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## MEMORIAL ADDRESS: JOHN MORRIS RANSTEAD

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It is my privilege, on behalf of members, to salute and honour the memory of a founder and first president of this Society, John Morris Ranstead.

Born and educated in England, Jack Ranstead came to New Zealand in 1900 at the age of 16. He was the son of a prominent pioneer Fabian and socialist, William Ranstead, who was the guiding spirit and organizer of the emigration of several hundred socialists to New Zealand round 1900. In 1901 William Ranstead founded the Socialist Society of New Zealand, and while its membership never exceeded 3000, many individuals passed through its ranks to play an important part in the later establishment of the New Zealand Labour Party. That, however, is an episode in New Zealand history that might be told elsewhere.

Jack Ranstead completed his formal education at Lincoln College where he gained a Diploma in Agriculture, and earned the distinction of being top student of the year. William Ranstead's efforts to establish a socialist rural group foundered, and Jack Ranstead joined his father and brothers in farming activities in the Waikato. To what extent he shared his father's socialist zeal I am unable to say, but certainly he remained at least liberal and certainly an active humanitarian throughout his life. His second name, Morris, whatever its true origin, is a reminder of the great friendship that existed between his father and that outstanding Fabian and leader in the arts, William Morris.

About 1906, at the age of 22, Jack Ranstead commenced putting his wide background knowledge of farming and animal nutrition to practical effect. He founded a herd of pedigree Milking Shorthorns at Matangi, and developed this to the point where it became the outstanding herd of its breed in this country. This was recognized in his election as president of the Milking Shorthorn Society in 1923.

During this period, the Matangi Shorthorns achieved some of the most outstanding milking records under Government Official Test. But to Jack this success was one-sided. It proved the value of scientific feeding under specialized conditions, but it did not demonstrate the basic principles of scientific breeding under commercial conditions. With his knowledge of

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the infant science of genetics, he wanted more than an outstanding single test record and an officially-approved certificate of conformation — the tools of trade of the pedigree breeder of that period.

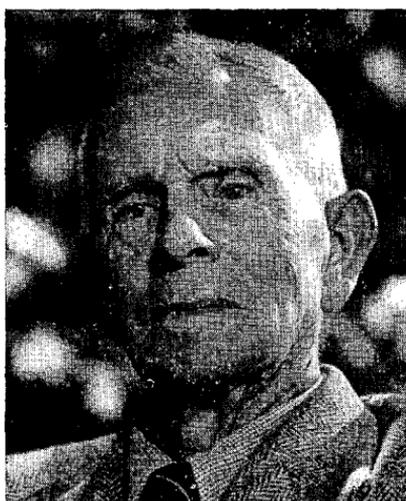
The assessment of genetic potential based on commercial herd conditions had to wait for another decade. In these early years when the services of trained veterinarians were practically non-existent, Jack Ranstead was much called upon by farmers in his district to treat their stock. This he did very successfully. His veterinary knowledge was far from superficial, as was demonstrated on several occasions in his discussions with veterinarians. In 1932 his outstanding qualities as breeder, scientist, farmer, and leader earned him the national award of the Bledisloe medal.

In the early years of the 1930s herd improvement activities were directed chiefly to selection and culling. But attention was slowly turning to the need for a more scientific basis for assessment of the transmission of milking qualities, particularly through the herd sire. For this latter purpose selection at that time was almost entirely based on the conformation of the dam and bull, with a single testing record for a minority of the dams, and in rare cases a series of such records.

The Group Herd Testing movement from the Hamilton office of the New Zealand Co-operative Herd Testing Association had started a drive for testing records on a lifetime basis behind as many herd sires as possible, and progeny tests for the sires themselves. The methods used for the progeny tests were not very scientifically based. Jack Ranstead heard of the work and immediately offered his services in constructive criticism of the basis for the progeny tests. Coming from an established breeder with a high performance record in his own stud and an acknowledged reputation as a scientist, this offer was doubly welcome. With his home frequently available for evening meetings, his very extensive library open for reference reading, and the opportunity for full and practical discussion of all aspects of the new developments, the foundation for the later success of progeny testing in New Zealand became firmly established.

Scientists from overseas were interested and John Hammond of Cambridge, at that time probably the acknowledged world authority in the animal breeding field, took an active interest in these developments. During a visit to New Zealand in 1938 he met Jack Ranstead and remained a firm admirer of the scientific and technical competence of his knowledge of animal breeding.

The discussion evenings in the Ranstead home became a focal point for a strong revival in the application of scientific



JOHN MORRIS RANSTEAD, *a founder and first president of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production.*

methods to animal husbandry generally. This was a period of initiation, thorough testing of theories, and a challenge to faster progress in applying the scientifically-known to the accepted working norm. The pathway to the Ranstead home became a widely beaten one. To mention only a few of those early pioneers, Will Riddet, McMeekan, Hugh Donald, Mac Cooper, Ernie Marsden, Bill Hamilton and that enthusiastic scientist farmer neighbour of Jacks, H. E. Annett, all gathered to hammer out the newer theories, and applied methods for achieving faster progress. Many research workers from all parts of New Zealand, but particularly from Ruakura, called to take advantage of Jack's wide scholarship, his pre-eminent library, his breadth of experience, and his ability to recall and assemble reference authorities.

One result of such an evening was the formation in 1941, on Jack Ranstead's initiative, of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production. It was a unanimous decision that the obvious first president should be John Morris Ranstead. Later he was instrumental in the formation of the New Zealand Genetical Society of which he also became president. In the case of the New Zealand Society of Animal Production the aim was to build a two-way path to the application of more scientific methods in farming, and more knowledge by research workers of successful field practices. For that purpose Jack was a strong advocate that breeder, farmer, scientist and

extension worker should be brought together in the Society's membership.

He had an unflinching technique for encouraging initiative and at the same time keeping the initiator's feet firmly on the ground — especially if too many issues were being taken for granted and not being adequately examined. He had all the reference authorities at his tongue's tip and also at his fingertips. This technique was not restricted to animal husbandry, but extended to many fields including mathematics, and the arts and sciences generally. He was an avid reader and a meticulous one.

An example of his careful cataloguing of his reading concerned Dobzhansky's book, *Principles of Genetics*. Dobzhansky attended the Science Congress in Christchurch in May 1951 and Jack was to stay with his great friend Otto Frankel, Director of the Wheat Research Institute, for the period of the conference. He had recently received a copy of the book, and was amazed at Dobzhansky's command of the English language; he used words even Jack had to look up. In his methodical way Jack made a list of these and took it with him. On his arrival in Christchurch he asked Otto if he had read the book. "Yes, of course," said the assured Otto. "Well, then, did you understand it all?" Otto fell neatly into the trap and Jack produced the list to Otto's discomfort and undoing.

His impressive all-round, scientific and practical knowledge resulted in his being appointed to the Council of DSIR in 1936, a position he held till the end of 1954. Without being in any way a dominating member, he could make his presence felt in the verbal crossing of swords with his Council colleagues, and rarely to their advantage. During this period he gave strong support to scientific developments in many areas but particularly in sheep and cattle breeding. He was one of the few very strong and unremitting supporters of Dr F. W. Dry's work in defining the inheritance pattern for 'N' type wool — or as it has now become known, Drysdale wool. He established a small flock of these sheep and this at a period when there was strong opposition from sheep breeders at this "nonsense" of playing around with "hairy" wool. Many of Dry's own colleagues were also critical of the cost and lack of prospects for this research. But both Dry and Ranstead were interested in the inheritance value of this particular type of fleece manifestation, and it is to their credit that the work succeeded against widespread opposition based, as was later demonstrated, on an erroneous short-term commercial point of view.

Jack's leadership was unusual in that he was never aggressive. He drew out and stimulated leadership qualities in others. This was so when he inspired the formation of this Society, and the only person really surprised at the unanimous choice of first president was Jack Ranstead himself. His Presidential Address carried a strong personal message:

"There is the matter of animal breeding to be considered. The farmer requires improved pedigree animals for by use of improved pedigree sires most of our high producing grade stock are ranking level in production with the pedigree stock that have been used to grade them up. In these herds no further improvement along these lines can be expected till improved pedigree stock are available.

"For this improvement we must look to the breeder but look in vain unless there are placed before him clearly and in a manner that he can understand the results of the workers in recent years in the field of animal genetics."

Later, at the same conference (1941) he presented a paper entitled "Should a Breeder Tell?" A member suggested a more apt title could well be "Does a Breeder know?". Jack replied, "Perhaps the purpose of the Animal Production Society can best be interpreted in the title 'Should a Breeder be Told and How?'"

His paper was a courageous attack on the dangers of the pedigree breeder suppressing information on the presence of harmful recessive genes in his stud — evidence of which had occurred in his own breeding experiences. He was far in advance of any other breeder in relating these issues to the interests of the national herd, and the necessity for the breeder to discard misleading phenotypic assessments for the greater though more elusive certainty of genotypic assessments.

His own published comment was "The old system of phenotypic selection is giving way to consideration of the genotypic through the progeny test, and this test demands the disclosure of a breeder's failures as well as his successes. . . . Very few breeders will publicly admit that they have any failures. Is this a satisfactory position?" Jack was in an unassailable position in knowing the answer.

This was a most important issue. Artificial breeding services were being developed by Ruakura and by the Dairy Board — against much entrenched opposition, including statements from breeders that artificial breeding would result in deformities in cattle, and would spread these deformities. Jack Ranstead threw his full weight behind the genetic soundness of AB work but warned of the dangers of spreading harmful recessive genes. But he pinned the dangers where they be-

longed — in the breeders' herds, and challenged them to be honest in disclosing abnormalities. The Ransteads never lacked courage.

Jack was a tremendous worker, both physically and mentally. He operated his own farm almost single handed. His range of practical activities ranged from the daily operations on his dairy farm, including a systematic study of grasses, fertilizers, and pasture management (on which he kept meticulous records) to advanced horticultural work in his garden and extensive orchard, and to the design and building of his home, milking sheds, and barns.

Good humoured, quick witted, observant, and provocative in a gentle, kindly manner — always with a chuckle — Jack was a rewarding conversationalist. With his individual system of mental and office filing he was a redoubtable conversational opponent. If in his reading he came across terms, processes, or products unfamiliar to him he would write them down for later resolution. He would cross check references and, if by chance, this brought to light a required book not in his library he would order it and worry about how to pay for it later.

A few weeks before his death I received from his adopted son, George Ranstead (to Jack's great sorrow he had no children of his own), a parcel of books Jack wanted me to have. In one of them I came across notes in his handwriting on half-a-dozen substances with which he was unfamiliar — adenine, thymine, guanine, cytosine, purines (a & t) pyrimidines (g & c). There follow notes on his researches into their meaning.

In this way Jack Ranstead became master of and authority on all his reading — as many of us found to our cost in discussion when we thought we were on firm and familiar ground. He would rarely sacrifice principles for expediency — his guiding star was his own scientific integrity. He lived a frugal life and devoted any surplus funds that occasionally came his way to the thorough stocking and upkeep of his library. This has been described as easily the best and most representative of its kind in private hands, and together with the large collection of books brought out to New Zealand by his father, William Ranstead, was donated as the Ranstead collection to the Raukura Agricultural Research Centre and through it to the University of Waikato. This collection forms a fitting memorial in itself.

Jack was a regular and most welcome attender at scientific conferences. He was a long-standing member of many scientific bodies and was an elected Honorary Life Member of the Royal Agricultural Society; the New Zealand Milking Shorthorn

Association; the New Zealand Genetical Society; and the New Zealand Society of Animal Production.

John Morris Ranstead, in his own inimitable manner, influenced many agricultural and scientific developments in this country — and even more individuals. We are honoured in acknowledging our debt. His services to agriculture were officially recognized in the 1960 Honours List by the award of an O.B.E. His last weeks in the Home of the Friends of St Francis of Assisi at Morrinsville were in keeping with his wishes and the spirit and gentleness of his nature. Though in body somewhat infirm, his mental qualities and good humour remained with him to the end. Having used his talents to the full, he died on September 7, 1972 at the well-lived age of 88.

He would not have wished me to conclude on too solemn a note. I owe a tremendous debt to him and in keeping with his sense of humour and love of the unusual or unexpected I am going to be lighthearted enough to say goodbye to him with a sonnet. I can already hear his chuckle and later no doubt I shall hear his gentle admonition and some well-directed comments on sonnet form and poetic structure.

#### JOHN MORRIS RANSTEAD

Nurtured in classics yet in conflict wrought  
Equipped to seek and mould life's mutant scenes  
This Ranstead son developed what life brought  
And trained his vision to a link of genes.  
In these men held the tools of nature's needs  
And soberly his mind sought out their force,  
His hands he taught to earn success in deeds  
That marked the soundness of his chosen course.  
Thus, practice proved in husbandry and plants  
His precepts moved to fields of wider truth,  
To forums where old ways the new supplants  
And chance gives way to calculated proof.  
With science, life, and friends Jack kept his tryst  
Gentle at heart, in mind geneticist.