

How The Dutch Ended up In South Africa

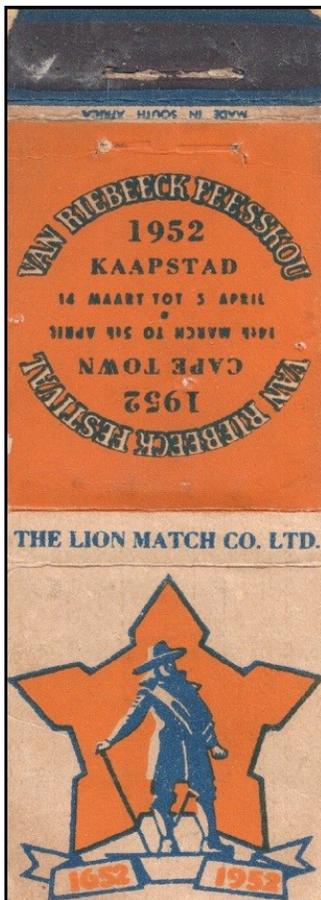
Although it was Portuguese mariner Bartolomeu Dias that was the first European to explore the coastline of South Africa in 1488, it was The Dutch East India Company (VOC) that decided to establish a permanent settlement at the Cape. The VOC, one of the major European trading houses sailing the spice route to the East, had no intention of colonizing the area, instead wanting only to establish a secure base camp where passing ships could shelter, and where hungry sailors could stock up on fresh supplies of meat, fruit, and vegetables. To this end, a small VOC expedition under the command of Jan van Riebeeck reached Table Bay on 6 April 1652.

As the local natives were not agricultural farmers, there was no food to trade for at the Cape, and the VOC had to import Dutch farmers to establish farms to supply the passing ships as well as to supply the growing VOC settlement. The small initial group of free burghers, as these farmers were known, steadily increased in number and began to expand their farms further north and east. The free burghers were ex-VOC soldiers and gardeners, who were unable to return to Holland when their contracts were completed with the VOC.

The majority of burghers had Dutch ancestry and belonged to the Calvinist Reformed Church of the Netherlands, but there were also numerous Germans, as well as some Scandinavians. In 1688, the Dutch and the Germans were joined by French Huguenots, also Calvinists, who were fleeing religious persecution in France under King Louis XIV.

Van Riebeeck considered it impolitic to enslave the local Khoi and San natives, so the VOC began to import large numbers of slaves primarily from Dutch colonies in the Far East. The offspring from miscegenation between the Dutch settlers and the slaves became known officially as the Cape Coloureds and the Cape Malays. A significant number of the offspring from the white and slave unions were absorbed into the local proto-Afrikaans speaking white population. The racially mixed genealogical origins of many so-called "white" South Africans have been traced to interracial unions at the Cape between the European occupying population and imported Asian and African slaves, the indigenous Khoi and San, and their vari-hued offspring. Simon van der Stel, the first Governor of the Dutch settlement, famous for his development of the lucrative South African wine industry, was himself of mixed race-origin.

Painting of an account of the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck, by Charles Bell.



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