



BOOK REVIEWS

Thomas Muir: Lad O Pairts The life and work of Sir Thomas Muir (1844-1934), Mathematician and Cape Colonial Educationist

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The book provides insights into the life journey of Sir Thomas Muir, his hard work, achievements as a mathematician, as well his dedication and determination in the Cape Colony. Sir Thomas Muir played a pivotal role in the Cape education system and eventually became one of the world's renowned mathematician. The era between 1800-1900, the Cape Colony was characterized by racially segregated amenities and institutions socially, economically and politically. Racial disparities played out on the education front. Resource allocation was largely informed by racial classification. White minority fairly benefitted from the unequal education system amid uneven distribution of resources. The majority of people were farmers and small-scale merchants. The mission of the Cape Colony at the time was to empower white minority educationally and economically.

Thomas Muir: Lad O Pairts, the life and work of Sir Thomas Muir (1844-1934), mathematician and Cape Colonial Educationist, was released in 2021 in two formats namely: An interactive e-book and a hard cover. The review will therefore focus on the structure and layout of the book and navigate the chapters in order to determine among other things, the extent to which visuals were able to capture the interest of the readers.

The book is presented according to different stages of Sir Thomas Muir's life which features the journeys he had undertaken as a mathematician and educationist in the Cape Colony. The opening chapter of the book covers the greater part of his early life and how he

navigated his world of existence through various episodes that finally led to his greatness. One considers this as the most critical part of the book, where the reader is provided with the genesis of the story so they can easily keep track of unfolding events in the entire book. The chapter details Muir's humble beginnings in Scotland where he grew up and the challenges he faced. However, the strategies he devised in order to mitigate his hardships, have not been sufficiently discussed. Taking the reader through the complexities of Muir's early life, would have been welcome. The second stage of the book is premised on his career as an educationist in the Cape Colony. Muir brought about reforms in the education space both as an educationist and mathematician. The following quotation clearly attests to that: *'There is one surviving record of Muir, the teacher, dating back to period only matter of months after he took up the reins of his high office in the Cape Colony. We gain some impression of his qualities as a teacher from his accounts of his visits to the convent in King Williams Town, Eastern Cape, on 8th of November 1892(p22...).'*

One of Muir's most remarkable contributions as an educationist and mathematician in the Cape Colony, was to effect some changes on the education system. *'In a colony with a predominantly conservative rural population, Muir had to pursue a policy of evolution rather than revolution (p25...).* *Muir's work on planning the reform of the School system resulted in a number of education bills which one of them was through the School board act of 1905(p28)'* Muir's wealth of teaching experience accumulated while in Scotland, enabled him to maintain a long and tactful planning in an endeavour to achieve educational goals that he had already set himself. He was the brain behind the architecture and state of the art of some school buildings within the Cape Colony. Rondebosch High School is one such school. The inclusion of visuals and photographs in this part of the book, paints a clear picture of his mammoth contribution to education.

Navigating through the chapters of the book has been made easier by the thematic guidelines provided. In the first chapter the writer details Sir Thomas Muir's early life in Scotland where he grew up. The genesis of his passion for a teaching profession and the odds he fought against in order to achieve greatness as a Cape colonial educationist and mathematician. Furthermore, the themes also provide insights into his family life, values and principles that he subscribed to. *'By a deed of gift, drawn up in 1920, Muir bequeathed his mathematical serials and books to the South African public library. He was a huge enthusiast of mathematical journals, which he felt encouraged and promoted original investigation. He said that they keep alive young students of mathematical journals in every University in town (p89...).'*

The visuals make better sense of the book from the family photos to the School

buildings as well as the tours he undertook. Muir learnt a lot from his travels and that helped him broaden his horizons. He also got the opportunity to interact with people from different backgrounds. Music was also one of his passions. *'Muir was also an enthusiastic singer himself, combining song with liberal quantities of alcohol (p.71)'*. The book succeeds in capturing the essence of Sir Thomas Muir's history and how he managed to reach the pinnacle of his success as an educationist in general and mathematician in particular.

The book comes across as a life story of shared memories of Sir Thomas Muir both in academic and historical contexts. It also provides incisive accounts on the tours that Muir undertook and the people he came into contact with. The practical lessons learnt from such interactions were covered extensively across themes in various chapters. It presents itself as a viable source primarily for researchers, academics, teachers and learners who are keen on tapping into the history of academic excellence in various fields of expertise. It would also be a valuable asset to schools, community, college and university libraries both locally and internationally.

Although the book did not say much about the reforms of the mixed race and blacks in the Cape Colony, it would have been more interesting to get a sense of how they would have been impacted by these reforms. A multi-perspective approach would have served the purpose in that regard.