

## **A detailed history of the GRA**

The Albany Museum Herbarium [GRA] was founded in 1860 with the donation of specimens by William Guybon Atherstone, Ludwig Pappe and others. It is the second oldest herbarium in South Africa after the South African Museum herbarium [SAM] founded in 1825. Due to the historical nature of the original collection, lecturers in the Department of Botany at Rhodes University felt the need for a student oriented teaching collection and in 1942 Dr M.A. Pocock and Dr. Eily Gledhill were instrumental in founding the Rhodes University herbarium [RUH]. In 1993 RUH was incorporated into GRA and the combined collection renamed the Selmar Schonland Herbarium [GRA].

The first curator of the Albany Museum Herbarium was Dr Peter MacOwan who fulfilled this role from his arrival in Grahamstown in 1862 until his departure in 1868. During this time he formed an exchange club which built up a valuable collection but which remained the property of the club and was transferred with Peter MacOwan to Gill College in Somerset East. Until 1889 when the botanist, Dr Selmar Schonland was appointed as Director of the Albany Museum, the museum's collection grew slowly and erratically. Schonland's appointment gave a much needed boost to botany in the Eastern Cape and his growing status as one of the country's foremost botanists and academics encouraged many plant collectors to send their material to the museum.

In 1904 Schonland was instrumental in founding Rhodes University and in that same year the herbarium received its first large addition of specimens viz the exchange club's acquisitions which had lain dormant in Somerset East since MacOwan's departure for Cape Town in 1881. This collection numbered about 15000 specimens collected worldwide by the foremost botanists of the day and is archivally the herbarium's most valued asset. There can be no doubt that the herbarium at the Albany Museum was intended to fulfil all the functions of a university study and research collection as well as living up to Schonland's own stated intention of setting up "the finest type collection in the Cape Colony".

The establishment of the Botanical Survey section in the Division of Botany and Plant Pathology under the State Department of Agriculture and Forestry in 1917 saw the designation of three "outstations", Kimberley, Durban and Grahamstown, and meant that the Honorary Curators of the herbarium would be government employees. The first government appointment in Grahamstown was Miss G.V. Britten in 1921. R.A. Dyer was appointed in 1925 as Dr Schonland's assistant but on Schonland's retirement in 1926 he took over as Curator. In 1930 he left for Kew as the first South African liaison officer and his place was filled by Mr C.D.B Liebenberg who served until 1939. During the war years from 1939 to 1946 Dr A.C. Leeman acted as Hon. Curator and he was followed by Dr Robert Story (1947 - 1954). During his tenure the Grahamstown Nature Reserve was taken over as a responsibility of the station. His work was a survey of Keiskammahoek and when that was complete he was transferred to Pretoria to take control of the Botanical Survey Section of the Botanical Research Institute. Mr W Marais filled in briefly for some months from 1954 - 1955 until Mr D.M. Comins (1955 -1959) was appointed. When he left the herbarium he took up an appointment as Director of the King Williams Town Museum. In 1960 Mr M. J. Wells succeeded him and when he left in 1968 the last of these Honorary

Curators, Mrs Estelle Brink took over. Her tenure ended in 1992 when the herbarium lost its regional status.

In 1963, during Mike Wells' tenure, Dr M.A. Pocock lodged her large collection of Marine Algae (> 20 000 specimens) in the Museum Herbarium and when she died in 1977 it became part of the Albany Museum Herbarium holdings. This collection represents half the entire country's holdings in algae and was the second large addition to the herbarium. The amalgamation with Rhodes University Herbarium (RUH) in 1993 added a further c. 30 000 specimens to the collections and since amalgamation it has fallen to the Department of Botany staff to curate the herbarium. The first of these curators was Mr Peter Phillipson assisted by Mr A.P. Dold who did most of the hands on curatorial work. Dr Nigel Barker filled in for a short period of 2 years during Peter Phillipson's absence on sabbatical and since Peter Phillipson left for Paris Tony Dold has been the curator.

Estelle Brink, 2007.