

Sir Walter Stanford **1850-1933**



Synopsis

Walter Ernest Mortimer Stanford was born in Alice, South Africa, in 1850 and educated at the Lovedale mission school. Walter left school and became a clerk under his uncle, the government agent to Tembu. Responsibility came early: in his uncle's absence he became in effect the agent, Her Majesty's representative to a semi-independent African tribe. At 18 he joined the civil service and was stationed at Queenstown, East London and in 1876 was appointed magistrate to the Qwathi chief, Dalasile, and settled at Engcobo, in Tembuland. He married Alice Sarah Walker in 1883 and they had three sons and four daughters. In 1885 he was promoted to chief magistrate of East Griqualand at Kokstad. Stanford was involved in negotiations with the Mpondo and in 1886 reached an agreement which provided for peaceful future relations. He was appointed C.M.G. in 1891 and became responsible for the administration of eastern Pondoland. In 1897 Stanford became under-secretary for native affairs in Cape Town, and subsequently the first chief magistrate of the newly formed Transkeian Territories. In 1904 he was appointed to the headship of the Native Affairs department, as well as chief magistrate. Special duties included roles as an adviser at the inter-state customs conference 1903, membership of the native affairs commission, 1903-1905, and acting as adviser to Lord Selborne on Swazi affairs in 1906. He entered the Cape Legislative Assembly in 1908 as an independent member for Tembuland and was selected to represent the

views of the African people at the National Convention of 1909, which led to the Union of South Africa. At this historic event he argued strongly for universal franchise, regardless of race and gender but his proposal was not accepted. From 1910 to 1929, Stanford served in the Senate, nominated for his knowledge of the African peoples. He was a colonel with the South African forces in the First World War. In 1919 he was appointed a Knight (K.B.E) and died age 83 in 1933. [ref J.W. Macquarrie, *The reminiscences of Sir Walter Stanford*, Vol I & II (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1958, 1962).]

Early Years

Walter Stanford was descended from the British 1820 Settlers in the Cape Colony on both his father's (William Stanford) and his mother's (Joanna Warner) sides. Walter Ernest Mortimer was their second son, born at Alice on 2 August 1850. His father died in 1856 at the early age of 36 following amputation of a leg after a riding accident. His mother 'was a small woman of indomitable courage who continued trading, farming and transport-riding, while still finding time to encourage her sons to read and write'.

Walter was in "poor health" so was sent at the age of 7 to live with his uncle Joseph Cox Warner in the Queenstown district where the altitude might improve his strength, a strategy which seems to have been effective, judging by his long and strenuous career. He received some schooling from a maiden aunt, Mary Warner, and for two years attended the Lovedale Missionary Institution, finishing his formal education just before he turned twelve.

On 1 July 1863, just before his 13th birthday, Walter became a clerk under his uncle, the government agent to the Tembu at Glen Grey. He thus entered the service of the department of African affairs in which he was to remain for 45 years and through which "he was destined to exercise a profound influence on the development of South Africa". Responsibility came early: in his uncle's absence he became in effect the agent, Her Majesty's representative to a semi-independent African tribe. He continued in Tembuland for six years, before moving to Queenstown and then East London as a servant of the department. [ref J.W. Macquarrie, *The*

reminiscences of Sir Walter Stanford, Vol I p xiii-xiv, Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1958.]

Magistracy

Walter advanced steadily and in 1876 was appointed magistrate to Tembuland. He was commissioned and fought in the Ninth Frontier War (1877-8) with “gallantry, energy and judgement”. This was followed by further skirmishes and tribal unrest, before Walter returned to magisterial duties in 1881. His first task was to relocate the defeated tribes. The Report of the Tembuland Commission testifies to “the fairness of the magistrates and the tenacity with which they attempted to ensure their native charges were justly treated.” He was also appointed to the Native Laws and Customs Commission, which was responsible for drafting a criminal code which recognised both African custom and European principles of justice.



Fig: photo of The Native Laws and Customs Commission 1882. WS is seated far left

In 1883 Walter married Alice Walker of Port Elizabeth, a long and happy marriage, with seven children: Walter, Dorothy, Robert, Alice, Arthur, Helen and Eileen.

Two years later he was appointed chief magistrate and administrative head of East Griqualand, headquartered in Kokstad. This was a tricky appointment as there were constant border skirmishes, raids and friction with the neighbouring Mpondo tribe until Stanford negotiated a treaty,

signed in 1886, despite unhelpful instructions from the Government and Prime Minister in Cape Town, which Stanford was able largely to ignore because of the distance by horse! In due course he was appointed C.M.G (Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George) for this achievement.

In 1894 the paramount chief of the Pondo died, leaving a leadership vacuum which led to a decision by Cecil Rhodes to annex Pondoland. That this contentious act was achieved without bloodshed was largely due to the diplomacy of Stanford and other magistrates. Rhodes was not pleased by the magistrates' commitment to just and fair treatment of the natives, leading to some acrimony (for which Rhodes apologised to Stanford much later). [ref J.W. Macquarrie, *The reminiscences of Sir Walter Stanford*, Vol I p xv-xviii, Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1958.]

Cape Town

Stanford's skills were recognised, however, and in 1896 the Prime Minister, Sir Gordon Sprigg, appointed him under-secretary for native affairs, in Cape Town. Stanford accompanied the next Prime Minister, W.P. Schreiner on a tour of the Eastern Province in 1899, explaining the African culture so coherently that Schreiner described the tour as "his road to Damascus" so profound a change did it make to his views on African policy. [ref J.W. Macquarrie, *The reminiscences of Sir Walter Stanford*, Vol I p xxi-xxiv, Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1958.]

During the South African (Anglo-Boer) war Stanford was the liaison between the Cape authorities and the Transkeian Territories and soon was placed in charge of a field force there. Following the war the Territories were consolidated under one magistrate, to which post Stanford was appointed in 1902. Remarkably the two assistant magistrates were his brothers: Robert at Kokstad and Arthur at Umtata. Walter was always sympathetic to the Transkeians. Known by them as 'Ndabeni' ('in the news'), he was deeply respected. His popularity was such that when Cape Town's first African township was set up in 1901, on Crown land near Maitland, following recommendations by a commission chaired by Stanford,

it was named Ndabeni in his honour at the residents' request. [*Cape Argus Weekly*, 29 March 1905]

From 1903 to 1905 Walter Stanford was a member of the Native Affairs Commission which recommended, inter alia “that a central Native College be established for training native teachers and to afford opportunity for higher education to native students”, although these high principles came to nothing. Walter also advocated the Commission's recommendations that Africans should have representation in Parliament. In 1904 he was recalled to Cape Town to head the Native Affairs Department but by 1907 his heart was under strain and he retired on medical advice. However by 1908 he was so recovered that he stood for Parliament and was returned for Tembuland, as an Independent. [ref J.W. Macquarrie, *The reminiscences of Sir Walter Stanford*, Vol I p xxi-xxiv, Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1958.]

National Convention

An election in 1908 brought in John X. Merriman as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, opening the way to convening representatives of the four hitherto rival South African colonies (Cape, Natal, Transvaal and Orange Free State). A National Convention was set up to advise on the nature and constitution of the Union, and Stanford was appointed as one of the 30 members, reflecting the liberal view as well as the interests of the Transkei and other African communities. He put the interest of the great majority of the population before the need for unifying the two colonies and two former republics, all of them legislated for and governed solely by white men. [Randolph Vigne : A voice of the future in the National Convention, *Quart Bull NLSA* 64; 2010 p 117].

Colonel Stanford argued strongly for enfranchisement of the Native Peoples and asserted “there must be a just native policy”. He formally proposed “*that all subjects of His Majesty resident in South Africa shall be entitled to franchise rights irrespective of race or colour...*” He argued that the franchise was the crux of the whole native question in South Africa. [The inner history of the national convention of South Africa, Edgar Harris Walton;1912, p118-145, Maskew Miller, Cape Town].’

Despite his reputation and his understanding of African life he was unable to persuade the Convention to adopt a universal franchise. The Convention did however agree to preserve the existing non-racial Cape Colony franchise and to entrench it in the South Africa Act, passed by Parliament in London in May 1910, which created the Union of South Africa.

Later Years

Following the Union Stanford was nominated to the Senate on the basis of his experience with the African people, and continued to champion their cause until the outbreak of the First World War when he took up recruiting work for the army, serving with the Cape Corps, of which he later became Hon Colonel. In November 1914 he was sent to East Griqualand where there were fears of an armed uprising. Stanford identified genuine grievances (related to sheep dipping regulations) made recommendations and negotiated a peaceful settlement. He returned to Cape Town and in 1918 became director of recruiting. At the end of the war he was appointed commissioner for returned soldiers. His lifelong services were recognized in 1919 with his appointment as Knight of the British Empire (KBE).

After the war Stanford remained busy. He helped found the 1820 Memorial Settlers Association and served as a steward of the South African Turf Club for 20 years. He gave his time and energy to the Western Province Agricultural Society, the Church, and the Community Chest of Cape Town. In 1927 he was awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws by the University of Cape Town, an honour he greatly valued. Senate work continued until he retired in 1929. . [ref J.W. Macquarrie, *The reminiscences of Sir Walter Stanford*, Vol I p xxvi - xxvii, Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1958.]

In 1933 Walter and Alice celebrated their golden wedding, surrounded by their children and grandchildren. Soon afterwards Walter was taken ill and died on 9 September [Obituary, Cape Argus 27 September 1933]

Following his death Jan Smuts (Prime Minister 1919-1924, 1939-48)) wrote to Alice: "I counted Sir Walter Stanford among those of my friends on whom I could rely for wise counsel and support and it is a deep sorrow that

he has passed away. He has had an exceptional record of service to his country, and leaves behind a record of which we are all very proud”. [ref J.W. Macquarrie, *The reminiscences of Sir Walter Stanford*, Vol I p xxviii, Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1958.]

Conclusions

Sir Walter Stanford spent much of his professional life as a magistrate and administrator for the Transkeian Territories, in the north-east Eastern Province of today, then occupied as a ‘native reserve’. He was a public servant who developed great bonds with the African people. He was a pioneer for the rights of the Africans, and in particular strongly advocated their enfranchisement in the newly forming Union of South Africa in 1909.

Fig: Walter Stanford age 80 painted by his grand-daughter Allison

