

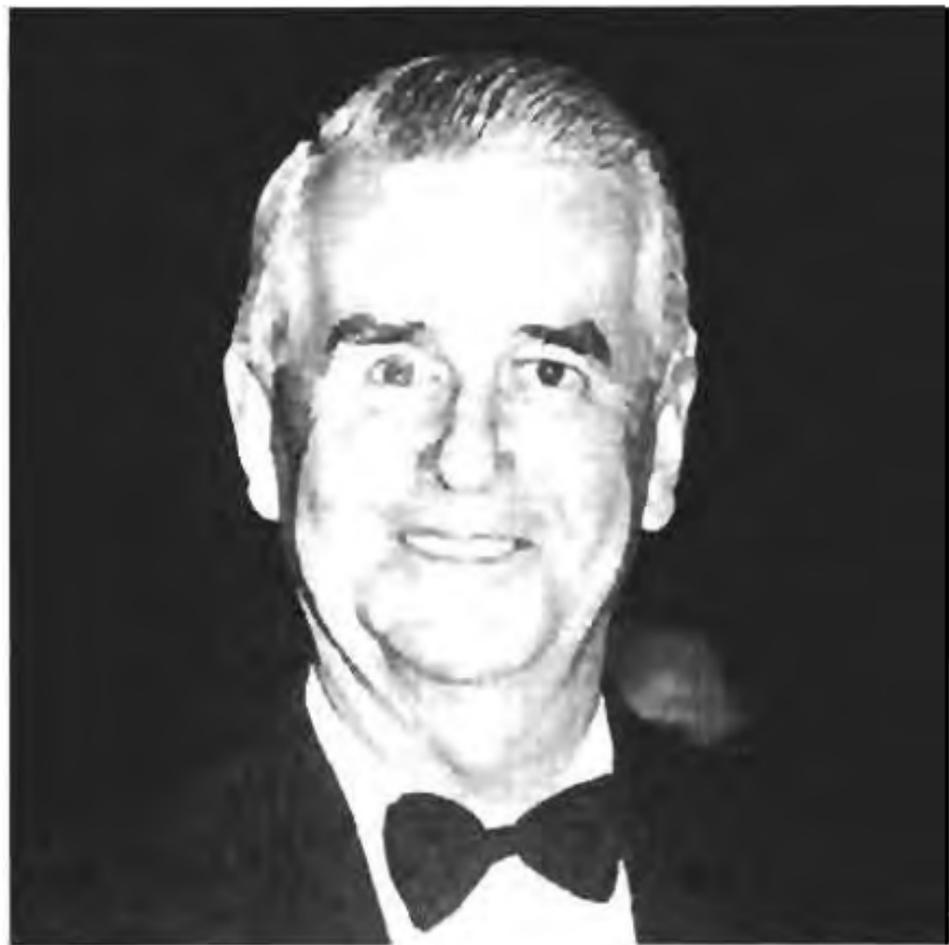
Gerhardus Adriaan ('Horace') Rall (1916–1997)

Horace Rall — 'Horace' was an Anglicised version of 'Hardus' — was born in Greytown in 1916. His father had been jailed for treason during the South African War as a Natalian who had fought for the Boers. He received his education in Greytown. When he started school he could speak Afrikaans and Zulu, but very little English. It was a situation soon remedied by the headmaster, the redoubtable Dr W.G. McConkey, later to become Director of Education. In standard eight he won the prize for English, and duly matriculated with a first class pass. Another of his teachers was the young Ray Fuller, a future headmaster of Maritzburg College, who instilled in him a life-long love of history.

Those were the depression years, however. His father did not have the money to send him away to university but, thanks to his fluency in Zulu, the local magistrate offered him a job in the Department of Justice at Weenen. Here he studied for the civil service law exams and started on an LL.B by correspondence.

During the war years the Department of Justice was so short-staffed that he was initially not allowed to go north with his unit, the Umvoti Mounted Rifles. When eventually released for service, he got into the SAAF and flew Dakotas with the Transport Squadron. One of his tasks was to fly a cargo of apes from Fez in North Africa to Gibraltar to replenish the local population. Churchill firmly believed the superstition that if the apes died out on the famous Rock, Gibraltar would fall to the enemy.

Back in the Department of Justice after the war, and after several years on the relief staff — during which time he played provincial hockey for Border — he took



Senator G.A. Rall

up a permanent post as assistant magistrate and native commissioner at Stanger. Here it was his task to serve the order of deposition on Chief Luthuli, with whom he was personally on good terms. From Stanger, rather than take promotion to Johannesburg, he moved as magistrate to Kranskop. In 1955 he resigned from the Department of Justice and bought the farm Gracelands in the Muden Valley. It was during these years that he became actively involved in politics as a member of the United Party, unsuccessfully contesting the Newcastle seat against a cousin, Hannes Rall.

From 1960 to 1970 he represented the United Party in what was then the 'enlarged' Senate, a frustrating experience given the Nationalist majority and the inability of opposition Senators to influence legislation. More rewarding were the next four years as the elected member for Umvoti and member of the Executive Committee of the Natal Provincial Council where the United Party still had a majority, and where his bilingualism was an asset. Portfolios he carried were Education, the Natal Parks Board (of which he was chairman), the Sharks Board and Museum Services. (It is interesting to note that one of his sons, Adrian, represented the same geographical area, now renamed Greytown, in the Natal Provincial Council from 1981 to its demise in 1986.)

The United Party's attempts to introduce parallel-medium education met with enthusiasm among neither English- or Afrikaans-speakers. But what was introduced during those years was differentiated education, offering technical training within the same schools as provided the traditional academic courses, rather than in separate schools. The Director of Education at the time was another product of Greytown High School, Philip Nel, whose obituary is also featured in this issue of *Natalia*.

Rall's tenure as chairman of the Natal Parks Board was more controversial after the appointment of John Geddes-Page as Director. But it also saw the development of recreation parks around state dams such as Midmar, Chelmsford and Albert Falls, and the proclamation of new nature reserves: Weenen, Vernon Crookes, the Eastern Shores of Lake St Lucia and the one of which he was most proud, Itala.

Retiring from politics in 1974, Rall returned to full-time farming on Gracelands. In 1990 he sold the farm and spent his last years on a smallholding outside Greytown. He leaves his wife Lilian, five children and ten grandchildren.

(Compiled from an interview with Horace Rall published in Natalia 20)