

The oak trees of Stellenbosch; the Eikestad, or town of oaks.

Brian Bredenkamp, Arbor Day 2012

High Commissioner H A van Reede tot Drakenstein visited Stellenbosch in 1685, six years after Simon van der Stel visited here for the first time in 1679. He was apparently the first botanist to visit the town and he noted that there were no trees in the valley or on the mountains, and the only trees were on the banks of the river. These were being felled for use as firewood and timber by the people who had settled in the new town, and he encouraged the Free Burghers to plant young trees, both indigenous and exotic, on each erf in proportion to the size thereof.

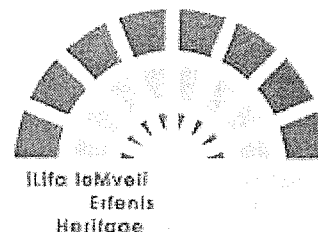
There was a clause in the title acts of farms in the area compelling the owners to plant young oak trees in place of the indigenous trees that had been felled and these were oaks that were well-known to the Dutch, the English/Common/European oaks (*Quercus robur*), the species you see around you.

The efforts were rewarded by a town that became known for its tree-lined streets. Early botanists, among them Thunberg, Lichtenstein and Burchell, wrote about the shady avenues in their journals.

Most of the early plantings were killed in the fires that razed early Stellenbosch but the Naudé panorama of the town

Case No: X120725ZS26D
File No: HM/STELLENBOSCH/ERF 15827
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Date: 15 August 2012

Dr. E Albertyn
Heritage Consultant
12 Timberon Street
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Dear Dr. E Albertyn

CASE NO: X120725ZS26D
HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT (HIA): PROPOSED ADDITIONS, ALTERATIONS AND NEW BUILDINGS ON ERF 15827, BOUNDED BY VICTORIA & MARIAS STREETS & MERRIMAN AVENUE, 'STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY', STELLENBOSCH IN TERMS OF SECTION 38(4) OF THE NATIONAL HERITAGE RESOURCES ACT (ACT 25 OF 1999)

The above matter was discussed at the Impact Assessment Committee (IACom) meeting held on 08 August 2012. In terms of section 38(4) of the National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999):

DECISION

The Committee resolved that:

- i. The HIA is endorsed as having met the requirements of section 38 of the NHRA;
- ii. The heritage-based urban design and architectural guidelines as set out in Volume 1, Section 2 are endorsed;
- iii. The demolition of the Afrika Saal, sections of Huis Marais and of Huis Visser and of the Matron's Cottages are approved.
- iv. The proposed development is approved as follows:
 - a. the Wimbledon Hub and New Generation Residence (design by Jonker and Barnes Architects);
 - b. additions and alterations to Irene Residence (design by Visser, Kapperer, De Bruin Architects);
 - c. new "Groenplein Listening, Living and Learning" Units (design by Smuts and De Kock Architects), and
 - d. the additions and alterations to Huis Visser and Huis Marais (design by Roelof Rabe Architects).
- Such approval is on condition that the development is generally in accordance with the drawings seen by the IA Comm on 8 August 2012 and is subject to architectural resolution being resolved with continuing consultation and assessment by the specialist heritage architectural team prior to final approval by the local authority, and
- v. The landscaping plan is approved in principle, subject to the resolution of the issues raised by I&APs in consultation with the specialist heritage architectural team prior to final approval.
- HWC endorses the guidelines prepared by the heritage specialists and recommends that they be extended to the whole campus so as to guide any future development that the University may wish to undertake and that such development should be subject to a peer review system to be established to the satisfaction of HWC.

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captured ca 1880 shows that there were huge trees at the time. I suspect one of the shadowy shapes in the photograph is the *Araucaria* in the grounds of the theological seminary around the corner from here.

As far as the oaks are concerned these were planted in waves, with the second and third waves coming after the fires. A handful of the third generation of trees exists today and these are all within sight of where we are at the moment. The reason we are here is to celebrate the fact that the oak trees in this street were planted two hundred years ago and we are here for their birthday party. I hope we can have another party four years from now when the *Araucaria* will celebrate its bicentenary.

The other reason for being here now, is the celebration of Arbor Day, a tradition that originated in Nebraska. A visit to Nebraska today wouldn't disclose that the state was once a treeless plain. Among pioneers moving into the Nebraska Territory in 1854 was J. Sterling Morton from Detroit. He and his wife were lovers of nature, and the home they established in Nebraska was quickly planted with trees, shrubs and flowers. Morton was a journalist and soon became editor of Nebraska's first newspaper. Given that forum, he spread agricultural information and his enthusiasm for trees to an equally enthusiastic audience. As a result of his efforts on the 10th April 1872 one million trees were planted.

A prominent conservationist from Pennsylvania, Major Israel McCreight convinced President Theodore Roosevelt to promote Arbor Day in 1906 and on the 15th April 1907 he issued an Arbor Day proclamation that the importance of trees and forestry should be taught in all schools.

In the 1970's the Natal branch of the South African Institute of Forestry started an Arbor Day campaign in Pietermaritzburg, and in 1983 the Department of Forestry declared National Arbor Day for South Africa. Due to the work in Natal this was the first Friday in August but that didn't work at all well for the less tropical provinces so the tree planting was moved to September and since 1999 we have celebrated National Arbor Week from 1-7 September.

I think the spirit of Arbor Day is summed up beautifully in a letter published anonymously in the Burger on 30th August 2003. The title was: *Ons kan nie sonder bome leef*. It reads:

"Plant 'n boom, dêmmit, sommer vandag nog! Ek verseker elke leser daar is niks lekkerder in die lewe nie as om jare later verby 'n tuin te ry, 'n groot boom welig aan't groei te sien en te dink: Dit is mos my boom wat ek destyds geplant het!"

Let's get back to the oaks of Stellenbosch, our pride. Under earlier legislation the oak trees lining Dorp Street were declared to be national monuments and this was later expanded to

include the trees in the rest of the historical core: Van Ryneveld, Andringa, Church, Drostdy, Plein, Van Riebeeck and Die Laan. This legislation was replaced by the Heritage Resources Act and in recent times we had to get permission from the South African Heritage Resource Agency to do any work on the trees. Talk about an exercise in futility!

The trees that stand on the pavements are naturally municipal property and are protected by municipal ordinances, one of which obliges us to replace dead trees with English oaks (This is counter-productive in the light of the problems we have with English oaks so in recent years we have used pin oaks, water oak, cork oaks, saw-tooth oaks, Turkish oaks and evergreen oaks. Within 50 m of where we are standing one can see four of these species). The public do not notice anything different.

There is an even higher level of protection embodied in the National Champion Tree Project where trees of particular significance in terms of size, historical significance, economic value and other factors are identified and declared to be national champions. The tree in front of you is an example.

The oak trees of Stellenbosch, in common with street trees in towns and cities elsewhere, have a tough time. We compact the soil around them, keeping oxygen away from the roots, we pave the sidewalks, cutting off the water, drive cars over their root systems and the cars belch noxious gases into the tree canopies and buildings generate heat that exacerbates all these

factors. As I understand there are a whole bunch of city councilors present and I must take the opportunity of saying that we, and that includes you, are the trees' worst enemies! I implore you to enforce the rules regarding tree protection with new buildings and please stop the excavations for basement parking on erven where large trees line our streets. One needs to look no further than the Jan Cats development or Huis Pirion to see that when you approve something like that you are signing the death warrant of our trees. Similarly when you approve the laying of cables and pipes on the sidewalks, particularly in the heat of summer, you not only kill our trees you prevent the planting of trees to line our streets.

I want to end with three quotations; one from the Bible and another of historical significance plus another article from the Burger.

The mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

Isaiah 55:12 NIV

Cypress and myrtle trees will grow in fields once covered by thorns. And then those trees will stand as a lasting witness to the glory of God.

Isaiah 55:13 NIV

A fool and a wise man see the same tree quite differently.
Robert Louis Stevenson.

Klimbome

Riana Scheepers, VAK, Die Burger, 14 Januarie 2003

“Gelukkig is ek nie fyntjies en eina grootgemaak nie, want vandat ek kan onthou, was geen boom vir my te hoog of te gevaarlik om uit te klim nie.

Die eerste boom van my klein menseheugenis was die koraalboom waaronder my wiegie staangemaak is. Ek is doodseker dat ek die herinnering van skurwe doringstam en bloedrooi koraal reeds van tóé in my dra. Daar was die twee wildevye op oupa Lewies se plaas. Miskien het die grootmense van ons vergeet, miskien het ons van hulle vergeet, want in daardie labirint van oerwortels het bome kastele geword, katedrale en paleise. Daar was geen benul van tyd, of kos of slaap nie

In die soel, donker grond van KwaZulu-Natal groei merkwaardige bome. Daar is kiepersolle met sambrele teen die luglyn, daar is tambotiebome met takke geheel en al geelslang, soetdorings vol skerp assegaaië. Langs die loom riviere is koorsbome wat jou laat droom, onder die wildeklappers die soet vrugte wat ons met 'n klip oopgekap het. In elke boom was ek

onaantasbaar, kon ek lees en wegkruip en die onverskrokke seerower of beeldskone jongvrou wees. Nie één keer het ek uit 'n mik geval nie, het 'n slang my bedreig nie. Onaantasbaar was ek, onsigbaar en omhels deur dit wat wonderliker en groter was as ek.

Klim vandag se kinders nog boom? Is daar op ons dorpsere nog bome groot genoeg waarin 'n klein kind die hele wêreld kan verower? Word daar nog dromers en digters gemaak op die baie spesiale wegkruipplek hoog in 'n boom se mik waar niemand, niemand jou kan kry nie?

Op die plaas waar ek woon, is daar 'n hele paar van dié droombome. Tussen die dennebome in die berg is daar één wat al daar staan vanaf die tyd toe Anna Lategaan die slawe op die plaas laat vrygaan het. Dit is my boom, los hom uit.

Maar onder by die opstal is daar nóg. Sestien van hulle. Maar veral één, naby die perdestal. 'n Eikeboom so groot soos die Heer se genade, wat toemaak tot amper op die grond. Dit is 'n klimboom, 'n wegkruipboom, 'n genadeboom. Dit is 'n musiekboom vol eike-klokkies en eekhorinkies. Dit is 'n boom wat vra vir die kieweling van 'n kind se nuuskierige handjies en voete teen sy stam op, tot bó.

As jy 'n kind het wat nie weet van alleenwees, soetheid en genade nie, bring hom na my toe. Ek sal hom 'n boom gee. Laat die kind klim.