



23 November 2018

HISTORICAL SKETCH

1. Marthinus Theunis Steyn (1875-1916):

- Born at Rietfontein in Winburg in the Free State on 2 October 1857 as one of 11 children.
- Went to school on a farm in the area where he was born, and then proceeded to Grey College in Bloemfontein.
- Studied Law in Great Britain, and although his home language was English, championed the cause of the (Afrikaans-speaking) Boers.
- Started his law practice in Bloemfontein in 1883 and became well-known in the Free State, thanks to his duties as jurist in the circuit courts.
- Elected as State President of the Free State in 1896, following the sudden resignation of FW Reitz due to poor health.
- Known for the fact that he tried until the very end to avoid what was to become known as the Anglo-Boer War. Despite Steyn's best efforts to broker peace, war broke out in 1899 between the Boer republics and Great Britain. Steyn knew from the outset that the republics were doomed but decided to continue with the war against the colonial ambitions of the British Empire for the sake of honour and loyalty.
- Played a conciliatory role between opposing Afrikaner factions in the period after the war.
- Was the initiator of the National Women's Memorial – a monument to honour the thousands of women and children who died in the fields and concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer War.
- Co-founder of the South African Party in 1910.
- Died in 1916 after collapsing at a women's meeting which he was addressing. He was laid to rest at the National Women's Memorial.

APPENDIX B

2. Statue of MT Steyn on the UFS Bloemfontein Campus:

- Erected with funds collected by the Afrikaanse Studentebond.
- Built to honour the fact that MT Steyn had “worked so diligently for an indigenous Free State university during the republican years before the Anglo-Boer War and had been the ‘soul’ of the war”, and because of what he meant for the Afrikaner.
- 12 years planning and fund-raising phase before it was built.
- Motivated by the desire of the Afrikaanse Studentebond to inspire young Afrikaners to take up leadership in South Africa, and to become culturally relevant by means of Afrikaans.
- Unveiled on 28 September 1929 in front of a thousand attendees.
- Constructed by acclaimed Dutch-born sculptor, Anton van Wouw, who is widely regarded as the ‘father of South African sculpture’. Most of the important public sculptures in South Africa between 1895 and 1930 were created by Van Wouw. His other works include the statue of Paul Kruger on Church Square in Pretoria, the statue of Louis Botha in Durban, and the figure of a woman at the National Women’s Memorial near Bloemfontein.
- Described by art authorities as “a good likeness of MT Steyn” and as “Van Wouw’s finest large-scale sculpture of this nature.”
- Typical of 19th century sculpture that celebrates power and purpose. Steyn is presented as a person of reflection (he was a jurist), and also as a person that commands respect. The statue is therefore large (twice life-size) and placed on an almost equally impressive base. This verticality creates a commanding presence against the backdrop of the primary facade of the Main Building.

SOURCE:

Heritage Impact Assessment: President MT Steyn Statue

Compiled by Roodt Architects; Assisted by Ntando Mbatha and Seotseng Tlhoale