

Obituaries

Harry Lundie (1903–1989)

The death of Harry Lundie in late 1989 took from the scene a distinguished Natal educationalist. His association with schools — as pupil, teacher, headmaster, inspector and finally, Deputy Director of Education — was an exceptionally long one, beginning at the tender age of three when he accompanied his elder sister to Longmarket Street Girls' School. Attendance at Boys' Model School and Maritzburg College followed.

In the early 1920s he was a student at the Natal University College, gaining a double first in Mathematics and Chemistry in 1922. The only other member of the Maths III class of that year was Alan Paton. With Paton he was one of four men, all of whom were to have distinguished careers, in the first



Harry Lundie in his mayoral robes.

(Photograph: Natal Witness)

Education Diploma class run by the University.

His first teaching appointment was in 1924 to Vryheid High School. He was to remain there for 17 years, apart from 1929 when he took unpaid leave to complete an M.Sc. degree at Rhodes University. It was in Vryheid that he met and married Lillemor Roering, with whom he shared some fifty-five years of happy married life.

Like many another young teacher, Harry Lundie had to adapt his own interests and inclinations to the exigencies of the school timetable. Though a science graduate, he found himself initially teaching History, English and Latin to junior forms. He had also to make some epic journeys in the interests of school sport. One of his favourite stories was of his taking the Vryheid rugby team to Utrecht. They left on a Friday morning at 9:00 am on the railway delivery mule wagon, having first to overcome the reluctance of the mules to leave town! They did not reach their destination, forty-five miles away, until some twelve hours later. The return trip on the Sunday was equally slow, with the team having to climb off the cart uphill to ease the load. Verily, pioneering days.

When promotion came, it came rapidly, first to Egerton Primary School in Ladysmith, and then to Woodlands Indian School in Pietermaritzburg. In 1945, at the comparatively young age of forty-two, Harry Lundie joined the inspectorate in Durban, responsible mainly for Indian and Coloured schools, all in those days still under the control of the Natal Education Department. Ten years later he was made Chief Inspector, a promotion which brought him back to Pietermaritzburg, though not before he had conducted a one-man recruiting campaign in Britain to try to alleviate the shortage of teachers then being experienced by the Natal Education Department.

In 1959 Harry Lundie found himself in the eye of an intense political storm. The position of Deputy Director of Education became vacant and as Chief Inspector, the next senior official, he was the nominee of the Provincial Executive Committee. His nomination, however, was not confirmed by the Public Service Commission which produced a counter-recommendation, that of a more junior Inspector, Mr J.H. Stander, a Broederbond member whose political views were presumably more in sympathy with those of Pretoria. Deadlock! Exco refused a compromise solution, the appointment of both men, and made no appointment. Public opinion was reflected in large protest meetings, and the matter was an issue in the provincial elections in October of that year. With Stander threatening legal action, and the advice of senior counsel that his chances of success were good, the new Exco dramatically resigned rather than appoint him, leaving the matter in the hands of the Administrator — who agreed to face court proceedings.

Eventually, in a case of enormous public interest, a full bench of the Natal Supreme Court, presided over by the Judge President, found unanimously in favour of the applicant, and itself ordered his appointment with retrospective effect to January 1959. It was, however, an empty victory for Stander. He might have been given high office, but he was apparently bypassed and ignored by the rest of the Department.

As an unwilling participant in the whole unhappy drama, Harry Lundie conducted himself with his usual dignity, but found it an intensely painful experience. It was a matter never ever discussed within the family circle, and even thirty years later it remained something he wished neither to recall nor discuss. It was only after Stander retired in 1963 that justice was done, and he

duly finished his career as Deputy Director. Had it not been for the 'Stander affair', however, he might well have been Director.

When Harry Lundie retired in 1968, he had given forty-one years of distinguished service to education in Natal. But his retirement from the NED was not to be one of folding of the hands, or resting on laurels.

T.B. FROST

Prior to the City Council elections in September 1969, I recall telephoning Mr Harry Lundie to wish him success as a candidate. It was my first encounter with him. I felt that here was a man of integrity and superior intellect, whose long experience as an educator and administrator could add to the prestige of any form of government. That it was within my own sphere of local government that he sought election, gave hope for the future. The fact that he was elected in a three-cornered contest also indicated recognition from his constituency.

Upon my own return to the Pietermaritzburg City Council in 1970, after a break of five years, I was able to measure the strength, devotion and purpose of Harry Lundie. His election as Deputy Mayor in 1974 came as no surprise, nor his elevation to the office of Mayor in the following year.

Under his leadership and, as Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, I became closely involved with him, and was afforded a privileged and clear view of his understanding and breadth of vision on all civic matters. We also worked closely together during his term as Chairman of the Tradings Committee. It was he who so clearly defined the desirability of the introduction of the very controversial Miniature Circuit Breaker, which all householders and industrialists were required to have installed to curb the escalating use of, and demand for, electricity. This hated device must have saved the City millions in electricity purchases, and it was Harry Lundie whose determination brought finality to the raging battle.

But one must not forget his years as Mayor. He brought dignity and refinement to this office and, always at his side, was his beloved Lillemor. Who can forget the charm and obvious devotion of this couple, advanced in age but young in spirit, happily walking hand-in-hand about the City? Their dedication to their Christian belief was obvious. These were two people who had received the gift of the Spirit and it followed that, in their public life, they gave all things a spiritual intensity.

To the great dismay of his friends and colleagues, Harry Lundie decided, after many years of distinguished service, to retire from civic affairs. To those of us who had been privileged to serve under him, this was a bitter blow. He continued, however, with many acts of charitable service, not least to the aged, and his simple and noble contributions were recognized by the City Council when it granted him the Certificate of Civic Commendation. Then Harry Lundie left us, but not his influence, and it might have been for him that Canon Roger Lloyd once wrote: 'The divine purpose in a life may be to keep the rest of us humble and to make us rejoice; humble, because it eludes our classification and we cannot explain it, and rejoicing, because it is a gift which lights our paths'.

'So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side'.
Rest in Peace, Harry.

PAMELA REID