The Journal of Jan van Riebeeck is the official diary of the Cape settlement during the ten years of Van Riebeeck's régime. In it is recorded from day to day everything of note that happened from the day Van Riebeeck left Holland in 1651 until the date of his departure from the Cape in 1662.

When the 300th anniversary of the landing of Van Riebeeck still seemed a long way off, the Council of the Van Riebeeck Society -- a society which has been responsible for the publication of a large number of important South African documents -- decided to publish the Journal of the Founder on the occasion of the Tercentenary. The Van Riebeeck Society became even more ambitious; it decided to publish also a complete and accurate English translation.

Translations of the Journal -- or parts of it, at any rate -- have been attempted before. One hundred and fourteen years ago, Donald Moodie translated portions of the Rev. H. C. V. LeBourdais's French text into English. Other portions of the Journal which dealt with the natives and the relations between Europeans and natives were, for want of complete copies, never translated.

A number of years later, the...
of the original was lost.

The difficulties connected with the publication of the Journal, especially its translation, were well appreciated by all the members of the Council of the Van Riebeeck Society. The Journal is a bulky document of 2,500 pages, closely written in the Gothic-Netherlandic handwriting of the seventeenth century. Sometimes it is untidily and carelessly written; often there is a complete absence of punctuation marks. Here and there the language and style are involved and confused, so that it becomes exceedingly difficult to know what the diarist was trying to say. One had also continually to be on one's guard against words and expressions which, in modern Dutch, have lost their original idiomatic connotations. Thus, e.g., "destilled waters" but spirited liquor, and a tonne gouts would not be "a ton of gold", but simply an expression of the time to denote a hundred thousand gilders. Hundreds of other examples of this nature could be quoted.

It is when the writer of the Journal endeavours to translate a foreign name or, better still, when he aims at conveying the sound of the word in his own language, that we come across the most startling results. The English ship Welcome becomes the Willemcompat and the Olive Branch becomes the Clyftack. Worse still is the fact that the English ship the Eagle becomes the Egel—the Dutch word for a Hedgehog! Small wonder then that we find the diarist becoming vaguely puzzled about the figurehead of the ship which, he said, bore a much closer resemblance to "an eagle or other bird" than to a hedgehog.

It was no easy matter to obtain suitable translators for the Journal. In the end, however, we were fortunate. Mr. W. F. L. van Zyl, Chief Translator to the House of Assembly, undertook to do Vol. 1; Vol. 2 was translated by Dr. J. Smuts, formerly also a translator.
to the House of Assembly and now on the staff of the Afrikaans Dictionary at Stellenbosch; and Vol. II was done jointly by Messrs. C. Johnman and A. Ravenscroft, lecturers in English at Stellenbosch.

It was my task, as Editor, to provide the necessary historical introduction and explanatory annotations, and to check the translators' work. In this last part, which, needless to say, required an immense amount of research and study -- I was greatly assisted by Messrs. Victor de Kock, Archivist at the Cape Archives; D.H. Varley, Librarian of the South African Library; V. Walpole, Senior Lecturer in English at Stellenbosch; L.C. van Crotet, Editor of Die Kaaper-Taalskrif; and Dr. E.E. Mossev, well-known through his work on Old Cape Highways. To all these men I owe a debt of deep gratitude; for their continued and hearty co-operation made the translation of the Journal possible.