

# SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL VETERINARY MUSEUM



## HISTORY OF THE MUSEUM

The South African National Veterinary Museum (SANVM) is an upgraded version of an initiative to preserve the history of veterinary science in South Africa inclusive of the early history of the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute (OVI), the Veterinary Faculty of the University of Pretoria and the vaccine facility, now known as Onderstepoort Biological Products. The museum was started many decades ago and its drastic improvement, in a century old OVI building, was selected in 1998 as a project by the History Committee of the South African Veterinary Association to be completed in 2008 for the centenary celebrations of the Onderstepoort complex.



Students' Hostel, c.1935



A visitor looking at some of the panels: Inauguration of the SA National Veterinary Museum, October 2008

## MUSEUM BUILDING AND CONTENTS

The museum currently consists of 6 rooms in a historic 1908 Arts and Crafts, U-shaped complex destined to become a students' hostel.



Some of the instruments on display in the museum



Mr Tonie du Bruyn, photographer, who established the 1<sup>st</sup> museum

### **West and East exhibition rooms**

The 8 panels in the rooms illustrate the history of veterinary science as it developed over many millennia, consisting of the 'ethno-veterinary medicine' used by the earliest humans. Remarkable progress in developing veterinary medicine was made in the Middle East and Egypt, followed by the Greeks and Romans but stagnating during the Middle Ages. Veterinary medicine became a science with the establishment of the first veterinary schools in Europe, led by France at Lyons and Maisons Alfort.

Duncan Hutcheon, colonial field veterinarian in the Cape Colony, was first to conduct some meaningful veterinary research in South Africa. His assistant Jotello Soga, of mixed Xhosa and Scottish stock, was the first South African to qualify as a veterinarian.

However, the undisputed father of local veterinary research was Sir Arnold Theiler, the founder of Onderstepoort. He conducted pioneering research on devastating diseases such as rinderpest, East Coast fever and African horsesickness. He was also the driving force behind the building of a state of the art laboratory in 1908, later to become internationally famous as Onderstepoort. Theiler was also the father of veterinary education in South Africa, his Onderstepoort campus serving to accommodate a veterinary faculty in 1920. The Onderstepoort Faculty's first students qualified in 1924.

One of the panels is devoted to the short-lived second veterinary faculty for black students at MEDUNSA, an 'own affairs' product of the Nationalist Government.

In those early days Onderstepoort had to be self-sufficient in the production of vaccines against the many infectious diseases new to science that occurred in SA and other African countries. Vaccine production therefore became one of the primary functions of the Institute. The evolution of vaccine production at Onderstepoort is illustrated on one of the panels.

Regulatory services in South Africa – the subject of one of the panels – are indispensable for the control of many of the devastating transmissible animal diseases that occur in Africa. The Directorate of Veterinary Services/ Animal Health is responsible for applying the Animal Health Act for the control of notifiable diseases such as rinderpest (now history), East Coast fever and the related theilerioses, tuberculosis, brucellosis, African swine fever, rabies, sheep scab and several others.

By far the majority of South African veterinarians are now practising privately. The first South African veterinary graduate to go directly into private practice was the pioneering Jack Boswell who graduated in 1935. Private veterinarians now serve every conceivable niche of animal health in this country. The pharmaceutical industry is indispensable to the veterinary profession and for the maintenance of animal health. This is illustrated on a panel also depicting local veterinary practice.

The veterinary profession is now well organised, the South African Veterinary Association representing the majority of the locally employed veterinarians. The South African Veterinary Council is the statutory body responsible for the registration of veterinarians, animal health technicians, veterinary technologists and veterinary nurses, thereby serving as a 'watchdog' to ensure high academic and ethical standards for these professions. One panel is devoted to these two bodies.

One banner features Mr AM (Tonie) du Bruyn, who established the original museum, and another, the initial sponsors of the current museum.

There are 4 cabinets in the museum containing a variety of memorabilia such as veterinary textbooks, microscopes, veterinary vaccines and remedies and a wide assortment of instruments.

The oldest microscope in the collection was manufactured in The Netherlands, ca. 1750, and was probably based on one designed by A van Leeuwenhoek (usually credited with the discovery of the microscope). One microscope on exhibit was personally used by Sir Arnold Theiler when he was in Switzerland after retiring from Onderstepoort in 1927.



A monocular brass microscope, microscope in travelling case and lenses



An arsenic field dip testing kit with instruction booklet, various dipping compounds, anti-helminthics and dosing spoons

The arsenic dip testing kit to measure the concentration of arsenic in dip tanks, especially during the successful East Coast fever eradication campaign, is one of the particularly noteworthy items in the cabinet containing historic medicines and vaccines. The same applies to a bottle containing immune serum against rinderpest, used in the early 'serum-virus' immunisation process against the disease.



Bottles with blood and rinderpest immune serum and a container for compacting red blood cells



Hoof trimming instruments & horseshoe for correcting a horse's stance

The third cabinet contains a very wide variety of instruments used in surgical and dental procedures performed on animals. These include sets of firing irons used, in decades gone by, for pin- and line-firing of horses with chronically inflamed joints, masks to administer chloroform or ether as anaesthetic and castration clamps for horses.

The fourth cabinet contains an assortment of obstetrical, urological and teat instruments, mainly used on cattle and horses. It also contains post mortem instruments, including a humane killer and instruments used for marking (e.g. tattooing).



Instruments used for obstetrics



Doctor's bag

### ***Theiler exhibition***

Two rooms in the north-south lying wing of the building have been dedicated to the memory of Sir Arnold Theiler. One is furnished to resemble a waiting room to Theiler's office and *inter alia* contains an illustrated timeline summarising Theiler's career.

The other room has been furnished as a replica of Sir Arnold Theiler's office, containing original office furniture and other memorabilia such as his bookcase and personal books and office equipment, including an old-fashioned telephone and record book with entries in his own handwriting.



The waiting room (Winged arm chair was donated to Mrs Theiler by the staff in 1927)

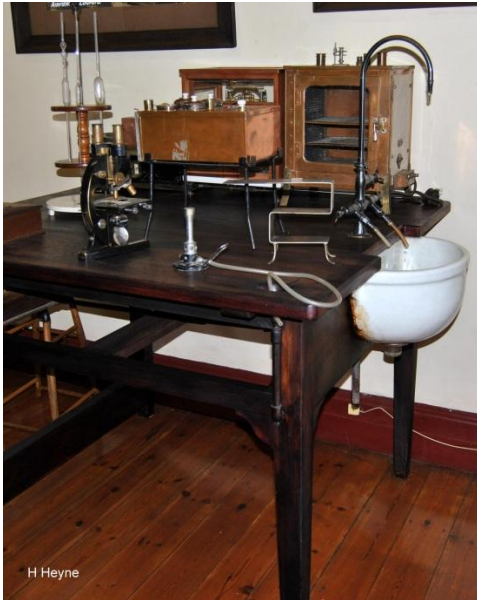


Replica of Theiler's office with original furniture & record



### **Old-fashioned laboratory**

Situated south of the Theiler rooms, all the items exhibited were originally in use in the Onderstepoort laboratories and include *inter alia*, an original laboratory bench with basin and gas pipes, an 'elegant', enclosed, double pan chemical balance and a hot air heated copper oven.



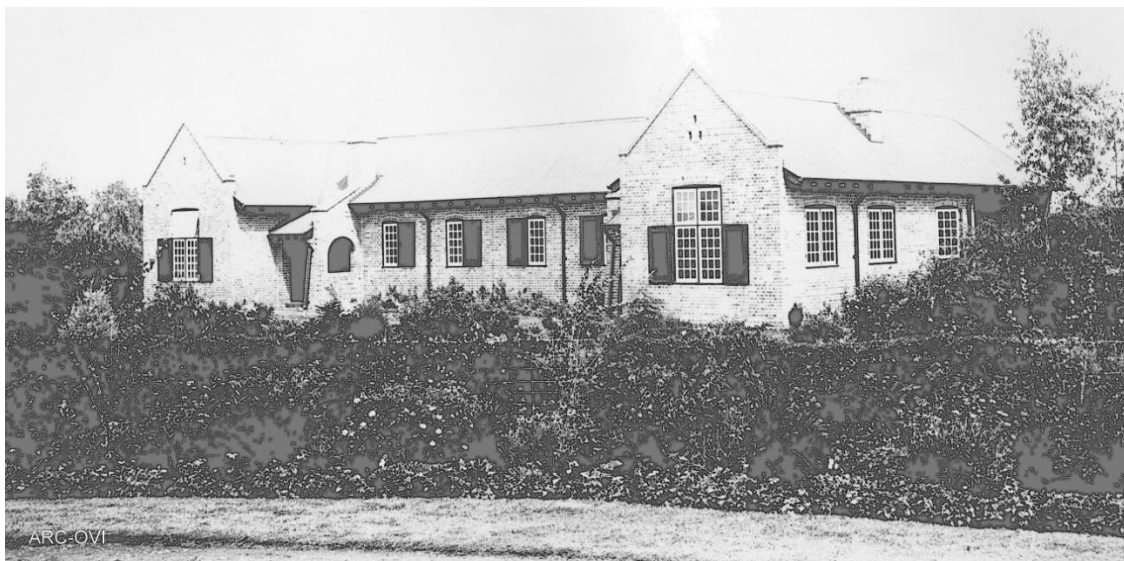
An original laboratory bench with porcelain basin and brass taps from the "Old Main Building" with equipment used in the histopathology laboratory



A part of the consulting room/clinic with a wooden operating table and cabinet with instruments, anaesthetic machine and balance

### **Old-fashioned consulting room/clinic for pets**

Adjacent to the old-fashioned laboratory, the exhibits were selected to demonstrate the type of equipment used in the early stages of small animal orientated veterinary practice in South Africa. The exhibits *inter alia* consist of an old wooden surgery/dissection table, a wash basin and diagrammatic charts of the anatomy of the dog and the cat.



Eastern façade of the "Old Hostel", c. 1930's

## OTHER THINGS TO DO AT ONDERSTEPSPOORT

### *Visit the:*

**Gertrud Theiler Tick Museum  
Museum of African Diseases**

### **VISITING HOURS**

SA National Veterinary Museum & Museum of African Diseases

Visiting hours: 8h00 - 15h00 (Weekdays) Make an appointment with the PRO  
Week-ends and Public holidays (Prior arrangement with Curator)

Gertrud Theiler Tick Museum

Only on appointment with Curator

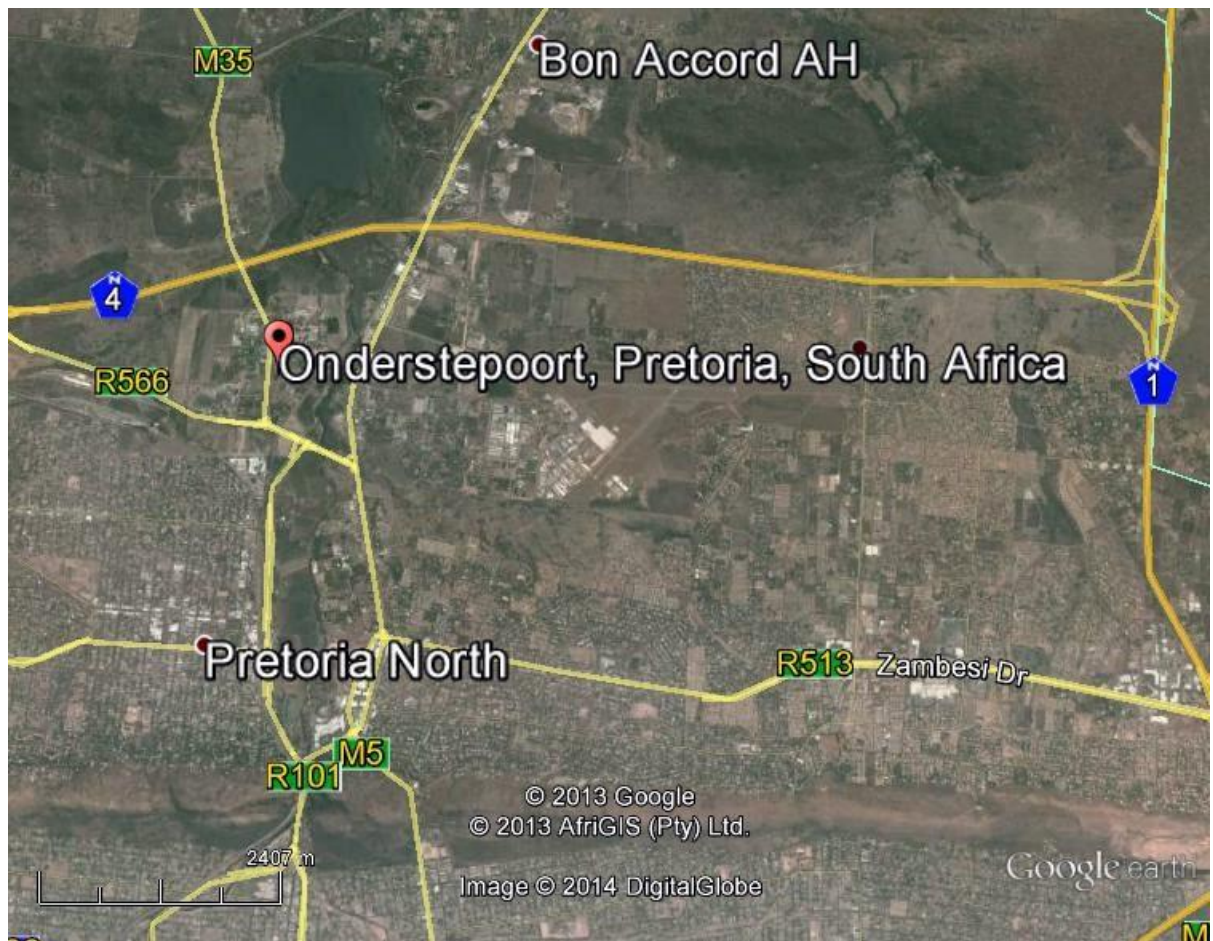
### **CONTACTS:**

PRO: ARC-OVI, 012 5299111 (switchboard)

Curator: Heloise Heyne, ARC-OVI, 012 5299187 (office hours)

### **HOW TO GET TO THE MUSEUM**

Geographical coordinates are 25° 39' 2" South, 28° 11' 3" East



By Dr R Bigalke (Condensed by Heloise Heyne, March 2014)