

de Beer, Johannes Nicholas (1881–1967)

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Godfrey K. Sang is a historical researcher and writer with an interest in Adventist history. He holds a B.A. in History from the University of Eastern Africa Baraton and a number of qualifications from other universities. He is a published author. He is the co-author of the book *On the Wings of a Sparrow: How the Seventh-day Adventist Church Came to Western Kenya*

Johannes Nicholas de Beer served as a Seventh-day Adventist Church administrator and a pioneer of several mission stations in Southern Africa.

Early Life

Johannes Nicholas de Beer was born on January 17, 1881, in the Boshoff district of the Orange Free State (OFS) in South Africa. He was the son of Gerhardus Petrus de Beer (1860-1929) and grandson of Johannes Nicolas de Beers (1830-1883) after whom he was named. The Kimberley diamond mines were discovered on Grandfather De Beer's farm, who gave his name to the De Beers Consolidated Diamond Mines associated with, among others, Cecil Rhodes.²

Gerhardus de Beer became an Adventist in 1890 through the witness of evangelist Gert Scholtz, who was passionate to share the Seventh-day Adventist message with everyone he could when he first became acquainted with it through his interaction with Pieter Wessels, his brother-in-law, and was baptized by Elder Wessels.³ His father encountered much opposition from his relatives but remained firm.

Johannes de Beer's mother passed away while he was still a child. He was then sent to boarding school at Claremont Union College (now Helderberg College of Higher Education), and was baptized there in 1893 at the young age of 12 years old. He was 15 when his father remarried in 1896. At the age of 19, he joined the Claremont Sanitarium and trained to become a nurse. When he qualified he became the head of the Swedish



Pastor J. N. de Beer

From *Trans-Africa Division Outlook*.

Massage Department.⁴ In 1902, while working at the Claremont Sanitarium, he married Hilda Kassebaum, with whom he shared 65 years of marital bliss.

Missionary Work

When the Claremont Sanitarium closed in 1905, he worked as a colporteur for a few years until he was called to mission work in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) in 1910.⁵ For 12 years Johannes and Hilda de Beer served at Somabula Mission (now Lower Gwelo) and pioneered the work at various mission stations such as Shangani, Selukwe (now Shurugwi), and Que Que (now KweKwe).⁶

In 1922 he was appointed president of the Orange Free State Conference⁷ which covered the Free State Province of South Africa, as well as Kimberly in the Northern Cape and Aliwal North in the Eastern Cape Provinces. In 1927 he moved to the Transkei to establish the Cancele Mission Station.⁸ He served there until 1935 when he was appointed president of the Cape Field (later renamed the Good Hope Conference). Early in 1942 he moved to East London as president of the South Bantu Mission Field where he worked for the next 9 years.

Retirement and Later Life

In 1951 he retired having attained the age of 70 years old after 41 years of professional pastoral ministry and as a church administrator. In his retirement years, he did not become an idler but continued to serve the native churches to whom he had devoted his ministerial years. They moved to the Cape where he served Maitland, Stellenbosch, and Kensington churches. The De Beer family briefly moved to Bloemfontein before settling at Anerley on the south coast of the Natal Province of South Africa. He passed away at the age of 86 years on March 13, 1967, at Port Shepstone, Natal.⁹ He was survived by his wife Hilda, his son John, his daughters Erna Louw and Doreen Hogg, and two sisters. At the time of his death, he had seven grandchildren. His funeral was conducted by Pastor A. W. Staples, assisted by W. H. Hurlow, C. H. Mackett, and G. E. Garne at the Windsor-on-Sea Church. He was laid to rest at the Uvongo Cemetery in Natal.

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. J. N. de Beer, "Death of a Pioneer," *African Division Outlook*, June 13, 1929, 12.
2. A. W. Staples, "Beloved Pioneers Laid to Rest," *Trans-Africa Division Outlook*, July 1, 1967, 6.
3. *African Division Outlook*, June 13, 1929, Sentinel Publishing, 12.
4. Staples, 6.
5. "J. N. De Beer," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Takoma Park, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1911), 123.
6. *Ibid.*, 1922, 141; see also J. N. De Beer, "Somabula Mission," *The South African Missionary*, September 13, 1915, 1, 2.
7. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Takoma Park, Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1923) 159.
8. J. F. Wright, "Seven Encouraging Omens As We Face the Last Half of 1927," *African Division Outlook*, July 15, 1927, 6.
9. Staples, 6.

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