

OBITUARY: Len Hobson

Howard Blight
AMORENTIA

Len Hobson, one of the original pioneers of the Letaba district, died on 11 June 2014 after a short illness. He was 87 years old.

Len was originally from the Karoo, where his ancestors had established themselves as part of the 1820 settlers. Certain areas of the Karoo are still full of Hobsons. He studied BSc at Rhodes University and went back to the Karoo family farm. After a terrible drought the family sold that farm and he moved to Tzaneen in 1950 where he became a successful fruit farmer. Len's mother, granny Mary Hobson, lived in Tzaneen to the ripe old age of 92.

Len Hobson imported the first fibreless mango cultivars from America and can rightfully be called the father of the modern-day mango industry in South Africa. In the late 1960s he imported all the Hawaiian macadamia selections that formed the corner-stones of the Southern African macadamia industry as we know it today.

Len Hobson was though perhaps best known as Mr. Papino, the red fleshed paw paws which he branded Papino in the 1970s. The small, largely seedless Solo Papaya was his best selection and was widely sold both in SA and in Europe.

As a respected citrus farmer he served on the Citrus Board in the 60s and once grafted an orange, a lemon, a naartjie, a grapefruit, a lime and a cumquat, all onto the same tree, all bearing their own respective, unique fruits.

There were few crops Len didn't grow in his life, even rice, beans, litchis and Jack Fruit. He once exported some Jack Fruit to London where the authorities called in the RSPCA thinking they were some kind of exotic animal from Africa.

Len was known throughout the Transvaal as "Ma-kepies" – he always wore a hat. His wife Val used to tell the tale that even when he got up in the middle of the night to check the pump, the first thing he did was to put on his hat. The favourite hat was a beaten-up old hat, all dirty and oil stained. Val



Len Hobson (without his hat)

once had it washed and Len was furious, saying it had lost its character. He marched off to the workshop and with the help of some grease and oil, re-instated the hat to its former glory. Petrol attendants in Johannesburg would greet him, "ha, thobela Ma-kepies".

A prolific writer and a lover of local history, Len was a man who right up to the time of his passing was computer literate like few others of his age still involved in projects. Len Hobson is survived by his two daughters, Diana and June, five grandchildren and five great grandchildren, three of whom live in Tzaneen.

Those of us that knew him will miss him greatly and treasure the memories of a kind, gentle and gracious man. Len's powerful spirit will remain in the Letaba district for all time. **ST**