

Mrs. Reino Pott-Leendertz (1869-1965)  
and the  
Transvaal Museum Herbarium

by

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Reino Leendertz, the founder of the Transvaal Museum Herbarium, was born in Medemblik, Holland, on the 2nd January, 1869. She qualified as a pharmacist in 1891 but then turned her attention to Botany. At Amsterdam she studied under Professor Hugo de Vries and afterwards became one of his assistants. In July, 1898, she arrived in Pretoria and was appointed Botanist to the State Museum on the 1st September, 1898. In her letter of appointment the Director, Dr. J. W. B. Gunning, mentioned that, although it was contrary to the policy of the Committee to appoint women on the scientific staff, her exceptional qualifications decided them to waive this objection. Thus she became the first official botanist of the Transvaal as well as its first woman civil servant. A large collection of plants had been purchased from Rudolf Schlechter and these formed the nucleus of the Transvaal Museum Herbarium.

The State Museum was then housed in a building on the Market Square in Pretoria, the part that is presently used as the covered market. This building, which was rented for £10 per month, was officially opened by President Paul Kruger in May, 1894. It soon proved to be too small and plans were made to put up a new building in Boom Street, where the Zoological Garden was being constructed. A photograph of the stone-laying ceremony for this new building, on the 22nd July, 1899, shows Miss Leendertz as the only woman among the museum officials.

War broke out and Pretoria came under the English in 1901. The British commander asked her to stay, but Miss Leendertz decided to return to Holland. At a girls' high school in Amsterdam she taught Natural History for a year but she did not like teaching (in after years she confided to a niece that she had difficulty in keeping order). So she re-applied for her former post at the museum, now called the Pretoria Museum, and was accepted immediately, since the Director had a high opinion of her capabilities. She returned to Pretoria in 1904.

She threw herself with heart and soul into the work and started a special Transvaal herbarium. She collected extensively in the Transvaal, her numbers eventually reaching nearly 6,000. Her first excursions were done by bicycle. In the beginning a Mr. B. H. Rademacher and his sister accompanied her; later Mr. A. T. J. Janse (now Professor Janse), who was on the staff of the Normal College, became her enthusiastic companion during week-end excursions. At one stage they decided to make an exhibit of the Transvaal timber trees. The trees were photographed; wood, bark, flowering branches and fruits were all loaded onto the bicycles and taken home. Mr. Haak Snr. who was the owner of the bicycle shop (which afterwards became Haak's Garage), once happened to see such a fully loaded bicycle and remarked that they were not meant to be used as wagons.

Quite often she used her holidays to go on collecting expeditions further afield. Gatherings from Ermelo (with a beautiful kloof, Mavriestad, nearby), Zeerust, Bethal, Potchefstroom, Standerton, Vereeniging, Moorddrift (near Potgietersrus), Heidelberg and some spots nearer Pretoria (Daspoort, Kameeldrift, Roodeplaat, Irene) are localities regularly met with in the herbarium.

The collection now expanded by leaps and bounds as can be seen from the following extract from the Annual Report of the Transvaal Museum, 1905-1906: "I collected in the neighbourhood of Pretoria 84 species of plants in many duplicates, nine species of wood, many fruits and seeds to complete the collections. On a botanical excursion to the Zoutpansberg District, where I stayed at Marabastad, Waterval, Rietfontein and Eersteling—only a fortnight—I collected 105 species of plants in many duplicates. Most of them were new to the collection "Transvaal Plants". On a five days' excursion to Crocodile River and Skeerpoort, I collected 68 species of plants of which 50 species were new for the Transvaal collection: and on one to Rooiplaat (Roodeplaat), Derdepoort, also of five days, 62 species of plants of which 40 species were new to the collection".

In about 1906 the Reverend F. A. Rogers of the South African Church Railway Mission is also mentioned by her as an assiduous collector, who regularly sent her large parcels of plants from different localities. The plants were just put between sheets of paper by him and Miss Leendertz did the rest, the pressing, naming, etc. She also made duplicate sets for the collector. Other collections, which were purchased by the Museum, were a collection of Ferns and Fern Allies from Mr. T. R. Sim. Miss Leendertz pointed out that it was a standard collection, Mr. Sim having based his book "The Ferns of South Africa" on it. Further additions were collections purchased from Mr. G. N. Thorncroft, of Barberton, and the missionary, Henri Junod of Shilouvane (near Tzaneen).

No wonder that soon the universal complaint was heard; the boxes housing the collections "were filled to the top" and that she had no assistant to help her with the pressing, mounting and labelling. The neat sheets with her copy-book handwriting are a joy to behold. She was an extremely good taxonomist and hardly ever made mistakes in her identifications although the literature at her disposal in those days was limited.

In her next report she informs us that a junior assistant was appointed in September, 1907, and that new boxes had arrived. Incorporated in the herbarium that year were 2,436 species of plants and she remarked that "many families are now fairly well represented and form useful material for study and reference". She then again refers to the Ferns and Fern Allies collection which through additions from Junod, Burt Davy and others had become one of the best in South Africa. She also thanks Dr. Harry Bolus for his co-operation. In conclusion she mentions that the "Preliminary List of Transvaal Vascular Plants which Mr. J. Burt Davy and myself have prepared", had been read as a paper at the Grahamstown Meeting of the South African Association for Advancement of Science.

She also spent a good deal of time on the preparation of a botanical exhibition, filling 8 show cases with examples of flowering timber trees of the Transvaal with their Latin and vernacular names, and 16 other cases "illustrating the biology of plants, e.g. insectivorous plants, parasites, poisonous plants, etc., all provided with descriptive labels in both languages".

In April, 1908, the Director, in a report presented in the first issue of the "Annals of the Transvaal Museum" informed us that the Herbarium contained 4,000 specimens. In 1915 the number of sheets catalogued had risen to 14,400 and when she left to go on pension on the 2nd January, 1925, the last number entered by her was 23,255.

Before that, in 1912, the Natural History and Geological collections of the Transvaal Museum had been moved to a new building in Paul Kruger Street.

Staff members of the Museum, when on field trips, added many plants to the herbarium. We frequently meet the names Dr. H. G. Breyer (at one time a Director of the Museum) and his son, when the latter was stationed at Fort Namutoni in South

West Africa; C. Wilde, T. J. Jenkins, C. J. Swierstra, V. Fitzsimons, G. van Dam, J. Hewitt, M. Collins, Austin Roberts, were industrious collectors. The Maputaland Expedition, which visited Mozambique in 1914, also yielded a number of plants.

Names of well known South African collectors are also represented in the herbarium, such as Wilms (apparently his early gatherings were not numbered), F. A. Rogers, G. Thorncroft, H. Junod, W. Nelson, W. A. H. Harbor, M. Stewart, R. D. Bradfield, R. E. Symons, J. Medley Wood, Alice Pegler, Florence Paterson, Daly & Cherry, H. G. Flanagan, P. Krook, A. Penther, W. Tyson, Barbara Smart, Theo Kassner, A. Stolz, etc.

Together with other well known scientists such as Sir Arnold Theiler, Prof. A. T. J. Janse and Dr. I. B. Pole Evans, Miss Leendertz was a foundation member of the Biological Society which was started in Pretoria in 1907. In 1909 she married Mr. N. W. Pott.

From the time of her retirement in 1925, her interest in botany appears to have ceased but to the last she remained active and alert and a real lady, much loved by all around her. After a short illness she passed away on the 14th June, 1965, at the age of 96.

A few plants were named after her, the best known being *Stapelia leendertziae*. There is also a *Blepharis leendertziae* Oberm., *Delosperma leendertziae* N. E. Br., *Indigofera leendertziae* N. E. Br., *Lotononis pottiae* Burtt Davy and *Thesium pottiae* N. E. Br. A list of her publications is appended.

Upon her retirement, Miss D. Kaplan succeeded her in 1925. In 1927 Mr. R. G. N. Young took over and in 1929 Miss A. A. Obermeyer, who remained there until her marriage in 1938. In 1953 the Board of Trustees of the Transvaal Museum donated the herbarium, now consisting of about 40,000 numbers, to the National Herbarium, Pretoria.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was a pleasure to hear Professor A. T. J. Janse reminisce on the time that he and Miss Leendertz went out collecting on bicycles and I thank him heartily for the information so freely given. Grateful thanks are also due to Mrs. E. Patterson, a niece, who lent me the few but important letters and documents Mrs. Pott had preserved. These were very helpful indeed in building up a picture of her early years at the Museum. Dr. V. Fitzsimons, the present Director, kindly lent us the photograph reproduced here.

#### LIST OF PUBLICATIONS BY MRS. R. POTT-LEENDERTZ

1. The Amaryllidaceae of the Transvaal in Ann. Transv. Mus. 1: 46 (1911). Enumerating 11 genera and 36 species.
2. A first checklist of the flowering plants and ferns of the Transvaal and Swaziland. J. Burtt Davy and R. Pott-Leendertz in Ann. Transv. Mus. 3: 119-182 (May, 1912). 3,240 species are enumerated.
3. A new species of *Stapelia* from the Transvaal, *Stapelia gettleffii* Pott in Ann. Transv. Mus. 3: 226, t.13 (1912).
4. A new record of plant species for the Transvaal, *Duvalia polita* N. E. Br. in Ann. Transv. Mus. 3: 226 (1912).
5. New species of *Alepidea* in Ann. Transv. Mus. 4: 206 (1914). *A. jenkinsii* Pott; *A. basinuda* Pott.
6. A new species of *Warburgia* from the Transvaal, in Ann. Transv. Mus. 6: 60, fig. 1-2 (August 1918).
7. Addendum to the first checklist of the flowering plants and ferns of the Transvaal and Swaziland, in Ann. Transv. Mus. 6: 119-135 (1918). Another 700 species were added.

