

*Verstaalings van Nawaak - artikel soos dit was
verskeid Engelse tydskrifte gestuur is
my propaganda met die gedagte te maak
Verstaalings van maj. Jeffries, deur my regisreer.
H.B. Thom*

THE ARCHIVES YEAR BOOK FOR SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY.

By Prof. H.B. Thom.

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The time when historical research in South Africa was carried out by one or two amateurs, with the help of a few archives documents and a great deal of oral tradition - and perhaps the exercise of an equal amount of imagination - is fortunately a thing of the past. For years now thorough and scientific research work has been done in our Archives by well-trained historians.

But the best historical labour in South Africa is not generally that which finds a publisher very easily. Publishers look chiefly for a wide-reading public, and on that our best historical productions can seldom depend.

The ordinary reader does not usually show any interest in well-weighed opinions, for which, with the assistance of numerous footnotes and other critical aids, proofs of integrity are offered. For obvious reasons the ordinary man prefers the dramatic and sensational.

Scientific historians, therefore often do not know how to dispose of the results of their studies. Often, by means of serious and laborious research, which sometimes has to be carried out over a period of many years, our historians may make most important discoveries and additions to our historical knowledge, but the manuscripts have to lie on the shelves in private homes or in Libraries, where occasionally the dust is shaken off when a new researcher comes to consult the work already done.

In this young country of ours, where there are no Historical Societies and periodicals, or University presses as in the older countries of Europe, to assist the historian by publishing the results of his arduous labours, the need for a proper medium of publication was very serious. It was in order to remedy this need that the Archives Year Book for South African History came into being.

Although various sympathetic persons, among others Dr. C. Graham Botha (formerly Chief Archivist), Prof. A.J.H. van der Walt (now Director of External Studies in Pretoria) and the writer of this article, had discussed the need and sought a remedy, it was actually Prof. J.L.M. Franken of Stellenbosch who hit the nail on the head and came forward with the happy suggestion of the Archives Year Book.

In an article in the Stellenbosch Oudstudent of September 1937, Dr. Franken explained his idea. "I make an appeal," he states, "for the publication of a Year Book, in which the results of historical research in our archives can be published!" He expressed the conviction that such a scheme would succeed if it were carried out by the Government. "I can only suggest the introduction of such a publication if it emanates from the Government, in association with the Archives!"

Prof. Franken then referred to what had already been done in regard to the preservation, arrangement and accessibility of the records kept in our Archives depôts, and continued. "I venture to go a step further, and to state that an archives only completely carries out its purpose, its ideal intention when it

also offers the opportunity for making the sources, as interpreted by the researcher, available to a wider circle by means of publication in cases where otherwise funds would be lacking!"

Finally, he appealed to the Minister for the Interior - under whose control the Archives fall - with the urgent request "That he should assist in making the good work which has already been done in this matter even more valuable by placing, in the future, an additional sum of £500 on the estimates for the printing of a year Book for the publication of work directly based on scientific research done in the sphere of South African history in our Archives in the four Provinces!"

The idea of a Year Book was received with approval. It was given favourable notice in the Press, and historians welcomed it. Most important of all was the fact that the then Chief Archivist, Dr. Botha (who today still serves on the Editorial Staff), strongly supported the idea and referred it to the Minister for his approval.

The result of these (and many other) preliminary steps, was that the Minister granted and made available the amount asked for. To the Editorial Staff he nominated the Chief Archivist (Dr. Botha), the then Assistant Archivist (Dr. C. Beyers), Prof. Franken and the writer, with the then Cape Archivist (Dr. P.J. Venter) as Secretary.

Thereupon the Editors set about the task of laying down regulations for the issue of the Year Book. With a few alterations their draft approved by the Minister. Among other matters, a name had to be decided upon for the series, THE ARCHIVES YEAR BOOK FOR SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY. a name which, in the light of the founding of the publication, was very apposite, was finally selected.

The Editors immediately began to collect suitable material for the Year Book. Notices appeared in the newspapers; the University authorities all received intimations, and direct contact was made with a number of research workers. Within a short time a number suitable and carefully prepared historical studies had been offered, which plainly showed how great was the need for such a publication.

In 1938 it was possible to publish the first Year Book which appeared in two fairly bulky volumes. It was an important event, not only for those whose work was contained in the volumes, but also for South African historical research in general. In his preface to the first volume, the Chief Archivist stated: "Researchers doing thorough scientific work in the Archives should thus find a means of publishing the results of their investigations and thus make them available for others." - And in this fact lies the great value of the Year Book.

In Volume I three works appeared. Two of these were short essays; one written by the well-remembered late Prof. Blommaert. "Het Invoeren van de Slaavernij aan de Kaap" and one by the Cape Archivist Dr. P.J. Venter, entitled. "The Destruction of Records in South Africa!" The third contribution was the dissertation submitted by Prof. D.W. Kruger of Potchefstroom for his doctorate, a detailed and scientific study entitled "Die Weg na die See!" With this last contribution which occupies the major portion of Volume I, and which reveals the significance of the East Coast-especially of Portuguese East Africa - in regard to Boer Policy before 1877, - the Year Book made its bow in a manner befitting its purpose;

Volume II of the first Year Book is devoted to one important study, namely "Die Geskiedenis van die Luterske Kerk aan die Kaap," by Dr. J. Hoge of Stellenbosch. This work, the result of intensive archival research over a number of years, is an example of painstaking and thorough research, and will undoubtedly long remain the standard work on the History of the Lutheran church at the Cape.

In the later Year Books a variety of contributions have appeared. The era of the Dutch East India Company is represented by a number of fine monographs. This period, which is unfortunately sometimes still regarded as the "Dark Middle Ages" of South African history, is one which is of the greatest importance to us, since the most significant foundations of our whole national and cultural existence were laid at this time.

The importance of this period is apparent if we examine the contents of the matter dealt with under this head. In 1940 Prof. Franken's "Kaapse Huishoue in die Agtiende Eeu" appeared. In this we are given an insight into the social and economic conditions of a distinguished old Cape household, by means of extracts from the letterbooks and memoranda of Van Dessin. In the same year Dr. P.J. Venter's "Landdrost en Heemraden" was published, a useful dissertation, presented for a doctorate, in which the writer first takes us far back into our political past, and then explains the working and the meaning of these old Cape governmental institutions.

Two years later Dr. C.F.J. Muller, now senior lecturer in the Department of external Studies in Pretoria, came forward with his study of the first hundred years of the history of South Africa's oldest industry, the fisheries; and later Miss M. Marais' "Armsorg aan die Kaap onder die Kompanjie" appeared, a study which, because of its contents and scientific value at the present time - when so much interest is shown in social work - deserves special consideration. The latest issue of the Year Book is also concerned with a study of the Company's period, namely Dr. Anna J. Boeseken's "Nederlandse Kommissarisse en die Agtiende Eeu se Samelewing aan die Kaap," which in my opinion is an example of excellent scientific research.

As can be expected, however, most of the publications deal with the nineteenth century. In 1939 the sixth and last volume of Sir George Cory's well-known "Rise of South Africa" - or, rather, the first six chapters of the sixth volume, the only portion completed at the time of Sir George's death, - was published in the Year Book. By issuing this work, which chiefly deals with the period of Sir George Grey's governorship, we have not only enriched our historical writings but have also paid suitable tribute to the memory of the well-known historian.

A number of other useful studies dealing with the history of the Cape have also appeared: C.F.G. Schutte's work: "Dr. John Philip's Observations regarding the Hottentots of South Africa," for example, is a critical essay of a high standard, while Phyllis Lewsen's "First Crisis in Responsible Government in the Cape Colony" gives in clear outline a description of a difficult question.

The Free State and Natal are represented by Dr. J.J.S. Grobbelaar's "Vrystaatse Republiek en die Basoetoe-Vraagstuk" and Dr. A.J. du Plessis's "Republiek Natalia". These are two very valuable scientific studies, and should be known to all who are interested in Boer history.

Transvaal history is well represented. There is e.g. a contribution by the late Dr. P.J. Pieterse, during his lifetime Archivist in Cape Town and Pretoria, entitled "Transvaal en Britse Soevereiniteit, 1881 - 1884"; a historical-topographical study by B.H. Dicke entitled "The Northern Transvaal Voortrekkers"; a detailed work by Dr. F.A.F. Wichmann on "Die Wordingsgeskiedenis van de Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, 1838-1860"; and a very readable study by the present Cape Archivist, Dr. Breytenbach, viz "Andries Francois du Toit en sy Aandeel in die Transvaalse Geskiedenis!"

Although we have not by any means given an exhaustive list of what has already appeared, we have at least shown the rich variety and the wide scope of contents of the Year Book.

Historians and Librarians would be wise to order from the Government Printer, any volumes which they do not as yet possess, while the volumes are still obtainable. There are already twelve large volumes of handsome appearance. The selling price is 12/6 per volume, at present a very low price, actually below the ~~cost~~ ~~price~~ cost of production. After a few years, the price will undoubtedly rise, as has happened again and again with Africana.

During the first five years of the existence of the Year Book it was customary to publish two volumes annually, but later only one volume was issued per year. In addition, the Year Book got a few years in arrears, as is plain from the fact that the volume issued at the beginning of this year bears the date 1944. This was due to the strict need for economy in money and paper during the years of the war. Sometimes during that period it seemed as if the publication would have to cease, but after long negotiations between the Editors and the Government a means was found to carry on, and the Editors considered themselves fortunate in that they could continue the work.

It is however to be regretted that the Year Book is at present a few volumes behind schedule. But the Editors have had to decide whether they would allow a hiatus of a few years to remain in the series or whether they would make a great effort to catch up the lost volumes.

The first alternative was by far the easier, but the Editors did not choose it. Since they had in hand the necessary material for all the volumes of the series, and were anxious to avoid the break in publication, they decided to continue a few years in arrears, hoping that in course of time they would be able to catch up again. It seems now as if this decision was a wise one, for the Government has recently made available an additional sum of money, so that the opportunity seems favourable for the completion of the series to date, that is to say, if the problem of our times, the serious shortage of printing facilities, does not hold up the work again.

It seems as if young research workers today still do not know what a valuable means of publication they have in the Archives Year Book. Often they still search -- sometimes in vain -- for financial assistance for the publication of their work, and, it does not occur to them to offer their manuscripts to the Editors of the Archives Year Book. The Year Book is not only a suitable means of publication, but for the youthful historian it has also

this great advantage, that it brings his work prominently before the eyes of the people who are really interested, such as librarians, archivists and historians.

Contributions may be in Afrikaans, English or Nederlands, and must be sent to the Secretary, Archives Year Book for South African History, c/o of the Archives, Queen Victoria Street, Cape Town. The Editors are eager to make the Year Book as representative of the whole Union as possible, but at the same time they must emphasise the important condition for acceptance, namely high scientific standard. They would rather not publish a Year Book at all than publish one containing compilations of poor quality.

Contributors receive no honorarium and the Editors also give their services free - for all of us it is a work of love, in the service of our national history. But every one who contributes to the Year Book must offer work of a high standard so that the Year Book will be what we all desire it to be, a live and fruitful factor in our intellectual and cultural life.