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Founding architects of the Department of Public Works in the Transvaal until 1910, their work and influence.

Thesis by Enla Marié Minnaar.
Supervisor: Professor D. Holm.
Co-supervisor: Dr. K.A. Bakker.
Submitted for the degree PhD. Architecture.

ABSTRACT.

The void in available literature pertaining to the origin of the official architecture of the 'Publieke Werken Departement' in the 'Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek', the destruction of the Department by the Anglo Boer-War and the subsequent reconstruction of the Department as the Public Works Department of the Transvaal Colony, is addressed.

A new perspective is set regarding the architectural data of the period, by analysis of the cultural doctrine of the different departments.

The history of the Department is divided into four periods. The first deals with the era from the establishment of the Department in 1877, until the appointment of Sytze Wierda. The second incorporates the time from 1887 with his engagement up to the outbreak of the Anglo Boer-War in 1899. This period is generally seen as the golden age of Transvaal Republican architecture. The third relates the effect of the war on the Department and the architects while the fourth deals with the colonial time from the annexation of Pretoria in 1900, until Unification in 1910.

The structure and work procedure of each department are examined to derive an image of the type of training the architects had undergone and a survey is made of what can be found of the original libraries of the departments. Specific careers are investigated. In this context, buildings are chosen from the researched lists, to be examined. The designated buildings are regarded as documents, and are analyzed with regard to cultural doctrine and business stance.

The first period produced pragmatic thatched buildings. During the second phase, Wierda attained the embodiment of cultural doctrine in architecture, rising above mere utility in building. He strived to create a sophisticated, ideal townscape for the Z.A.R. Continuity was lacking, however, as the Department was at first brought to a standstill, and then wiped out by the war. During the fourth phase, the British Colonial Department brought about specialization of architects as quantity surveyors, engineers and architects. At first, only utility buildings were designed by the Department while prestige projects were given to private architectural firms.

KEYWORDS

Architecture, "Publieke Werken", "Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek" (Z.A.R.), Anglo Boer-War, Sytze Wierda, Colonial, Business stance, Cultural doctrine.



**BYLAAG A: GEDEELTES VAN DIE TOESPRAAK VAN
STAATSPRESIDENT PAUL KRUGER BY DIE
HOEKSTEENLEGGING VAN DIE
GOUVERNEMENTSGEBOUW, 6 MEI 1889,
(DE VOLKSSTEM: 9 MEI 1889).**

'De rapporteur vraagt mij om langzaam te spreken, doch ik vrees dat de paarden op hol zullen gaan.

Ed. Achtb. Voorzitter en leden van den Volksraad; Leeraren en afgevaardigden van de Synode; Vertegenwoordigers van vreemden Mogendheden, Vrienden.

Ik verklaar hiermede den hoeksteen gelegd te hebben van het Staatsgebouw op de zetelplaats der Regeering, te Pretoria, in die Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek. Het is een feit dat ons allen moet vervullen met dankbaarheid, met vreugde, met trots; want het is een bewijs dat er welvaart heerscht in de Republiek. Wie zou er voor vijf jaren gedacht hebben dat nu zulk een groot, ruim en kostelijk gebouw voor onze werkzaamheden noodig zoude zijn en dat ons gemakkelijk zoude vallen de koste daarvan te bestrijden. Maar wat toen niet voorzien was is nu werkelijk geworden. De aanwas der bevolking heeft de welvaart doen herleven en grooter worde, maar zij heeft ook nog andere gevolgen gehad: de werkzaamheden en dus ook de aantal ambtenaren zijn vermeerderd. Daarom moest er een nieuw plek, een nieuw gebouw gemaakt worden. En dat moes goed zijn.! Het is nu niet meer voldoende zooals vroeger toen men dikwijls blijde was om de Volksvertegenwoordiging en ambtenaren een dak boven hun hoofd te kunnen geven.....'

'.....Nee, het aanzien en de waardigheid van dezen Staat begon nu drngend te eischen dat er zoowel voor de Volksvertegenwoordiging als voor de Regeering een nieuw gebouw zouw komen, waarvan het uiterlijk in overeenstemming moet zijn met dat aanzien en die waardigheid.'

'.....Ik kan niet nalaten mijn dank uit te spreken over het departement van publieke werken, dat onder leiding van zijn waardige hoofd, den heer Wierda, dien ik hier bijzonderlijk noemen wil en zijn assistent, den heer Van Rijsse, de schoone plannen, en teekeningen heeft vervaardigd en aan wien wij de denkbeelden en het ontwerp verschuldigd zijn, die wij weldra in steen zullen verwezentlijkt zien....'



BYLAAG B: HERBERT BAKER SE BRIEF AANGAANDE
DIE SAMESTELLING VAN DIE P.W.D. (CS 4 437/01).

CONFIDENTIAL

Union-Castle Building,
Adderley Street
Cape Town 1st March 1901

To His Excellency,
The High Commissioner.

Your Excellency,

In connection with the appointment of a Government Architect at Pretoria, I have the honour to send the following suggestions.

I assume that in the first instance there will be a distinct Department of Architecture which will plan and superintend the minor alterations, additions and new buildings required by the Government.

I do not think it will be found to be in the interests of the Public and certainly not in that of Architecture that the Architect at the head of this Department should be allowed to design the more important buildings. Anyone who had the general practical training and business capacity for organising a department would not have the artistic qualifications nor the time at his disposal to compose works of true architecture, and the practice too commonly prevailing of keeping young artistic draughtsmen behind the scenes cannot be too strongly condemned.

It might be possible to divide the Department into practical and artistic - or Surveyor's and Architect's - divisions but my firm opinion is that the absence of competition and rivalry would create a want of keenness in both Architect and Staff, and that there would be a danger of the work not being turned out quickly and economically, as well as in time failing to be of a very high Architectural order.

I think that ultimately for the head of the Practical Department, the advantages of high training would outweigh considerations of local knowledge, and I would recommend that a man should be chosen in England. The R.I.B.A. might be asked to



select a candidate, one preferably who had passed the examination for the District Surveyors, who control London buildings under the County Council. His knowledge of English Building Acts would be of great assistance in framing similar laws in the new Country. His want of African experience could be supplemented by the appointment of local assistants or even at first by a Committee of local Architects to advise him.

There are several Architects of fairly good professional training who have practised in Johannesburg, but the best of these would not be tempted, except at a high salary, to accept the appointment. Their advice however might be of great value, and they might recommend a qualified local man.

If an immediate appointment has to be made, I would advise that one of the leading Transvaal architects be asked to accept the post temporarily. If this suggestion fails, the Colonial Government would recommend some of their District Inspectors or Draughtsmen.

If it is decided not to entrust the larger buildings to a Government Official a different Architect might be chosen by selection for each building, out of which number the fittest would I hope survive. On the other hand resource might be had to competitive designs, though, except for buildings of special monumental character, where pure art might outweigh consideration of planning and construction, this system is now generally acknowledged both by Architects and the more educated public to lead to unsatisfactory results.

In this Country particularly the better men with their hands full have no time to compete, and in the absence of any good professional assessors the award would frequently go to a showy but ill-planned design.

Your Excellency will, I hope, excuse my going further and discussing the question, so interesting in a new country, of the possibility of establishing control over the Architecture of Municipal and private buildings.



Any attempt to curtail originality or to
Russmannise whole cities would of course be undesirable, but
at least palpable architectural enormities might be prevented.

The idea has been seriously entertained both in
France and Germany, and in New York and Boston, Art Commissions,
I believe, exist which exercise artistic control over all build-
ings erected by public funds, but more especially over monuments,
statues, fountains etc.

Washington, which has such a high reputation as a
well laid out city, is managed by a small body of Commissioners
appointed by the Government, and they do the work usually per-
formed by a Municipality.

Such a Commission, which would not consist entirely
of Architects, would be of great value in other respects such as
supervising Municipal Building Regulations, which South African
Municipalities are apt to copy wholesale from London regardless
of different circumstances and conditions of climate, and from
this good architecture is often hampered.

The following Architects who have practised in
the Transvaal are slightly known to me, and have all had a London
education in Architecture.

Leck (now in Cape Town) He might perhaps consent
to assist temporarily.

John Begg (now in England) the best trained
Architect in Johannesburg.

~~Emley~~
~~Emery~~ (now in South Africa, I think).

I have the honour to be,

Yours faithfully,

Herbert Baker.



HERBERT BAKER & MASSEY,
ARCHITECTS.

Union-Castle Co.'s Building,
44, Adderley Street,

Cape Town, 6th March 1901

Re ~~17~~ ~~1901~~

G. V. Fiddes Esq. C.E.
Government House,
Cape Town.

Dear Mr. Fiddes, the honour is conferred to you, and

Since writing the report, I find
that the name of the Architect I mentioned is not Emery

but Emley. He is now, I understand, practising at
East London.

I think I should also have mentioned
the name of Mr. Stuckie, who probably had the largest
practice at Johannesburg. I believe that he does very
good work, although I have not seen any of it.

Yours faithfully,

Public Works Department

Herbert Baker

I have the honour to be,

SIR,

Your most obedient humble servant,

(Handwritten signature)

General,

ADMINISTRATOR,

The Right Honourable

J. Chamberlain M.P.,

LONDON.