

**The Simon van der Stel Festival:  
Constructing heritage and the politics of pageantry**

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This article will discuss the Simon van der Stel Festival, an annual event held in Stellenbosch from 1967 to 2000. The focus is on the reasons for initiating such a festival and why a faction within broader Stellenbosch embraced this part of its colonial-Dutch heritage. The progress of the festival will be traced until its climax in 1979, the Tercentenary Festival, in which 300 years since the founding of Stellenbosch was celebrated. Then the Van der Stel Festival will be compared to the Jan van Riebeeck Festival of 1952, which celebrated the arrival of Van Riebeeck in the Cape. It will be argued that while the Jan van Riebeeck Festival was carefully planned by the state to serve as a mass pageant of white domination, the Simon van der Stel Festival was a localised, community-based operation (albeit a narrowly defined sector which made claims to representing the wider community). The article attempts to contribute historiographically to the well-trodden path of South African heritage studies which has been widely discussed by authors such as Ciraj Rassool, and Sabine Marschall.<sup>1</sup> However, this article has a decisively local character compared to previous work done on heritage festivals which have had a broader scope of study.

Central to this study is the appeal of commemorative and celebratory heritage festivals, especially when historical milestones are reached after a decade, century or millennium. This article will therefore explore notions of heritage construction; pageantry; and “the cult of the centenary” to explain why the Simon van der Stel Festival came into being. Furthermore, the significance of hosting the festival in Stellenbosch will be discussed, as well as how it changed over time. In addition, an explanation will be given of the implications of hosting the festival and why it came to an end.

First, this article will sketch a brief history of Simon van der Stel. The context of the festival requires an overview of the publicly accepted version of his character, achievements and legacy. It is widely accepted that Simon van der Stel was one of the most popular governors of the Cape of Good Hope. Naturally, he was not adored by all, but in comparison with other colonial governors or commanders he appears to have been fair in his rule and generally successful in his endeavours. It should, however, be borne in mind that biographies of Van der Stel, like those of other historical figures, have been contested and opinions of his achievements have changed over time. Little was done to commemorate South Africa’s history until the early

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1. For example, see C. Rassool, “The Rise of Heritage and Reconstitution of History in South Africa”, *Kronos*, 26, August 2000, pp 1–21; and S. Marschall, “Commodifying Heritage”, in C. Hall (ed.), *Tourism and Postcolonialism: Contested Discourses, Identities and Representations* (Routledge, London, 2004).

1940s.<sup>2</sup> The festivals held in Van der Stel's honour were, in a sense, a re-construction of Van der Stel's life. For example, it appears that as far as his treatment of slaves was concerned, many biographers have suffered convenient amnesia. It is also significant that this re-making of Van der Stel's story took place at a time of grand apartheid.

### **Kommandeur Simon van der Stel and the founding of Stellenbosch**

Simon van der Stel was born in Mauritius in 1639 where his father was commander of the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) station on the island. Van der Stel's mother was of so-called "mixed origin", because her father was a white European and her mother was of Indian descent. Arguably, if Simon van der Stel was living in South Africa during the apartheid era, he would have been classified as a coloured person.<sup>3</sup> Paradoxically, the festival held in his honour some 300 years later was perpetuated by the hegemonic white Afrikaner class, whose political supremacy was reinforced by the apartheid government's policies of hierarchical racial separation.

After 1652, a succession of relatively unimaginative and mediocre governors took office, under whom slow progress was made at the Cape. A noticeable change took place in 1679 following the appointment of Simon van der Stel. He arrived in Table Bay on 12 October 1679. Strangely, the wife of the new commander, Jacoba Six, elected to remain in Amsterdam and she never again saw her husband after his departure for the Cape of Good Hope. The precise reason for this remains unclear although Van der Stel continued to regard her with affection after his arrival at the Cape. He emigrated from Holland with his six children (including Willem Adriaan, his successor) and his wife's sister, Cornelia, whose task was presumably to take care of his youngest daughter who was only two years old at the time.<sup>4</sup>

Simon van der Stel's sense of adventure is evident in the fact that he made his first venture into the interior within three weeks of his arrival at the Cape of Good Hope. It is on this, one of many expeditions, that he came across the area which was to be named Stellenbosch. On the eve of 8 November 1679, his diary reflects his arrival there. He describes a little haven next to the Eerste River with beautiful high trees; he decided to name it Stellenbosch (Stel-and-Bush). Upon his return to Table Bay he announced that land would be made available in Stellenbosch for all those who wished to settle next to the Eerste River on residential farms. It was these people who formed part of the founding community of the second oldest white settlement in what was to become South Africa.<sup>5</sup> The granting of farms to private citizens encouraged the immigration of white women,

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2. C. Rassool and L. Witz, "The 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival: Constructing and Contesting Public National History in South Africa", *The Journal of African History*, 34, 3, 1993, pp 450–451.
  3. J. Hunt, *Dutch South Africa: Early Settlers at the Cape, 1652–1708* (Troubadour/Matador Publishing, Leicester, 2005), p 106.
  4. Hunt, *Dutch South Africa: Early Settlers at the Cape*, pp 105–106.
  5. A.J. Böeseken, *Simon van der Stel en sy Kinders* (Nasionale Opvoedkundige Uitgewery, Kaapstad, 1964), pp 54–55.

although for several decades the proportion of men to women among the settlers remained very high.<sup>6</sup> The immigration of white women ultimately led to an increase in the number of white settlers at the Cape.

On 14 October 1686, Simon van der Stel celebrated his 47th birthday in what had by now become his favourite town – Stellenbosch. Apart from his birthday celebration the reason for his visit was threefold. First, he wanted to host a weapon show. Second, he wanted to award sections of land to newly-arrived freeburgers; and finally, he was to inaugurate the recently completed church in the town. Three years later, in 1689, his birthday celebrations were expanded to include a Dutch fair or *kermis* which was held during the first two weeks of October, climaxing on the final day, the commander's birthday. The day was also declared a public holiday for the residents of Stellenbosch, who dressed in their best clothes and gathered to toast his wellbeing. While the fair was in progress there were no restrictions on trade, and everyone was free to buy and sell local produce. Among the "colourful" events that took place was the drilling of the militia, and target practice also formed part of the entertainment. The target was a wooden parrot or "*papegaa*" fixed to a pole and placed inside a circle with a radius of 60 feet, an event that was commonly referred to as "*papegaaiskiet*". Whoever managed to shoot the wooden figure off his perch most consistently was hailed as "king of the marksmen" and would duly receive a prize for his efforts.<sup>7</sup> This event was re-enacted at the Simon van der Stel festivals that followed years later, and one can certainly argue that some of the banal minutiae of these latter festivals had long historical roots.

### **Van der Stel's contribution to the colony**

With regard to the expansion of agriculture, maximising profits and cutting losses, Van der Stel was praised by a visiting commissioner for his much improved supervision and was widely regarded as a "reformer and innovator".<sup>8</sup> It was only during his term of office that the DEIC's initial plan for a stable and resource-rich station between Holland and the East was coming to fruition. This could also be attributed to the fact that when Van der Stel arrived at the Cape there was already a generation of settlers who had been born in the Cape and were accustomed to the climate and environment, which had certainly not been the case when Jan van Riebeeck had arrived in 1652. It was also due to Van der Stel's influence that Stellenbosch is one of the world's finest wine-producing regions today. On arrival at the Cape he was critical of the wine produced in the region and ascribed its poor quality to the inadequate and questionable farming methods that were being used. He personally oversaw the transformation of the industry; he was fully committed to high standards and at least matching

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6. T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (MacMillan, Johannesburg, 1987), p 22.

7. Hunt, *Dutch South Africa: Early Settlers at the Cape*, p 111.

8. C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa* (Oxford University Press, Cape Town, 1972), p 7.

the quality of the famous French wines of the day. He was also very fond of planting trees and sought to beautify the settlement.<sup>9</sup>

The expansion of the wine industry was an important economic boost, benefiting not only the Company, but the burghers as well. The arrival at the Cape of approximately 200 Huguenots during Van der Stel's rule was also a notable asset. Many of the Huguenots had previous experience of winemaking in France, and brought their viticulture skills to a part of the Cape that had a similar climate. Prior to their arrival, Van der Stel was one of the first producers of high quality wine on his farm, Constantia. He later became a leader in this expanding field.<sup>10</sup> One can thus argue that Van der Stel had an enduring influence in Stellenbosch – certainly 300 years later this was one of the rationales offered to justify why it was appropriate to organise a heritage-rich festival in his honour.

### **Heritage construction through pageantry**

For the purposes of studying the historical processes at work in staging the Simon van der Stel Festival, it is necessary to discuss heritage construction and pageantry, because they are instrumental in an understanding of the cultural impact that heritage festivals have on a community or society. Furthermore, the fascination that people have with the commemoration of historical events or prominent figures at centennial celebrations will be explored. This has become known as the “cult of the centenary”.<sup>11</sup> It is important to remember that heritage is not considered a pure and true version of the past. This is because the past, as it is materially embodied in museums, heritage sites and festivals, is inescapably a product of the present. It is kept alive by those who organise and maintain these material displays. The existence of “the past” is similarly paradoxical because its existence is maintained only through the forms in which “the past” is publicly demarcated and represented as such in the present, from which it is being distinguished.<sup>12</sup> Heritage is constructed; just as history itself it is a representation of the past brought to light in the present. However, the difference lies in the medium in which it is expressed. History mainly occupies written and oral forms, while heritage can exist in both tangible and intangible forms.

Defining and conceptualising heritage can prove rather complex. Heritage can be viewed as a diverse knowledge set in the sense that there are many heritages, the contents and meanings of which change through time and across space. In addition, heritage is capable of being interpreted differently within any one culture at any given time, as well as between cultures and through time. It can be argued that this interpretation of heritage is produced by dominant ideologies within a society which reinforce

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9. Böeseken, *Simon van der Stel en sy Kinders*, pp 84–85.

10. Hunt, *Dutch South Africa: Early Settlers at the Cape*, p 141.

11. R. Quinault, “The Cult of the Centenary”, *Historical Research*, 71, 176, October 1998, pp 303–323.

12. T. Bennet, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Routledge, London and New York, 1995), pp 129–130.

support for particular state structures and related political ideologies. Thus, heritage does not engage directly with the study of the past. Instead, it deals with the way selected material artefacts, mythologies, memories and traditions become resources for the present. Heritage is more concerned with meanings than material artefacts; such artefacts may be cast aside as the demands of present societies change. Inevitably, heritage is as much about forgetting as remembering the past.<sup>13</sup> All these elements were evident in the organising and staging of the Simon Van der Stel festivals, and the changes that occurred over time, as this article will show.

Ciraj Rassool examines the cultural workings of three closely-related issues, namely heritage, public history and identity formation, under conditions of political transition in South Africa.<sup>14</sup> Although he focuses on the transition period in South Africa in 1994 when the African National Congress (ANC) took over the reins of power, this transformation is in many ways comparable to the transition the Afrikaner people experienced in 1948 when the National Party (NP) took political control, followed closely by socio-economic hegemony. Rassool is concerned with understanding the ways in which South Africans are encouraged to consider, narrate and visualise their society and the past, including their own identities as individuals.<sup>15</sup> This refers to the ways in which a society constructs its heritage, thereby taking select portions from the past and packaging them into a neatly consumable “product” for the public; people in turn use this “product” in constructing their individual identity. An effective way of promoting heritage construction to the public is by means of pageantry.

As a Roman poet once observed: “Things seen are mightier than things heard”.<sup>16</sup> Pageantry is used as a visual tool to convey a message – the message being a selected segment of history which is promulgated as heritage. Thus, through a pageant which re-enacted a historical time in which residents dressed in colourful seventeenth-century Dutch clothing, the diarised events of the founder of Stellenbosch were re-enacted to serve as a celebration of Simon van der Stel’s birthday. The inclusion of horses greatly enhanced the spectacle and level of experience, because horses can be viewed as potent symbols of the power wielded by those who ruled the settlement.<sup>17</sup> The use of horses also symbolised the power of the ruling elite who were responsible for the festival, namely white Afrikaners.

However, as this article will show, the Simon van der Stel Festival had a decisively limited formal political character, as opposed to the Union of South Africa Pageant of 1910; the Voortrekker Centenary of 1938; and the

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13. Cited in B. Graham, “Heritage as Knowledge: Capital or Culture?”, *Urban Studies*, 39, 5/6, 2002, p 1004.

14. Rassool, “The Rise of Heritage and the Reconstitution of History”, p 1.

15. Rassool, “The Rise of Heritage and the Reconstitution of History”, p 1.

16. P. Merrington, “State of the Union”, *Journal of Literary Studies*, 15, 1, June 1999, p 5.

17. See S. Swart, *Riding High: Horses, Humans and History in South Africa* (Wits University Press, Johannesburg, 2010).

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Jan van Riebeeck Festival of 1952.<sup>18</sup> The reason for this is that these three festivals occurred in times of rapid socio-political change, namely the formation of Union in 1910; poor-whitism in the 1930s; and the rise of the Afrikaner nationalist state in 1948. A pageant therefore serves as a tool to popularise history through heritage construction with a distinct visual character. In the case of Stellenbosch, the colonial Dutch, Georgian and Victorian historical buildings (many of which are protected as historical monuments)<sup>19</sup> contribute to the notion of Stellenbosch as an “open-air museum of itself”.<sup>20</sup>

With regard to the appeal that public commemoration of the centenaries of important events or famous people offers, Roland Quinault contends that it is a relatively recent phenomenon. In modern Europe, centennial commemorations were rare before 1800 and relatively scarce until the mid-nineteenth century. Since then, the number and scope of centenary commemoration has grown rapidly and by the turn of the century, a “cult of the centenary” had become firmly established throughout Europe and the Western world.<sup>21</sup> In the aftermath of a constructed norm to commemorate events or famous people, many festivals were organised to celebrate important centenaries. These included the Great Trek Centenary of 1938; the 1952 Jan van Riebeeck (Tercentenary) Festival commemorating Western European settlement at the Cape; and the Simon van der Stel Tercentenary Festival of 1979. However, the Stellenbosch festivals in honour of Simon van der Stel were unique in that they originated in 1965 and were held annually, although with a watchful eye on the tercentenary festival which was to be celebrated in 1979.

Finally, with regard to heritage construction it is important to establish *who* constructs heritage, and to *what* end. A catalyst for heritage construction is political hegemony and the subsequent economic power wielded by the ruling elite. “The dominant ideology thesis in relation to heritage”, refers to the representation of different histories to broad public audiences; the presentation of the past is analysed as a flexible instrument which is used by those holding state power. Because the state holds power it is able to communicate a particular political message to subordinate groups. Critics of this approach, including Leslie Witz, highlight the inconsistencies among the various producers of meaning. Witz argues that occasionally there is a lack of distinction between the dominant producer and subordinate receiver groups. Furthermore, the subordinate groups may also construct their own meanings that are located outside the bounds of

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18. See Merrington, “State of the Union”, pp 1–19; A. Grundlingh and H. Sapire, “From Feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual? The Changing Fortunes of Great Trek Mythology in an Industrializing South Africa, 1938–1988”, *South African Historical Journal*, 21, 1, 1989, pp 19–38; and L. Witz, *Apartheid’s Festival: Contesting South Africa’s National Pasts* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2003).

19. T.V. Bulpin, *Discovering Southern Africa* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2001), p 144.

20. B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums and Heritage* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998), p 151.

21. Quinault, “The Cult of the Centenary”, p 303.

the dominant ideologies.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, heritage, or at least its construction, is exclusive in that it reflects the interests of the ruling class and marginalises and places subordinate political groups in the periphery. This may not always be intentional, yet it resonates in the political system in an almost subconscious manner.<sup>23</sup> With this in mind, this article will now explore the reasons why the Simon van der Stel Festival was revived.

### **1965-1967: The birth of the revival**

The initial idea to create a festival to commemorate the birthday of Simon van der Stel and his establishment of the “community of Stellenbosch” can be attributed to a married couple who lived in the town during the 1960s. Willem Lubbe, one of the “founding fathers” of the Simon van der Stel Festival Committee (later to be named the Simon van der Stel Burgerraad) and secretary of the committee for our focus period, tells that the revival of the festival was grew from an idea that was put forth by Miems and Ters van Huyssteen. Lubbe describes the couple as being “enthusiastic people when it comes to culture”<sup>24</sup> (here culture is implied to include heritage, as culture is a widely debated term). When they undertook an overseas trip to Germany in 1965, they encountered numerous town festivals. This sparked the idea in Miems that Stellenbosch would lend itself perfectly to hosting such a town festival, purportedly because it carries the name of its well-known founder, Simon van der Stel. Upon arrival back in Stellenbosch, at a town meeting the Van Huyssteens proposed their idea of staging an annual festival, and the idea was wholeheartedly embraced by the local community. Lubbe commented that the enthusiastic response from the residents was “second to none”.<sup>25</sup>

A special reference to the ability of the Van Huyssteens in the 1960s to be able to travel abroad is crucial to understanding why the idea of holding a festival took root. The affluence of Afrikaners in the 1960s has been labelled an economic miracle; only three decades earlier there was widespread poverty among Afrikaans-speaking whites. The problem of poverty in the 1920s and 1930s, which was a result of severe dislocation of social life at the time,<sup>26</sup> was so profound that a special commission of inquiry, the Carnegie Commission was set up in 1924 to identify and address the causes of the problem. The commission established that white poverty was a “social problem” and a problem of “moral failure”. The commission recommended that there should be a reversion to “constructive charity” and the fostering of self-help, led by the church.<sup>27</sup> However, the rise of Afrikaner wealth was less miraculous when one bears in mind that since

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22. Witz, *Apartheid's Festival*, p 6.

23. Witz, *Apartheid's Festival*, p 6.

24. Interview conducted with Willem Lubbe, Stellenbosch, 21 May 2010.

25. Interview conducted with Willem Lubbe, Stellenbosch, 21 May 2010.

26. P. Christie and A. Gordon, “Politics, Poverty and Education in Rural South Africa”, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 13, 4, 1992, p 400.

27. J. Seekings, “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34, 3, September 2008, p 536.

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the early 1950s, apartheid legislation played a major role in the relative affluence of Afrikaners in the 1960s. The historical processes under which economic and social changes took place were closely linked to the development of capitalism and racially exclusive ideologies, particularly as put forth by the National Party government, which drew the majority of its support from Afrikaners, and had assumed power after the 1948 general elections.<sup>28</sup>

As Albert Grundlingh points out, the South African economy gained rapid momentum in the 1960s, outpacing nearly all Western countries by registering an average annual growth rate of six percent over the latter part of the decade. It is widely understood that an affluent society is free to pursue leisure activities, having the luxury of leisure time. In addition, he claims that the longer term economic transformation during the 1960s had a “fermenting effect on Afrikaner politics”.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, consumer practices came to play a more prominent role in the formation of identity, placing greater emphasis on re-inventing the self in a new environment.<sup>30</sup> Thus, through their increased economic prosperity, the Afrikaner community was able to construct their heritage through a pageant which would re-invent their perceived notions of “self”. This notion could be assumed and consolidated year after year.

At the risk of being counter-factual, one could certainly argue that had it not been for the affluence of the Afrikaners in the 1960s, where a seemingly middle-class family could afford to travel overseas, and perhaps lay claim to a European sense and manner of “heritage” celebration, then the idea to host an annual festival in Stellenbosch to honour its founder would not have originated, at least not as early as 1965. As E.P. Thompson has noted, “... there is no such thing as economic growth which is not, at the same time, growth or change of culture; and the growth of social consciousness”.<sup>31</sup>

Accordingly, the decision was taken among some prominent members of the community to create a committee to oversee the administration and planning of the festival. It would not only bring homage to the town’s founder, but also serve as a celebration of his birthday, which was 14 October. For practical reasons, if it happened that this date was not on a Saturday, the re-enactment ceremony and birthday celebration would take place on the Saturday closest to the date. The historical Braak, a central commonage, served as the venue for the main activities of the festival with the exception of the “*papegaaiskiet*” which would take place at the shooting range in the Stellenbosch suburb of Onder-Papegaaiberg. The “*papegaaiskiet*” was contested by members of the Historical Firearms

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28. Christie and Gordon, “Politics, Poverty and Education”, p 400.

29. A.M. Grundlingh, “‘Are we Afrikaners Getting too Rich?’ Cornucopia and Change in Afrikanerdom in the 1960’s”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 21, 2/3, June/September 2008, p 158.

30. Grundlingh, “Are we Afrikaners Getting too Rich?”, p 158.

31. E.P. Thompson, “Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism”, in *Customs in Common* (New Press, New York, 1991), p 403.

Society. The winner would be crowned "*koning van die skerpskutters*" (king of the sharp-shooters) and was awarded a floating trophy made of stinkwood, sculpted into the shape of a parrot by June te Water, a famous sculptor. The trophy was sponsored by Senator Paul Sauer, one of the intellectual architects of apartheid.<sup>32</sup> In addition, a traditional birthday banquet in honour of Van der Stel was held in the town hall (with the exception of the 1967 festival), with typical Cape-Dutch cuisine from the period such as "*waterblommetjebredie*" (Cape pondweed stew), spit-roasted suckling pig, and "*pampoenkoekies*" (pumpkin fritters).<sup>33</sup>

The intentions of the Simon van der Stel Festival Burgerraad, which was established in 1965, are clearly outlined in its constitution in which the founding fathers set forth numerous aspirations. First, they intended to plan and organise an annual celebration of the birthday of the founder of Stellenbosch, Simon van der Stel, on the Saturday closest to 14 October. Second, they wanted to promote the cultural-historical aspects of both Stellenbosch and its founder without any direct or indirect association with any political or quasi-political institutions. However, the festival would have an informal political character because it was planned and managed by members of the dominant political elite. They were in sole control over what form the festival would take, free from political or state intervention. Third, the Simon van der Stel Burgerraad made the public aware of the birthday festival and encouraged them to take part in costume, that is, in typical Dutch clothing of the Van der Stel era.<sup>34</sup> In order to make the choice of clothing as historically accurate as possible, two experts in the field, Dr Anna de Villiers and Pieter Bredenkamp were consulted.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the Burgerraad made a point of gaining the support, both moral and practical, from the Stellenbosch community, the local administration, and other institutions and organisations that were active in the area. Finally, the Burgerraad took on the responsibility of electing someone in the committee to act out the role of Simon van der Stel during the festival.<sup>36</sup> The term "community", as it is used in this article, refers to the residents of Stellenbosch who at the time were mostly Afrikaans-speaking whites. Of course there were also English-speaking white people and coloured residents who enjoyed the festivals both as participants and spectators, but they took part in a diminished capacity.

In promoting the heritage of the town's founder, the Simon van der Stel Festival Committee decided at a meeting held on 8 June 1966 that with an eye to the upcoming 1979 tercentenary festival, they would promote the idea of erecting a statue of Simon van der Stel in front of the city hall. There were, however, some problems regarding this location, because another

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32. "Stellenbosch se Papegaaiskiet word in Ere Herstel", *Eikestadnuus*, 15 September 1967, p 1.

33. W.P. Lubbe's private collection (hereafter Lubbe Collection), Official Festival Programme, 1976.

34. Lubbe Collection, Konstitusie van die Simon van der Stel-Burgerraad.

35. Lubbe Collection, Letter addressed to Dr Anna de Villiers, 20 March 1967. Also interview conducted with Willem Lubbe, Stellenbosch, 25 October 2010,

36. Lubbe Collection, Konstitusie van die Simon van der Stel-Burgerraad.

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organisation had already proposed the idea of hosting a war memorial for residents of Stellenbosch who had died in active service in various wars over the decades.<sup>37</sup> The idea of a statue in honour of Van der Stel was promoted in the local newspaper, the *Eikestadnuus*, by none other than Miems van Huyssteen. She expressed her passion for her particular version of the heritage of the town, claiming that no other town in South Africa had such an extraordinary figure as Van der Stel as a founder, or one who had exercised such enduring influence.<sup>38</sup>

Despite this heartfelt plea, the initial drive for erecting a statue lost momentum after the first five years. However, the plan eventually came to fruition some four decades later, when a bust of Simon van der Stel was unveiled in Stellenbosch in 2010 by Fred Stevens (chairman of the Simon van der Stel Burgerraad); Alderman Cyril Jooste (executive mayor); and Leo van der Stel (a direct descendant of Simon van der Stel).<sup>39</sup>

The Simon van der Stel Festival Committee had to rely on the cooperation of the municipality and various business chambers and historical organisations to host a successful festival. First, the committee engaged in correspondence with the Historical Monuments' Commission to obtain the necessary permission to hold the festival on the Braak. D.J. Kotzé, a member of the Historical Monuments' Commission and on the staff of the Department of History of the University of Stellenbosch, granted the necessary permission in a letter which also congratulated the committee on reviving Stellenbosch's past. He applauded the initiative to bring "character" to the Braak once again.<sup>40</sup> The municipality agreed to close off the parking areas surrounding the Braak and the roads along which the procession would take place. Various business chambers, including the Afrikaanse Sakekamer van Stellenbosch (Afrikaans Business Chamber of Stellenbosch) and the Chamber of Commerce, accepted the Festival Committee's request to advise their respective members to close their businesses at eleven o'clock on the Saturday morning of the festival so that the entire town was able to enjoy the festivities.<sup>41</sup> The fact that the Festival Organising Committee could rely on the cooperation of the various community institutions and social organisations on an annual basis, thereby building an intimate relationship with them, made the Simon van der Stel Festival so successful. The sheer quantitative success of the festival can be measured in the steady increase of festival attendees over the years. The first festival in 1967 succeeded in attracting approximately 2 000 spectators.<sup>42</sup>

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37. Lubbe Collection, Letter from H. Fransen to the Town Clerk of Stellenbosch, 30 June 1966.

38. M.S. van Huyssteen, "ń Standbeeld vir Simon van der Stel", *Eikestadnuus*, 22 July 1966.

39. Stellenbosch Municipality, 'Van der Stel Borsbeeld Ontvang', Stellenbosch Municipality Newsletter, (10 June 2010).

40. Lubbe Collection, Letter from D.J. Kotze to W.P. Lubbe, 12 June 1967.

41. Lubbe Collection, Letter from G.J. Roux to W.P. Lubbe, 5 September 1967; Letter from W.P. Lubbe to Mr Jackson, Licensing Society, 10 August 1967.

42. "Duisende Was by Van der Stel-Fees", *Die Burger*, 16 October 1967.

## 1967: The inaugural festival and beyond

The historical re-enactment ceremony remained relatively unchanged from 1967 to 1979, with only minor adjustments being introduced as the festival expanded over time. The festivals from 1967 to 1974 were all declared open with a salute of canon fire from Papegaaiberg; this opening was only replaced from 1975 onwards by a carillon performed by all the church bells in the town.<sup>43</sup> Governor Van der Stel's grand ceremonial procession then departed from the Stellenbosch railway station in a horse-drawn carriage, winding its way along the oldest streets in the town, including Dorp (the original old Cape wagon road), Drosdy and Plein Streets on its way to the Braak, where the "governor" and his company would step out of the coaches.<sup>44</sup>

On his arrival at the Braak, the "governor" was greeted by a salvo fired by the sharpshooters. Once he had made his way onto the stage, the *landdros*, *heemraden* and burghers all congratulated him on his birthday. Thereafter, Van der Stel was saluted by a flag parade of horsemen riding in formation and bearing the DEIC flag. Landdros Mulder then gave a short speech, followed by the arrival of Henning Huisling and Adam Tas (prominent farmers of seventeenth-century Stellenbosch) to present the governor with a cask of wine. Thereafter a representative of the French Huguenots would greet and congratulate him, as would the schoolmaster at the time, Sybrand Mankaden, and his pupils. As was custom in Van der Stel's day, he then presented the top three students with prizes and sometimes passed judgement on a burgher who had broken the law. In this way the governor promoted good deeds and discouraged wrongdoing. After the school children had performed some well-known songs, the burghers came forward to present the governor with gifts. He thanked those in attendance, who responded by drinking a toast to Van der Stel's good health. The presentation of the trophy was then made to the "king of the sharpshooters". With a final trip around the Braak the governor departed while the sharpshooters fired off another impressive farewell salvo.<sup>45</sup>

The 1967 Simon van der Stel Festival also hosted one of the largest modern weaponry exhibitions that had yet been seen in the Cape Province. This inclusion of a weapon show was in a certain sense historically appropriate because Simon van der Stel had been keen to include a military display as part of his birthday celebration in 1687. The sheer magnitude of the weaponry exhibition is evident in the fact that a warning was posted in the *Eikestadnuus* advising residents of Stellenbosch in the vicinity of Coetzenburg (the venue where the exhibition was to take place) to open the windows of their houses to prevent them from breaking due to the

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43. Lubbe Collection, Official Simon van der Stel Festival Programme, 18 October 1975.

44. "Stellenbosch Celebrates the Birth of its Founder", *The Cape Times*, 14 October 1967.

45. Lubbe Collection, Official Simon van der Stel Festival Programme, 14 October 1967.

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shockwaves emitted by the explosions.<sup>46</sup> The weaponry exhibition was organised by the Stellenbosch University Regiment in collaboration with the Aircraft Training Centre at Young's Field.<sup>47</sup> These military exhibitions can be construed symbolically as presenting evidence of the military might (and thus by inference the political power) of the dominant Afrikaner class, as it did in the seventeenth century for the dominant Dutch colonial rulers.

In the years between the inaugural festival of 1967 and the tercentenary festival of 1979, various additions were incorporated into the festival so as to enrich its spectacle value. The most prominent and permanent of these was the hosting of a Dutch "kermis" (fair) from 1969 and the famous tug-of-war competition for high schools from 1973 (which was to become the largest of its kind in South Africa except for the national competition). Other festival attractions included dog shows; horsemanship displays; folk dancing exhibitions such as the minuet or the gavotte; drum majorettes; motorcycle or antique car shows; hot-air balloon rides; helicopter flips, and so forth.<sup>48</sup>

Contemporaries may see fit to criticise these various sideshows as having little or nothing to do with the history of Van der Stel or the heritage which the festival was promoting. But it is also true to say that the historical pageant featuring Governor Van der Stel was always emphasised by the festival organisers and was consistently showcased as the highlight of the festival activities.<sup>49</sup> One might then be led to the question of the relevance of the events. Witz maintains that the ultimate success of a festival is its ability to generate "festive excitement" that exhilarates the participants and spectators alike.<sup>50</sup> With this in mind the festival organisers probably sought to attract a larger number of participants by introducing the additional festival activities. They might also have used them to bring variety to the festival because it was an annual occasion. Furthermore, the logic behind the inclusion of school children in the festival activities was that if one could attract the children to the festival, then their parents would more than likely also attend. This tactic proved highly successful.<sup>51</sup>

### 1979: The Tercentenary Simon van der Stel Festival

The Tercentenary Simon van der Stel Festival had long been anticipated by the organisers because they claimed it would mark the climax of the now firmly established annual festival. For the purposes of this occasion, namely to celebrate the birthday of Stellenbosch's founder and to commemorate 300 years of the existence of the town, they decided that the festival would

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46. "Eikestad is Oorgehaal: Só Gaan Fees Gevier word", *Eikestadnuus*, 13 October 1967, p 1.

47. "Stellenbosch Turns back the Clock", *The Cape Times*, 14 October 1967.

48. Lubbe Collection, Official Simon van der Stel Festival Programmes, 1968–1978.

49. Interview conducted with Willem Lubbe, Stellenbosch, 25 October 2010.

50. Witz, *Apartheid's Festival*, p 10.

51. Interview conducted with Willem Lubbe, Stellenbosch, 21 May 2010; Interview conducted with Jauline van der Merwe, Stellenbosch, 4 November 2010.

be based on Van der Stel's final visit to Stellenbosch in 1698.<sup>52</sup> As was fitting of its significance, the festival would stretch over a period of five days, beginning on 10 October with a flag hoisting ceremony at the Cape Town Castle and the "governor's" departure by means of two horse-drawn carriages for Stellenbosch. It would end on Sunday 14 October with a church ceremony in the Moederkerk.<sup>53</sup> According to *Die Matie*, a Stellenbosch University publication dated 7 September 1979, the costumed burghers duly arrived at the Moederkerk on 14 October with their families and Dr Willie Serfontein led the service. The text used for the scripture was Numbers 6: 23–27 – the exact scripture read at the inauguration of the first church in Stellenbosch in 1687.<sup>54</sup>

The journey undertaken by the Van der Stel party from the Cape Town Castle to Stellenbosch after the flag ceremony followed the route which Van der Stel would most likely have taken in 1698. The expedition reached the farm of Oude Libertas (once the farm of Adam Tas) late in the afternoon. They once again stayed the night there and departed early the next morning, arriving at the historic Braak at eleven o'clock in the morning. Here, as was customary, the party was greeted by the mayor of Stellenbosch and a large number of local residents dressed in seventeenth-century costume. On Friday night 12 October, a lavish birthday banquet was held in honour of Governor Van der Stel, attended by 300 guests who were appropriately dressed in period costume, thus symbolising the 300 years since the founding of Stellenbosch.<sup>55</sup>

In 1985 the concept of undertaking a historic expedition following the diary entries of Van der Stel was expanded into an epic journey from the Cape Town Castle to the copper mines in the town of Springbok, commemorating the 300 years since Simon van der Stel undertook the same journey.<sup>56</sup>

The 1979 Simon van der Stel Festival succeeded in attracting approximately 5 000 spectators, including a group of 40 Dutch citizens who made special arrangements to attend the festivities in Stellenbosch as part of their tour of South Africa. The group of tourists were members of the *Stichting tot Herstel van Kulturelebetrekkings Nederland-Zuid-Afrika* (Foundation for the Restoration of Cultural Relations Netherlands/South Africa).<sup>57</sup> This suggests that heritage is an ideal route to follow in order to keep alive an interest in the past and as a way of attracting tourists. The expression of heritage by the community of Stellenbosch by means of the

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52. "Van der Stel-fees Vanjaar Groter as Ooit", *Eikestadnuus*, 17 October 1979, p 1.

53. Lubbe Collection, Official Simon van der Stel Tercentenary Festival Programme, 10–14 October 1979.

54. "Simon van der Stel-fees 300-Jaar", *Die Matie*, 7 September 1979, p 7.

55. Lubbe Collection, Official Simon van der Stel Tercentenary Festival Programme, 10-14 October 1979; Interview conducted with Willem Lubbe, Stellenbosch, 21 May 2010.

56. See W. Visagie and F. Verster, *1685–1985: Op die Spore van Simon van der Stel* (Willie Visagie Trust, Koelenhof, 2005), pp 20–21.

57. "Hollanders Kom vir Fees", *Eikestadnuus*, 5 October 1979.

Simon van der Stel Festival created an atmosphere in the town which was attractive to tourists. Today, Stellenbosch is dependent on tourism for a major part of its annual revenue. Even although the festival is no longer held these days, from 1965 to 2000 it succeeded in making the residents of the town (many of whom had a very one-sided, blinkered consciousness of the town's European colonial roots and heritage), more aware of this heritage. It is also suggested that the festivals served to mask the town's indigenous background and heritage.

The 1979 tercentenary pageant was held on Saturday 13 October at the Rynse complex for the first time. The pageant master, Pieter Bredenkamp, sought to create a pageant which was as historically correct as possible. Because the festival was based on Simon van der Stel's final visit to Stellenbosch in 1698, Bredenkamp was able to work from clearly outlined diarised events which brought a sense of legitimacy to the festival. The 1979 historical pageant could be construed as relatively inclusive with regard to the so-called "non-white"<sup>58</sup> participants. Included in the programme was a Malay-orchestra; tumblers from "Patria"; an Indian couple who performed a dance for the "governor"; and a visit from some "Hottentot captains".<sup>59</sup> Although the festival was organised by white people for white people – which is understandable under the societal norms of the time – the festival acknowledged the presence and influence of people of different ethnicities in the Dutch colonial Cape by including them in the festival – albeit only in token form. With the organisers' emphasis on historical correctness, or visually exhibiting the past in what they deemed an authentic, truthful manner, they did not merely promote their own heritage but succeeded in transporting the spectators almost 300 years back in time.<sup>60</sup>

### Heritage versus politics

There are several reasons for the eventual demise of the Van der Stel Festival, which had taken place annually in Stellenbosch for more than three decades. The main reason was the political transition which occurred in South Africa in 1994 when the ANC was elected into power. The Simon van der Stel Burgerraad reluctantly felt it had had to "hand the festival over" to the local municipality, which was now under ANC rule. This was because for the first time, the municipality had made a considerable financial contribution to the festival, and in doing so claimed the right to amend the management of the festival as the local councillors deemed fit, effectively bringing the festival into the realm of new party politics. The new "owners" made significant changes which can only be described as expressing dissonance with regard to the kind of heritage its progenitors wished to celebrate and portray. The residents of Stellenbosch and the Burgerraad felt that the

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58. This term is problematic in South Africa, however the term "black" in itself is exclusive because there are various racial denominations within the country which are not classified as black.

59. "V.D. Stel in Kleur, Geur", *Die Burger*, 15 October 1979.

60. "V.D. Stel in Kleur, Geur", *Die Burger*, 15 October 1979.

historical pageant had completely lost its meaning and the annual festival was later abandoned.

Governor Simon van der Stel now merely played a passive role, sitting in his chair overseeing the activities. Events that were perceived to be historically correct were replaced by entertainment such as gumboot dancing, which was presented as one of the “cultural” events. A prospective time-traveller’s jaw would certainly have dropped if he or she witnessed gumboot dancing in seventeenth-century colonial-Dutch Stellenbosch. The only facet of the original festival which was retained was the *papegaaiskiet*. Although drastic changes took place in the post-1994 period, the impact was not immediate because the so-called “authentic heritage” and Western European cultural-historical aspects of the festival were only slowly chipped away.<sup>61</sup>

With regard to the type of dissonance expressed in the promulgation and promotion of heritage in Stellenbosch, the way it manifested itself after 1994 was, as Tunbridge and Ashworth put it, by means of “obsolete transmission”.<sup>62</sup> This refers to a situation whereby a message continues to be projected to a changed society which has decisively different policies and goals from those of the society for which they were originally intended.<sup>63</sup> Here the “message” refers to heritage as expressed by the organisers of the original Simon van der Stel Festival. The activities which they saw as authentic and appropriate were deemed obsolete by the new black ruling class, who removed many of the cultural-historical aspects of the festival. As this article has argued, the construction or perpetuation of heritage practices reflect the interests of the ruling class, and if a political transition takes place, one can expect various changes to follow as far as the practise of heritage is concerned.

### **Comparative analysis of Afrikaner nationalist festivals**

The Simon van der Stel Festival will now be compared to the 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival. It is useful to make such a comparison because both these festivals celebrate prominent historical figures who lived in the same geographical space and in relatively close proximity in time. Furthermore, both founded the towns where their contributions were being celebrated. Yet these two festivals were decisively different.

This difference can be derived from aspects of organisation and intention. The Jan van Riebeeck Festival was a state-led initiative while the Simon van der Stel Festival was a locally-based initiative. Also, the Van Riebeeck Festival, held a mere four years after the NP government came to power, was intended to serve as a mass pageant showcasing white domination; it attempted to “display the growing power of the apartheid state

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61. Interview conducted with Willem Lubbe, Stellenbosch, 13 May 2011.

62. J.E. Tunbridge and G.J. Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage* (J. Wiley, New York, 1996), p 29.

63. Tunbridge and Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage*, p 29.

and to assert its confidence".<sup>64</sup> This implies that the Van Riebeeck festival was celebrated with overt nationalist overtones. In contrast, the intention of the Simon van der Stel Festival was arguably a trifle less sinister because by 1967 the apartheid regime was firmly established and there was no need to include condescending symbolism in its pageant with regard to black participants. Indeed there are other heritage festivals that can be compared to the Van der Stel festival, such as the Great Trek Centenary of 1938 that constructed white nationalist traditions and celebrated unity where none had existed before. The so-called "Tweede Trek" (second trek) created the notion of a collective national identity through the political staging of a vicarious spectacle.<sup>65</sup> The aim here is to illuminate colonial-Dutch heritage production by Afrikaner nationalists in the latter half of the twentieth century, with a localised town focus in the Cape region. Thus far this has received little attention from academics.

### **The Jan van Riebeeck Festival of 1952: Consolidating power and rewriting history**

The Jan van Riebeeck Festival was hosted in the city of Cape Town a mere four years after the National Party was elected to power in 1948. This led to the rise of the apartheid ideology and an Afrikaner nationalist ruling elite. As Rassool and Witz point out, the festival fair appropriated the Van Riebeeck icon to create a dichotomy in South Africa between "civilisation" and economic progress versus "primitiveness" and social backwardness. It used a street pageant to provide the ruling white elite with a history and legitimacy.<sup>66</sup> The view which holds Van Riebeeck as the founding father of the South African nation was relatively new at that time, because by the 1940s South Africa still had a weak national history. The reasoning behind this is that up until the 1940s, Jan van Riebeeck and 6 April 1652 had very little place in public history. In fact, it was only in the post-World War Two era that Van Riebeeck acquired the undisputed symbolism of white settler power.<sup>67</sup>

The Central Executive Committee set up to organise the event decided that the Van Riebeeck Festival should be a symbol for creating and fostering national unity; 300 years of Western civilisation had to be exhibited in historical displays that included a pageant highlighting selected events of South Africa's history, such as a reconstruction of the landing of the *Dromedaris* (Van Riebeeck's ship); the convergence of mail coaches from various corners of the country in Cape Town; and a colossal festival fair showcasing 300 hundred years of agriculture, industry and mining.<sup>68</sup> It is through this massive, state-organised pageant and fair that the newly instated Afrikaner nationalist government sought to legitimise its rule. In a

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64. Rassool and Witz, "The 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival", p 448.  
65. A. McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (Routledge, London and New York, 1995), p 373.  
66. Rassool and Witz, "The 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival", p 455.  
67. Rassool and Witz, "The 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival", pp 450–451.  
68. Rassool and Witz, "The 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival", p 452.

very real sense, it was attempting to rewrite history in order to sustain its control of the future. There was a definite need for the National Party to defend its “whiteness” and presence in South Africa because its apartheid policies, some of which had already been implemented, were causing the African population to mobilise and protest.

Significantly, when the Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival offered the white ruling minority an opportunity to construct a dominant ideological discourse, the black majority stirred and black resistance movements took the opportunity to launch their political campaigns. Within the first two weeks of April 1952, mass meetings were held in close proximity of the state-run festival. Newspapers and pamphlets were circulated which put forth alternative histories of South Africa; they expressed opposition to the festival and everything it stood for, calling for a boycott of what they named the “Festival of Hate”.<sup>69</sup>

The African National Congress (ANC) chose 6 April 1952 as the day it launched its Defiance Campaign against the minority government. In addition to boycotting the festival, the ANC declared that it would only allow its members to take part in the celebrations if the government removed six of the most hated pieces of apartheid legislation from the Statute Book. It alleged that these had brought “insult and humiliation” to the oppressed majority.<sup>70</sup> An opposition commentator on the festival, Cissie Gool, claimed that the festival was mere “gilded hypocrisy that distorted history and that one float was missing from the pageantry, namely the ‘float of truth’”.<sup>71</sup> The Jan van Riebeeck Festival was widely criticised for its content and was accused of propagating white hegemony by showcasing an extravagant and lavish display of power.

The contrasting natures of the Van Riebeeck and Van der Stel festivals, both of which were celebrating their respective founders, can be ascribed to the wider socio-political circumstances in which they occurred. The Jan van Riebeeck Festival was set in a time of recent political change, with the National Party victory at the polls in 1948. The apartheid policies were still newly implemented and the state had a desperate need to legitimise its rule. All spheres of life were being altered drastically to the benefit of white people and the detriment of black people. With any paradigm shift comes a need to redefine the notions of self, thereby reconstructing heritage and the view of the past to fit the present circumstances. In contrast, the Simon van der Stel Festival was inaugurated at a time when apartheid had been in existence for approximately one generation. The white minority had long since consolidated its hegemony and there was no immediate need to alter the public’s perceptions of the past. The 1960s were the “golden years” for the (nouveau rich) middle-class whites under apartheid and Afrikaner nationalist rule. An affluent white

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69. Rassool and Witz, “The 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival”, p 460; and Witz, *Apartheid’s Festival*, p 5.

70. Rassool and Witz, “The 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival”, p 460.

71. Witz, *Apartheid’s Festival*, p 168.

community could take it upon themselves to organise an annual heritage-rich event through charitable acts performed by members of the community.

The Van der Stel Festival also had a decisively diminished political character because the constitution of the Simon van der Stel Burgerraad in the 1960s had underlined the fact that it would promote the cultural-historical aspects of both Stellenbosch and its founder without any direct or indirect association with any political or quasi-political institution.<sup>72</sup> However, one has to bear in mind that any heritage pageant will of necessity have political connotations. In contrast the Van Riebeeck Festival was organised on behalf of the apartheid government to promote and assert its political hegemony. Being political in character, the Van Riebeeck Festival aroused political opposition from the ANC and other organisations such as the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM),<sup>73</sup> whereas the Simon van der Stel festivals did not elicit any immediate or overt resistance.<sup>74</sup> It is also true that when the Stellenbosch festivals were revived in 1967 the ANC and other resistance movements had been banned seven years earlier (in 1960) by the apartheid government. Because it was being run by the state, the Van Riebeeck Festival in Cape Town festival also had a massive budget, whereas the Stellenbosch festival was reliant upon charitable contributions from the local community and other interested participants. The cost of the festival was mainly covered by profit made from the Van der Stel birthday banquet and the fees charged for stalls at the Dutch *kermis* or fair.<sup>75</sup> Therefore although these two festivals both celebrated colonial-Dutch office bearers who were involved in the early history of the Cape and lived in the same geographical space in relatively close proximity in time, their intentions, scope, nature, the historical processes that were at work were markedly different. They were, however, similar in the sense that both festivals were organised by the dominant ruling class of the time.

## Conclusion

From 1967 until 2000 the Simon van der Stel Festival was held in Stellenbosch to celebrate the town's founder, although the festival gradually lost its historical "authenticity" after the political transition at national and municipal level in 1994. This annual festival celebrated the colonial-Dutch roots of the town with a sense of innate nostalgia. Paradoxically, the festival held in Van der Stel's honour some 300 years after his contributions to early Cape life, was perpetuated by the hegemonic white Afrikaner middle class, whose hegemony was reinforced by the apartheid government's policies of hierarchical racial separation. The irony lies in the fact that Simon van der Stel would have been classified as a coloured person under the apartheid government's racial classification act. However, one can argue that Van der Stel had an enduring influence in Stellenbosch and that 300 years later it

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72. Lubbe Collection, Konstitusie van die Simon van der Stel-Burgerraad.

73. Witz, *Apartheid's Festival*, p 5.

74. Interview conducted with Jauline van der Merwe, Stellenbosch, 4 November 2010.

75. Interview conducted with Willem Lubbe, Stellenbosch, 25 October 2010.

was deemed worthy to construct a heritage-rich festival in his honour, for a very particular set of socio-economic reasons.

The main reason why this festival ceased to exist lies in the political transition which took place in South Africa in 1994 when the ANC-led government came to power. The Simon van der Stel Burgerraad handed the festival over to the new local government authorities, who made changes to the festival which expressed dissonance with regard to heritage. This article has shown that with any major political shift comes the need to redefine notions of self and a reconstruction of heritage; any view of the past changes to fit the contemporary circumstances. Heritage, or at least its construction, is exclusive in that it reflects the interests of the ruling class and marginalises subordinate political groupings, placing them in the periphery. The type of dissonance expressed in the festival post-1994 is best described by Tunbridge and Ashworth as an “obsolete transmission” which occurs when the message (or heritage) expressed may continue to be projected to a changed society which has decisively different policies and goals from those of the society for which they were originally intended.<sup>76</sup> The chosen heritage that was originally portrayed by the Van der Stel Festival was considered obsolete by the new ruling class which inadvertently led to distinctive changes in character of the historical “message” being portrayed. The Van der Stel Burgerraad felt that this was the beginning of the end for the festival which they had created.

Finally, this article compared the Simon van der Stel Festival to the Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival of 1952 which celebrated 300 years of white settler rule at the southern tip of Africa. It was argued that while the Jan van Riebeeck Festival was carefully planned by the apartheid state to serve as a mass pageant showcasing white domination in a bid to assert political hegemony, the Simon van der Stel Festival was a community-based endeavour which was founded and conducted merely as a celebratory re-enactment of diarised events. Its aim was to bring homage to a governor whose legacy is still very evident in Stellenbosch today. However, this goal should not be romanticised. The reality is that in presenting the Van der Stel festivals there was a strongly aspirational element evinced by an emerging Afrikaner middle class who were aping the cultural festivals of Europe. Equally, there was an economic motive: the festivals were used to promote the heritage of Stellenbosch as a tourist attraction.

However, unlike the Van Riebeeck commemorative event, the Van der Stel festivals were decidedly less politicised; the constitution of the Simon van der Stel Burgerraad underlined the fact that the festival was intended to commemorate the cultural-historical aspects of Stellenbosch and its founder without any direct or indirect association with any political or quasi-political institution.<sup>77</sup> The Simon van der Stel Festival was an authentic heritage-rich festival enjoyed to varying degrees by the various

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76. Tunbridge and Ashworth, *Dissonant Heritage*, p 29.

77. Lubbe Collection, Konstitusie van die Simon van der Stel-Burgerraad.

sectors of the Stellenbosch community, although admittedly they held different stakes as residents of the town. The demise of the festival can be ascribed to the inevitable changes in the aftermath of a political transition. The changed nature of the festival evinced dissonance among some residents of the town who had enjoyed the earlier festivals; they were reluctant to adapt to the new version of celebrating the historical-cultural heritage of Stellenbosch.

### **Abstract**

The Simon van der Stel Festival was celebrated as an annual event in Stellenbosch from 1967 to 2000, celebrating the town's colonial-Dutch heritage in the form of a birthday celebration dedicated to its founder. In particular the focus of this article falls on the reasons why such a festival was initiated and why Stellenbosch lent itself perfectly to the hosting of the event. Furthermore, its progress is tracked until its climax in 1979, which was the tercentenary festival that celebrated 300 years since the founding of Stellenbosch. Heritage construction, pageantry and "the cult of the centenary" are used to explain why this festival was launched; the significance of hosting such a festival in Stellenbosch; how it changed over time; who was actively involved in its organisation; what the implications were of hosting such a festival; and why the festival eventually came to an end. Moreover, the Simon van der Stel Festival will be compared to a similar festival – the Jan van Riebeeck Festival of 1952 – which celebrated the founding of Cape Town in a similar fashion, but with more overt nationalist overtones.

**Keywords:** Afrikaners; Simon van der Stel; heritage; pageantry; Dutch colonial Cape; Stellenbosch; cult of the centenary; Jan van Riebeeck; festivals; apartheid.

### **Opsomming**

Die Simon van der Stel Fees was geïmplementeer as 'n jaarlikse geleentheid in Stellenbosch vanaf 1967 tot 2000, as 'n viering van die dorps se Nederlandse koloniale erfenis in die vorm van 'n verjaarsdag-viering van sy stigter. Die fokus van hierdie artikel val op die redes waarom so 'n fees geïnisieer was asook waarom Stellenbosch uitgeknipt was tot die aanbidding van so 'n fees. Verder word die vordering van die fees nagespoor tot en met die hoogtepunt in 1979, wat 300 jaar sedert die stigting van Stellenbosch gevier het. Erfenis konstruksie, "pageantry" en die "kultus van die eeufees" word gebruik om te verduidelik waarom so 'n fees gestig was; die betekenis van so 'n fees op Stellenbosch; hoe dit verander het met tyd; wie was verantwoordelik vir die organisasie van die fees; wat die implikasies was om so 'n fees te behartig; asook waarom die fees tot 'n einde gekom het. Laastens word die Simon van der Stel Fees vergelyk met 'n soortgelyke fees, naamlik die Jan van Riebeeck Fees van 1952, wat die stigting van Kaapstad gevier het, alhoewel met meer openlike nasionalistiese ondertone.

## The Simon van der Stel Festival

**Sleutelwoorde:** Afrikaners; Simon van der Stel; erfenis; “pageantry”; Nederlandse koloniale Kaap; Stellenbosch; kultus van die eeufees; Jan van Riebeeck; feeste; apartheid.