

Charles Henderson (1913–2001)

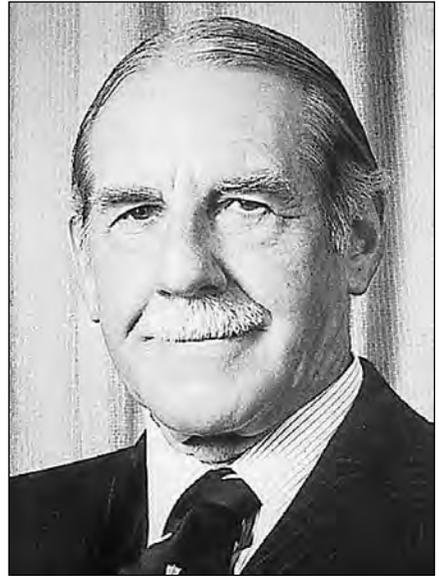
Charles Henderson (88), who died in Ladysmith, was a prominent farmer in northern KwaZulu-Natal and a veteran of political opposition to Afrikaner nationalism, serving in the Senate for 20 years.

Born in Dundee in 1913, he was educated by private governesses and at Dundee High School before matriculating from Durban High School in 1930. He was then taken to Scotland to become co-heir with his brother of a 400-year-old family estate, but elected rather to return to his native South Africa to join his father on the Biggarsberg farm Balbrogie. Here he expanded the family holdings by the acquisition of neighbouring farms and became noted for his progressive farming methods. Only in 1997, when Balbrogie celebrated its centenary, did Henderson hand over to his son James.

Henderson was a strong supporter of efforts to eradicate invasive aliens. He also led the way in veld management, field contouring, drainage schemes and donga reclamation. He headed the innovative development by the former Natal Parks Board of private game conservancies as founder chairman of the Conservancies Association in

KwaZulu-Natal. He also chaired the Biggarsberg Conservancy where he promoted foot and horse trials, fish and game stocking and controlled hunting. His contribution to agriculture and conservation were recognised at various times by the Elandsplaagte Farmers' Association, the Natal Agricultural Union, Stock Owners, the Natal Parks Board and the Department of Agriculture.

From 1933 when, at the age of 21, he became founder secretary of the Elandsplaagte branch of the South African Party, Henderson spearheaded opposition to Afrikaner nationalism in northern KwaZulu-Natal. His vigorous campaign against a republic in the 1960 referendum led to his being elected as senator, a post which he held for the next 20 years until the Senate was dissolved in 1981. As a senator, he was deeply involved during the 1960s in the fight against forced 'black spot' removals in Northern Natal.



Charles Henderson

Henderson was greatly concerned with the preservation of South Africa's heritage. His 1969 private member's motion in the Senate deploring the state's neglect of our national heritage elicited the extraordinary response of a standing ovation from the Nationalist benches and led directly to that year's new National Monuments Act.

Henderson was in the House and witnessed the assassination of Dr Hendrik Verwoerd in 1966. He was also in the House (as a guest) 24 years later when President F.W. de Klerk made his historic announcement of the release of Nelson Mandela. He remarked: 'I have been waiting 40 years to hear sense like this.'

Henderson served as a captain during World War II with the 2nd Battalion of the Natal Carbineers (of which his elder brother Colin was the commanding officer) in North Africa in armoured cars. After the war he rejoined with the rank of major until the 2nd Battalion was disbanded by the Nationalist government in 1954. Thereafter he served briefly with the 1st Battalion, including a stint as acting officer commanding.

Advocate Adrian Rall, son of long-time former political colleague Horace Rall, said of him: 'Charles Henderson was one of a rare breed of politician, now all but extinct in South Africa. He was a man of integrity and principle, a courageous fighter for justice; his life was one of selfless public service. That service was immense, covering a wide variety of fields, and his passing will be deeply mourned by the many people whose lives he touched.'

Henderson leaves his wife Sheila (whom he married in 1948), a son and four daughters.

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