

# PRETORIA FIFTY YEARS AGO

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**M**Y first visit to Pretoria was in April, 1901 and my first impression was that, like all South African towns at that time, it was very dusty. It was a Sunday and I remember that the Band of the Norfolk Regiment played in Burgers Park, but with the crowd of soldiers and civilians present the dust was too dense for it to be comfortable.

I was in and out of Pretoria several times until I arrived at the end of September, 1902, to make it my permanent home, and I am of the opinion that one could do worse than live in Pretoria.

Until the middle of 1902 military activities appeared to dominate the town. Army Headquarters were at Melrose House, 275 Jacob Mare Street, and the Chief of the Staff occupied Park Zicht, almost next door. The railings of Burgers Park provided hitching posts for the horses of the mounted orderlies, many of whom wore colourful uniforms.

The action of Lord Roberts in establishing Army Headquarters here was of great importance to the town although probably no Pretorian recognised it at the time. Later, when Lord Milner came to the Transvaal he established his office and residence in Johannesburg which rumour said was to be the new capital. It was said that he wanted Army Headquarters transferred to Johannesburg but the military chiefs would have none of it, as from their point of view Pretoria was a better place than Johannesburg from which to conduct operations. Lord Milner however strengthened the rumour by transferring three state departments to Johannesburg where they remained for many years.

This talk of the removal of the Capital was taken very seriously in Pretoria and it served the purpose of uniting old residents, newcomers, English and Afrikaners into one camp against such a proposal. No love was lost between the two towns and even as late as 1929 the late Hon. J. H. Hofmeyr, after spending seven years in Johannesburg and five in Pretoria wrote: "The attitude of Johannesburg towards Pretoria is one of polite patronage. It is a pleasant place, some 35 miles away from the metropolis, by what used to be the worst road in the world but is now fairly good, almost an outlying suburb. 'There is not much to see or do there,' so the overseas visitor will be told, 'still it is worth your while to run over for an afternoon if you can spare it'."

As for the Pretorian, his predominant feeling towards Johannesburg is one of what one might call well-bred dislike, the dislike of the aristocrat for the parvenu, the disapproval of middle-aged respectability for the extravagances of youth. "A good place for amusement, or to do one's shopping in, but far too blatant, aggressive, self-assertive, certainly not a

place to live in". That was in 1929. Twenty-five years earlier the Pretorian's view of Johannesburg was much more forceful.

When in 1906 Mr. Campbell-Bannerman announced that full responsible Government was to be granted to the Transvaal, the Pretoria branch of the Progressive Party asked that the Letters Patent should contain a clause that Pretoria was to be the capital. The insertion of such a clause in the 1907 constitution undoubtedly saved the country from a lot of strife.

The appearance of Pretoria at the end of 1902 was vastly different from what it had been in April, 1901. It is true that Martial Law was still in force but, compared with the war period, few soldiers were about, and civil police patrolled the town which had assumed its normal aspect. Army Headquarters and the military departments had moved to Artillery Barracks, but Major Poore, the Provost Martial, was still at the Magistrate's Court.

At the turn of the century there was no Hatfield, Hillcrest, or Brooklyn and I think that Villieria and one or two of the smaller suburbs were the only townships in the Moot Valley. Trevanna, Sunnyside and Muckleneuk were fairly well built up, probably because of the tram service, but there were few houses in Arcadia east of Hamilton Street. North of Church Street beyond Nel Street the only buildings were a pumping station directly opposite Wessels Street, Hugh Crawford's "Craigielea", T. W. Beckett's "Merton Keep", and Andrew Johnston's "Lisdogan". In Pretoria West, or Burgher Right Erven as it was then called, the houses were very scattered and most of them were small and of wood and iron. The brick houses probably numbered less than fifty.

It may surprise many to learn that on either side of the Johannesburg Road, from the present site of the Central Prison to the point where the road now forks to Roberts Heights there were several hundred squatters engaged in making bricks. They remained there until the Municipality obtained control of the Town Lands. Most of the clay pits were subsequently filled in with rubbish from town but a few depressions can still be seen. A straight road led from Church Street West along von Weilligh Street to the drift at Daspoort near which were the Daspoort Hotel with a skittle alley, an oil mill and the Bacteriological Laboratory under Dr. Theiler. There was no railway to Rustenburg in those days so the Daspoort Hotel was the last "pull up" in Pretoria for the road traffic for Rustenburg. The other licensed hotels around Pretoria were Silverton, Fountains, Skinner's Court, Wonderboom (just this side of the poort), and the Pelican at Mayville. Of the six only Silverton survives.

An ugly blot near the town was the camp of white squatters on the government ground beyond Hove's Drift. It stretched westward from Beatrix Street along what is now Zoutpansberg Road to Hove's Drift where the bridge is today. These people lived in shanties of flattened

paraffin tins, sacking and brushwood; whole families were there for years without any sanitary arrangement whatsoever. They obtained their water from the river. They were moved off by the Government at about the time of Union.

C. J. BEANES.

(To be continued).

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## MARIA VAN RIEBEECK

*Rede uitgespreek deur mevr. prof. Van den Heever by geleentheid van die onthulling van die Maria van Riebeck-straatnaamplaat.*

**N**AMENS die Maria van Riebeeck-Klub, Johannesburg, wil ek graag die Genootskap Oud-Pretoria bedank vir hulle vriendelike uitnodiging om vandag hier aanwesig te wees. Graag wil ons ook die Genootskap gelukwens met die gepaste vernoemings waarby die name van Jan en Maria van Riebeeck vir hierdie geslag en komende geslagte lewend in die herinnering sal bly.

In die kort tyd tot my beskikking wil ek probeer om vir u 'n vlugtige skets te teken van die vrou wat hier vernoem word, en wat reeds in 1940 in Johannesburg vernoem is deur 'n geselskap Hollandse en Afrikaanse vroue by die stigting van 'n vroueklub.

Omtrent Maria de la Quellrie is nie veel bekend nie. Besoekers aan die Kaap gedurende die kommandeur se dienstyl beskryf haar as 'n vrou met 'n innemende geaardheid, gesond en knap van uiterlik, met bruin hare en helder bruin oë.

Onwillekeurig dink 'n mens daaraan waarom so'n jong vrou uit goeie stand en met goeie middele haar in die huwelik sou verbind met iemand soos Jan van Riebeeck, 'n skeepsdokter in diens van die H.O.I.K., wanneer sy moes weet dat so'n huwelik vir haar sou beteken dat sy haar vaderland en die veilige, rustige bestaan daar vaarwel sou moes sê en haar al die opofferings sou moes getroos wat noodwendig daaraan verbonde moes wees. Maria de la Quellrie kon ongetwyfeld in Holland 'n goeie huwelik gedoen het en rustig tuis gebly het. Maar sy het die lewe saam met Van Riebeeck verkies, — die man met die vooruitstrewende maar onrusvoorspellende lyfspreuk: „Wie advancement soeekt, sal geen naerstighyt sparen.” Ons word gelei tot die afleiding dat hierdie kloeke jong vrou nie iemand was wat die rustige stilte van 'n burgerlike woning in Holland sou verkies nie. By haar het Van Riebeeck