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Obituary

Henry Paul Schapper, 19 July 1918–27 April 2010



Henry Schapper, who joined the faculty of agriculture at the University of Western Australia in 1952, was one of a vigorous group of young scholars who established agricultural economics as an academic discipline in Australia during the 1950s and cemented its primacy in agricultural policy formation during the 1960s. Born in Victoria, he left school aged 15, worked as a farm labourer but also studied, obtaining a Diploma of Agriculture from Dookie College in 1938. He then moved to New Zealand where he again worked as a rural labourer and studied, receiving a Diploma in Valuation and Farm Management from Lincoln College in 1940 and degrees of Bachelor (1948) and Master (1951) of Commerce from Canterbury College.

Henry's position at UWA was initially a research fellowship funded by the then Commonwealth Bank. This led to a PhD, conferred in 1957. During this period he also established an undergraduate course in agricultural economics and supervised a number of postgraduate students. In 1958 he was appointed Reader in Agricultural Economics at UWA, a position he held until his retirement in 1983. For his PhD and later during the 1950s Henry undertook a number of farm surveys focused on the impacts of credit, pricing and marketing policies on industry structure and management responsiveness. The dairy

industry was a focus of this research and Henry published on dairy industry policy in both WA and nationally advocating radical changes to dairy pricing and marketing arrangements.

During the 1960s Henry developed a distinctive approach to farm management, shifting from academic publishing to the creation of some innovative management institutions. He was instrumental in the design and promotion of some 65 farm management clubs, each of between 20 and 40 farmers, which employed their own management adviser. Using the analogy of laboratory facilities that supported technical advisory services, he established UWA's Farm Management Service Laboratory which provided financial management accounting, planning and seminar services to farmers. Recognising the need for in-service management education, he took the initiative in establishing the Farm Management Foundation which provided intensive courses for young farmers. While these initiatives did not survive in their initial form (computer technology, agricultural education curricula and consultancy structures all changed radically), each had a positive transforming influence on farm management in WA.

However, Henry's interests extended well beyond farm management. In 1961 he oversaw the establishment of the John Thomson Agricultural Economics Centre at UWA that funded a number of research economists, leading among other things to the first regional input-output tables in Australia. The Centre also published the quarterly Farm Policy journal which for 18 years popularised academic policy research studies to a wide audience.

While undertaking a study of investment in the Kimberley cattle industry, Henry became aghast at the conditions of Aborigines living there. He found it ironic that Australian agricultural economists travelled abroad to advise on rural development while ignoring one of the most intractable development issues in the world at home. Henry appreciated this as a criticism of himself, since he had recently returned from a mission to Zambia which had served as a platform for his presidential address to the AAES conference in 1965. It led him to publish *Aboriginal Advancement to Integration* in 1970, and he continued to press strongly for Aboriginal development thereafter.

In 1976 Henry was appointed the first rural planning economist of the Northern Agricultural Regional Development Project in Thailand. Post-retirement he concerned himself with writing on what he called the categorical imperatives of civilised society, presenting a paper in 1996 in Chile on human scale development. Throughout the 1990s he collaborated with conservationists to foster ecological sustainability, in particular the preservation of native forests near Bridgetown in WA's south west, a town to which he moved in 2005 and remained until his death.

Many of Henry's colleagues regretted that UWA did not see its way clear to appoint him to a chair of agricultural economics but it did acknowledge its debt to him in 1998 by creating the Henry Schapper Fellowship scheme that has enabled international scholars to spend time in its School of Agricultural and Resource Economics. Henry also received other honours. A foundation

member of the then AAES, he served as its President in 1964 and was awarded a Distinguished Fellowship by the current AARES in 2000. During the 1970s he had been a key player in the establishment of Perth's Film and Television Institute and in 1979 the Institute awarded him Life Membership. In 2006 he was inducted into the Royal Agricultural Society of WA's Hall of Fame.

Those who honour Henry most are undoubtedly his many past students and the large number of farmers whom he stimulated to think critically for themselves. He exposed many legends, fallacies and examples of poor thinking on policy matters. In doing so, he was sometimes brusque and often criticised, but he empowered many with an ability to articulate, comprehend and communicate reasoned thought. Beyond this, Henry was a staunch advocate for social justice and behind his sometimes acerbic tongue lay a deep compassion.

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