

LIFE MEMBERSHIP

L.G. MACKAY

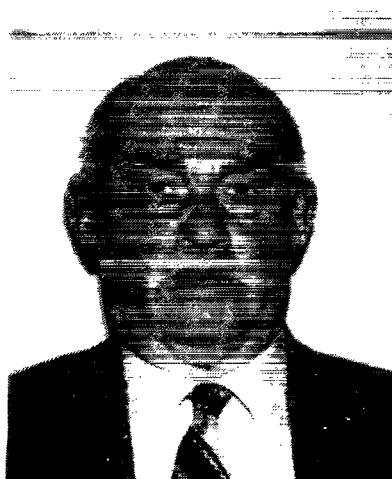
Gore, Southland.

It gives me very great pleasure to propose Lewis Gordon MacKay of Gore, Southland for the award of Life Membership of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production. He has been a member of this Society since 1949.

I have known Mr Mackay since 1935 when we attended Gore High School and were in some of the same classes. He had earlier been the dux of the Wenden Primary School and went on to be a leading student at secondary school. He played in the First XV Rugby team of the Gore High School.

Lewis was born in Gore on 13 March 1921 and raised on his father's farm in the Otama district. This property had been bought in 1877 and developed by his grandfather, John MacKay. I was frequently a guest at his house and spent much time on the farm working with sheep and other farm activities. It was a good experience for me. Lewis and I would discuss farming matters and sheep breeding far into the night. At that early age he showed a keen interest in sheep breeding. He subsequently purchased 19 Southdown ewes to found in 1938 the Braemore stud, into which from 1968, Lewis' brother, MacKay, was taken into partnership. During the first mating season his stud ram injured its testicles to such an extent that Lewis was very concerned about its fertility. He tested the ram's semen by using the fertility kit devised by W M Webster of Massey. He was soon reassured that the ram was sufficiently fertile to be left with his ewes for the rest of the mating season. This was Lewis's first contact with scientific technology.

World War II had begun by this time and Lewis volunteered for service in the Army. In May 1942 after



some months in the Artillery on coast guard duty at Godley Heads, Lewis went with the New Zealand Division to Egypt and Italy. During his time in Italy he did a correspondence course on wool offered by the Army Education Service. Later he did the course on Animal Breeding. While he was overseas I was writing to him to urge him to come to Massey after the war and do an ex-serviceman's rehabilitation course in Agriculture which included Animal Breeding. This he did in 1946 and so came under the influence of Professor A L Rae. He was greatly stimulated by his time at Massey and built up a library of books on animal breeding. These included J L Lush's *Animal Breeding Plans*, J E Nicholl's book: *Livestock Improvement*, A.L. Hagadoorn's book, and others.

Prior to the war, Lewis was active in the local Otama Young Farmers' Club. He represented that Club in the South Island finals debating contest. He encouraged all the local Young Farmers' Clubs to visit his farm and discuss sheep breeding with members. He held demonstrations on livestock appraisal using sheep from their Southdown and Romney studs, prime cattle and prime lamb carcasses. These activities helped young farmers understand the need for breeding animals to better match market requirements. Lewis had a great influence in the district especially on the young people through the YFC movement, his church involvement and Sunday School teaching.

He always was most encouraging to young people and those starting their farming careers. This helpful approach was well received by recent graduates in the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries. Lewis supported

them in their difficult task of giving advice and guidance to established farmers in the region. Likewise he was very supportive of the scientists involved with sheep breeding experiments at the Woodlands Station in Southland.

From an early stage, Lewis recorded performance information of the ewes in his Southdown and Romney flocks and used this information in the selection of his breeding animals. He readily incorporated the newly-introduced Sheeplan into his management system and used it with considerable success. As a pioneer in the use of Sheeplan in the Gore district, he influenced other stud breeders to become involved in this soundly-based and efficient recording programme.

Lewis was a ministerial appointee to the National Performance Recording Committee and its successor the New Zealand Sheeplan Council on which he served for several years until 1980.

Lewis also served on a number of other national and local committees. He was a member for 12 years, and its Treasurer for 10 years, of the local primary school committee. He was also a member of various committees of his local church and was active in fund-raising for a district hall at Otama and was chairman of the committee responsible for writing and publishing a history of the early Knapdale Run which included much of the Otama district.

During his time at Massey, Lewis and a colleague, T O Phillips and I, visited some 40 Romney, Southdown and Angus stud flocks and herds in the Wairarapa, Manawatu, Rangitikei, Wanganui and Hawkes Bay districts. While visiting a flock in the Maxwell area, north of Wanganui, Lewis was offered a number of Romney stud ewes from which he built up a very successful Romney stud flock. His sheep were keenly sought after because of their production records and this encouraged other Romney stud breeders to enrol in the Sheeplan programme. This stud was amalgamated with his brother's Romney stud then later transferred in 1985 to bear the registered prefix "Braebank".

Lewis was also elected to the Council of the Southdown Sheep Society of New Zealand. He served on that council for 18 years and became its President. He was reputed to be the only president of a breed society who ever wrote his own presidential address! The Council of that Society established a scientific committee of which Lewis was Chairman. Professor

Rae and I were members of that committee along with two other Southdown stud breeders, Messrs J H McCarroll, Tauranga, and JD Hughes, Waverley. Under Lewis's chairmanship that committee was very successful, being largely responsible for changing the type of Southdown in New Zealand from a very fatty, short body to the present-day Southdown which is longer-bodied, and more muscular than the earlier type. With a pen of three one-shear rams of this modern type he won the Million Dollar class at the Royal Show in Palmerston North in 1976. This demonstrated that the type of Southdown that the Scientific Committee was advocating could be produced and was acceptable to the Royal Show judge and Southdown breeders generally. This winning type set the standard and was soon emulated by leading Southdown breeders throughout New Zealand.

Shortly after this success, Lewis and Jack sold their entire Southdown flock to an Australian breeder in Victoria. Sheep from the flock are now having a considerable impact on the breed in Australia as have rams from the Braemore stud in the US, Great Britain and other countries to which they were exported in earlier years.

Lewis was frequently called upon to judge the Southdown entries at shows in New Zealand and Australia. In this role he was able to emphasise that the modern Southdown was the type to be produced as it was the kind that could sire prime lambs that met the fastidious demand of consumers throughout the world.

In their Romney stud flock, the MacKay brothers also changed the conformation of their sheep and this together with the use of performance records meant that there was a strong demand for their Romneys. Concurrently with his sheep breeding and Breed Society activities, Lewis developed their properties. Lewis was responsible for financial management and farm development. Large tracts of land were ploughed up, and heavy applications of lime were made. Lime was found to be absolutely essential and the initial dressing of 1 tonne per hectare was repeated in the second year of the new pasture. A problem of unthriftiness was encountered in the grazing of pasture in its first year. Lewis was perplexed by this problem so he conducted some experiments to help solve it. He found that unthriftiness in the sheep was solved by the application of 335 kg of phosphate per hectare. Once this problem had been

overcome great satisfaction was gained in the land development programme and stock productivity increased.

Throughout this land development, Lewis was involved in community affairs, in stud breeding and in Breed Society business, still finding time to advise and assist young people in their careers.

At the first World Congress on Sheep and Beef Cattle Breeding Lewis gave an invited paper: "Traditional attitudes to the breeding of sheep and beef cattle" In this he traversed the traditional attitudes and approach to livestock breeding in New Zealand and put forward a strong case for the adoption by sheep breeders of performance recording and the use of records in ram and ewe selection.

He concluded his address by stating:

"This somewhat complicated web of breeding and selling productive sheep and beef cattle, the key to future breed advancement and progress will result in teamwork involving scientists and technologists; stud breeders, commercial farmers, stud stock agents, bank managers and ancillary services. We are in it together, and in the field of sheep and cattle breeding, there are exciting days ahead".

The New Zealand Society of Animal Production in this its 50th year, wishes to recognise Lewis Gordon MacKay for his services to sheep breeding in particular. We greatly appreciate the considerable help he has been to young people and to advisory officers of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries down through the years. His service to the cause of animal production is worthy of this election to Life Membership of the Society.

R.A. Barton
Bruce Binnie