Obituary for Dr Jotello Festiri Soga (1865 - 1906)

Jotello Festiri Soga was born in 1865 at the Mgwali Mission in the Eastern Cape. He was the fourth son of Reverend Tiyo and Janet Soga. Dr Soga completed his matric at the Dollar Academy in Fife, Scotland and obtained his veterinary medicine degree in Scotland in 1886. Thereafter, he returned to the Cape Colony. On 09 July 1892, Dr Soga married Catherine Watson Chalmers, a Scottish woman. They had three daughters.

Seven years later he was appointed a veterinary surgeon for the colonial government. He was sent to Fort Beaufort and was also responsible for veterinary services for Victoria East, Stockenström and neighbouring districts. Dr Soga was also directly responsible for the inoculation against contagious lung-sickness, which was decimating cattle in South Africa. He conducted his own inoculation experiments on lung-sickness and thereafter, his vaccinating method was accepted as standard.

Dr Soga was also a lecturer to farmers whom he lectured on ways to control and treat diseases of livestock throughout the Cape Colony and the former British Bechuanaland, now Botswana. Moreover, Dr Soga conducted research on the effect of plants on animals, and comparative physiology. He frequently served as a judge at horse shows at the East London Agricultural Show, and was regularly invited to give lectures to farmers’ associations.

In the late 19th century, Dr Soga’s skills as a trained veterinary doctor were ideally suited and required when rinderpest and other animal diseases threatened to decimate farmers’ herds and flocks. As the first qualified South African veterinarian, Dr Soga was the first to send a warning about the dangers that rinderpest posed to the Cape Colony.

In 1905 Dr Soga became a founding member of the former Cape of Good Hope Veterinary Association, which today is known as the South African Veterinary Association (SAVA).
In veterinary circles Dr Soga was best known as the pioneer researcher in the study of toxic plants and their effect on animals. In acknowledgment of his original research work, the Jotello Soga Ethno Veterinary Garden was created at ARC-Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute next to the Veterinary Museum.

Dr Soga passed away on 06 December 1906 in Amalinda, East London.

Nominated by Dr PB Mutowembwa