

## SAHRIS OBJECT PDF REPORT

**Object Code:** 9/2/030/0017

**Quantity:** 1.00

**Cultural Association:**

**Maker:**

**Production Place:**

### Provenance:

The beacon together with others was caused to be erected by Governor Van der Graaff in 1785 to show the Company's authority and to strengthen its claim to the territory.

The public library of George stands in the shadow of a giant historical oak at the top of York Street. Inside the library there is an old stone beacon bearing the crest of the Netherlands and the monogram of the Dutch East India Company. It has withstood the ravages of wind and weather for nearly two hundred years having been first erected in 1785.

The Colony of the Cape of Good Hope was in the possession of the Dutch East India Company for nearly a century and a half. During that time it developed from a modest refreshment station at the foot of Table Mountain to being an extensive colony with its northern boundary stretching far into the Great Karoo and the Fish River fixed as its eastern limit in 1778. The Company was jealous of its possessions but it fell into decline and became bankrupt and powerless. England the greatest colonial power of the time impatiently awaited the time when this prize would fall into her lap. In 1781 she had already sent a large fleet with 3000 men to capture the Cape but the attempt was frustrated by the presence of a strong French squadron. No wonder that the Company regarded all Englishmen in the Colony with suspicion including even those that had suffered ship wreck.

On 7th May a vessel of the English East India Company the Pigot on her way home from Madras was forced to put in in distress at St. Francis Bay just south-east of Humansdorp. There were a number of English military officers on board returning from India. They hired wagons from the farmers in the vicinity and travelled overland to Cape Town. It was immediately suspected that they were making careful observations of the topography during their journey.

The incident caused great concern to Governor Colonel Jacob van de Graaff. He placed the matter before the Council of Policy and it was decided to take a hundred soldiers from the first Dutch ship to call at the Cape and to station small detachments of troops at Mossel Bay Plettenberg Bay St. Francis Bay and Algoa Bay. This resolve could however not be carried out because England had swept the Dutch East Indiamen from the seas. So the Council of Policy did the next best thing: instead of stationing troops it erected a number of stone beacons with the arms of the Netherlands and the monogram of the Company carved on them at places as evidence of the Company's claim to the area. One of these beacons was erected in Outeniqualand where George stands today. Outeniqualand was then an insignificant outpost in the Swellendam district. At the lower end of today's York Street a post house was built and the beacon was built into the wall of the main hall. When this extensive area was proclaimed as a separate district in 1811 and George became its administrative centre the old post house was still used as the drostdy or magistrates office for a considerable time but eventually a proper drostdy was built on the site now occupied by the Hotel Victoria. The old post house fell into disuse and at a much later stage was sold to a Mr. J. P. Lemmer. He preserved the old beacon carefully and eventually presented it to the public library. A replica of it was made and is housed in the South African Museum in Cape Town.