

# *Professor Karl Nathanson*

It is a privilege to be able to write a tribute to Professor Karl Nathanson who died on 18th June 1982 while still in the service of the University of Natal. He was a colleague and friend who contributed much to the welfare of the University, as well as much to the organisation and scientific development of agriculture throughout Natal.

Born and educated in Durban, his whole life was spent in the service of agriculture in this province, although his University training was obtained at the University of Pretoria. When he left D.H.S. as one of its distinguished products his family circumstances caused him to further his studies by taking up a four year bursary in Agricultural Education. Fortunately for us he realised that this course would be confining to his future in agriculture and

he applied for and was granted permission to extend his training to that of a full agricultural scientist followed by a U.E.D. Permission was granted largely because of his success as a student and his University career was punctuated with *cum laudes*, scholarships, distinctions and further *cum laudes*, the last when he obtained his D.Sc. from Pretoria University in 1963. If such formality were extended beyond Universities he would have received many more.

He returned to Natal to fulfil his educational obligations in agricultural teaching, first at Weston and then in Newcastle, and during this period met and married his wife Mary. In 1949 he joined the University as a lecturer in Agronomy and also gave lectures in Plant Physiology and Didactics of Agriculture. During this time he served as an executive member of the Natal Agricultural Research Institute Farm Committee, which was concerned with the development of the then new agricultural research stations at Ukulinga and Springfontein. It was during this period that his life-long interest in soya beans began and when he left the University in 1953 to become the Senior Agronomist at Cedara, he continued his research on maize and soya bean breeding. But, as at the University, he extended the use of his abilities into other work, including field husbandry, genetics and farm organisation. Furthermore he completely reorganised the research facilities at Cedara.

In 1957 he became Chief Regional Agronomist for Natal and eighteen months later became Acting Assistant Director (Research) in Natal. Here he was directly involved in the design of the master plan for the



Prof. Karl Nathanson

(Photograph: P.R.O. University of Natal)

development of research facilities in the Department of Agriculture and Technical Services which served them so well for the next decade.

In 1959 he returned to the University, now as Senior Lecturer in Agronomy and in 1968 became Professor and Head of the Department of Crop Science. During the period as Senior Lecturer, Karl showed those characteristics which resulted in his becoming such a highly valued and highly respected colleague within the University. First, without its interfering with his internal university work, he continued his loyalty to the Natal Agricultural Region by supervising its research programme until 1965. Second, when he found his new position required an improvement in his knowledge of mathematics and applied mathematics, he undertook the necessary courses. He was later to do exactly the same with Zulu. Thirdly, when it was needed by the University, he taught courses in Agricultural Meteorology for three years. These three facets of his approach to his work indicate the outstanding properties which showed throughout his life. He always had a constancy of purpose and a committed and continuing loyalty to the organisations for which he worked. He showed, too, a thoroughness of scholarship and a boundless energy and ability which he put into any task which he undertook.

Three years after his appointment to the Chair he was elected Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and was immediately involved in two major exercises. The first was a totally revised system of curricula and degree regulations for the Faculty, in which his meticulous attention to detail did much to ensure its success. The second was the beginning of the long process of the final transfer of the staff of the Faculty of Agriculture from Department of Agricultural Technical Services to the University. Here again his thoroughness and his ability to understand the complexities of the process laid the foundation which led to its easy and sound completion by other hands.

Indicative of the ability he had shown during these years and the confidence he had earned from his colleagues is the fact that, at the end of his Deanship, he was elected as one of the Senate Representatives on both the Senate Executive and on the University Council. In his contribution to both of these bodies his integrity and his concern for the welfare of others stood out as it had done when, earlier, he had served his colleagues first on the executive of the Lecturers' Association and, later, the Joint Academic Staff Association of which he became Vice-Chairman.

Although he became so deeply and valuably involved in the administration of the University, some things remained unchanged. He never lost his keenness to study further nor his avid desire to read about and understand fully whatever interested him. His interests were very widely spread but underlying most of them was a concern for the human condition. He did not ever lose, in the pressure of work, his ability to see the good in people, to encourage them and to build up their confidence. When his family became interested in sailing Karl, too, supported this interest, studied fundamentally and became first a co-constructor of boats, second, a good sailor and then served his fellow yachtsmen well as Commodore of the Henley-Midmar Sailing Club. His close-knit and successful family are a reflection in many ways of his and his wife Mary's love and understanding of people and a selfless willingness to serve others.

These qualities contributed to the steady output of research and the steady training of research students carried on during his years of control of the Crop Science department.

His concern for people contributed significantly to his taking on the direction of the Cassava research project which has contributed to an extremely rapid practical application and the start of a very important new agricultural development.

This is how he would have wished his research efforts to be rewarded.

But despite his elevation within the University hierarchy Karl was never confused by such positions. He always recognised that talents and abilities are not hierarchically confined and pressed strongly for the fuller inclusion of non-professorial colleagues in the affairs of the University. It was largely due to him, his enthusiasm and his concept of people and of how a university should develop, that the University of Natal is moving in a new direction. As our new understanding grows we will recall, I hope, his wisdom in moving us to this development.

This kindly, jovial and friendly man will be remembered long as a Natalian who contributed much to his province and to the University. While he did far more than his fair share of service to those around him he remained a lovable, humble and considerate colleague.

G.D.L. SCHREINER

