

SUMMARY

Sytze Wopkes Wierda, a native of the Dutch province of Friesland, was born in Hemrik on February 28, 1839. In the year of his birth, he was baptised in the historic Hervormde church at Hemrik, the same church in which his parents, at middle age, publicly professed to the articles of their faith.

Sytze Wierda came from a Frisian working-class background. In 1862 he started work as a carpenter in Drachten. From this humble beginning, Wierda progressed to Clerk of Works Extraordinary ("Buitengewoon Opzichter") in 1866 and within one decade to Chief Clerk of Works ("Hoofdopzichter") when the Netherlands government railways were built. From 1887 to 1900 he served with distinction as Chief of the Department of Public Works of the South African Republic and also gained recognition as architect and author in the land of his birth.

Sytze Wierda was the fifth child of Wopke Sjerps Wierda (1800 - 1859) of Hemrik, a casual labourer and part-time butcher during the winter months. His mother was Pietertje Roelofs de Vries (1806 - 1879). The father's side of the family was of old Frisian origin. After a primary school education in the district of Opsterland, his training as a carpenter started. This was partly completed in Appelscha in about 1858. In November 1860, he left Wijnjeterp for the city of Groningen where he worked as a carpenter's apprentice until March 1861. It is presumed that he also studied carpentry and architecture at the Groningen "Volksindustrieschool". From there he moved to the village of Winsum, in the same province, where he worked as a carpenter's assistant before returning to his parental home at Wijnjeterp.

As a qualified carpenter, he established himself in Drachten in 1862 and married Harmke Tjibbeles Kamp (1839, Drachten - 1926, Johannesburg). In about 1862, the year of

his marriage, he became a member of the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk, of which his wife and her family were ardent members.

In Drachten, he worked as a carpenter and studied architecture under town architect Duursma at the local drawing school until he moved to Enschedé in the province of Overijssel in 1865 to be employed as a carpenter and draughtsman by one of the railway contractors. While working at Hengelo station, Section Engineer Janssen noticed that Wierda, while engaged in constructional drawing, had revealed a marked degree of judgment, knowledge of construction and general competence. He was recommended for appointment by the government as Clerk of Works Extraordinary to the railway project at Enschedé. He remained in this position from January 1866 to May 1867, on the Hengelo - Glanerbeek section and was then transferred to Alkmaar in the province of North Holland.

In 1867, he was promoted to Clerk of Works Second Class ("Opzichter 2e Klasse") and up to 1870 played a part in the construction of railway works and buildings in the Zaan region and the bridging of the North Sea Canal.

In 1870, the Wierda family moved to Amsterdam, and from that year to 1875 Wierda acted as Clerk of Works First Class ("Opzichter 1e Klasse"). From 1875 to 1887 as Chief Clerk of Works he was occupied with the completion of the railway line from Zaandam to Amsterdam including the works and buildings in the Netherlands capital. This was in addition to the Central Station in the "Openhavenfront" and the Central Goods Station in the "Stads Rietlander

While employed in Amsterdam he found time to write a book entitled „Belgische Industrie", and to keep up family correspondence, to serve as a member of a local School-Committee, as well as to assist in the architectural training of Klaas and Pieter van Rijske of Zaandam.

Apart from his 22 years' supervisory work on the Government Railways, he found time during the 1860's for his first

love, architecture and employed his talents in this direction. As a licensed architect he participated in architectural competitions and in the course of time also designed private houses, teachers' dwellings and school buildings. With experience and confidence, Wierda found himself competing with leading architects for the designing of foreign and local public buildings including such notable structures as exchange buildings in Frankfurt am Main and Amsterdam around the year 1880.

He designed churches from 1873 to 1886 for the Christelijk Gereformeerde parishes of Zaandam, Baarn, Hijum, Nieuwendijk, Emlichheim (Germany) and 's-Hertogenbosch. All of these churches are still in existence today.

After his interest, as Hollander, in the restoration of the independence of the "Boerevolk", had been stimulated in 1881 and while he was seeking pastures new for his talents and experience as railways constructor and architect, he secured the support of Hendrik Bührmann in his application as Government Engineer and Architect ("Gouvernements Ingenieur en Architect") of the South African Republic. On November 1, 1887 he assumed office.

From 1887, the year in which he became a member of the Royal Institute of Engineers ("Koninklijk Instituut van Ingenieurs"), to 1900, Wierda not only acted as head of a fast developing state department, but he was personally involved in the design of several government buildings including the now famous Government Buildings ("Staatsgebouw" or "Raadsaal") on Church Square, Pretoria. Besides this, he also designed other state buildings in various Transvaal towns. His reputation as architect of public buildings in the South African Republic was firmly established within a few years after his arrival in Pretoria.

Architects and draughtsmen of Dutch origin - including Klaas van Rijsse Jnr. - played an active part in the 1890's under the inspired and expert guidance of Sytze Wierda, as

the specific architecture of the South African Republic took form. Extending his activities as architect of public buildings, Wierda took a lead in the planning of transport facilities, including a network of roads, the designing and building of bridges and the designing of the unique Paardekraal Monument at Krugersdorp, an achievement of enduring significance. This represented Wierda's contribution to South Africa's cultural and historical heritage.

The fact that the most valuable of Wierda's works stand today as proclaimed historical monuments is a tribute to the ability of the Dutch-born "Gouvernements Ingenieur en Architect" and "Hoofd van Publieke Werken" of the South African Republic.