

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS.

**Cape Town Congress
Thursday 8th. November 1956.**

**Photographic Society of Southern Africa,
P.O. Box 2007,
Johannesburg.**

**Dr. A.D. BENSUSAN
Retiring President.**

Dames en Here,

Ek verwelkom al ons Afrikaanse lede, na die derde Fotografiese Kongres van Suidelike Afrika.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here this morning and to have the opportunity of addressing you, for this is one of the very few centres in the whole country at which I have never previously spoken at a photographic gathering.

On two occasions I have been privileged to address the oldest Photographic Society in the world - the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, and I have also been honoured to read a paper to the Photographic Society of America at their 21st Convention at Chicago; but today I am privileged to address the oldest photographic organisation in the country of my birth - here in Cape Town under the shadow of Table Mountain and under the banner of P.S.S.A.

It is a wonderful occasion for me, as your first President, when I hand over the reins of office later to-day to a man who has been associated with the Cape Town Photographic Society for more than thirty years. Believe me gentlemen, P.S.S.A. could not have made a better choice for our new President, and his wisdom and long experience in photography will be an asset to our Society at a very delicate stage of its existence.

There has been a period of unsettlement in certain quarters, following the inception of our great and wonderful new body - P.S.S.A. Did we really think that P.S.S.A. would be launched on a completely smooth pond? History has always shown that members of the human race must acclimatise themselves to new developments wherever they may be, and so it is in a limited way with our own organisation.

It is an inevitable trend of progress, and progress cannot be halted for it depends not on the idiosyncrasies of man, but on the destinies of our creator. "The old order changeth, yielding place to new, and God fulfills himself in many ways".

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is not intended to be a sermon, but I felt it expedient to introduce this theme, for what is right and sincere will triumph and as our own P.S.S.A. has been built on sincerity and unity of purpose, we shall not fail!

I leave the photographic administration this afternoon with a sense of great pride and the knowledge that this sincerity and unity will continue, as I have the greatest respect for our new President and under his leadership we shall enter a period of great wisdom and steady development.

I may be contradicted, but it is my sincere opinion that P.S.S.A. is more important than S.A. Photography itself at this early stage. One is concrete and new and needs fostering, whereas the other is nebulous, it is a trend of events and a style which will take its own path when that path has been paved by P.S.S.A.

So let us foster our P.S.S.A., let it progress and let it bring about the trends and improvements. It is so much more important therefore that its future be guided with wisdom; there is no question of doubt that its very existence and progress is having a profound effect on our National photography. P.S.S.A. comes first and let us not be deluded by sinister critics who still dwell on the out-moded theme and hide behind what they feel is "S.African Photography" without any thought whatsoever, and certainly no effort whatsoever on behalf of P.S.S.A.

It is usual for a retiring President to read a paper on some technical aspect of his science or art but I must admit that my energies have been so wholeheartedly devoted to P.S.S.A. organisation that I have been unable to attune any mind to the hobby which I love so dearly. I had hoped to incorporate into this address to-day the many new developments such as arrow-head and division of fifths which I have pounded over the past two years. There is plenty of time ahead for these new developments of photographic composition, but my time on P.S.S.A. administration is now limited and there are important matters within our Society before we envisage the advantages and developments to our hobby itself.

This afternoon we shall be asked to give our opinion on several constitutional changes in our structure, for the development has been so phenomenal that what we considered suitable at Durban has proved to require certain amendments in view of the enormity of our organisation to-day. The last time I met many of our Cape colleagues was in George at the 1954 Easter Rally before Durban Congress when I stated - and you will find this recorded in the Press - that what I envisaged at Durban was the foundation of an organisation in which no one individual and no one club would ever have sufficient say in the affairs to dominate it. This afternoon gentlemen, I would like to add to that saying: no one individual, no one club and no one Province should ever have sufficient say in the affairs of our organisation to dominate it.

I shall be introducing the motion of equal Provincial representation for I sincerely feel that this is the only way we shall cement the friendly relationships which have been forged between photographic leaders in our respective Provinces. As some may recall, this was no minor problem of the National affiliation negotiations after the last war, and I see here to-day at least one or two who took part in those early deliberations.

We shall be failing in our duty to those that come after us if we do not immediately safeguard these Provincial rights in our charter.

During my term of office I have been most fortunate in my travels of being able to visit almost every Club in the country. This has not only provided valuable contacts for our administration with first hand knowledge of these Clubs, but it has enabled me to fully appreciate the broad prospective of our National photographic structure. The Clubs in the smaller centres are the ones that seem to be benefitting most from P.S.S.A. facilities, for P.S.S.A. has provided them with the link they have badly needed, and facilities on a National Scale which nearby larger Clubs have previously been unable to provide for them. There can hardly be a small club in the country that at some time has not written in to say how much they appreciate their membership of P.S.S.A. What better tribute could our organisation have than the goodwill of all these members and Clubs scattered from Nairobi to the Cape?

That, ladies and gentlemen, brings me to the important question of the function of P.S.S.A. in our National photography.

It has been frequently stated that we are here to help and foster the good of photography and cinematography - to co-operate and to co-ordinate the activities throughout the land. Surely no one can dispute this so-called policy, provided we remain a democratic body, administered by those who are elected by the photographers of Southern Africa to carry out these tasks.

Let us therefore not lose sight of this preliminary function of a national body such as ours, and let us not be too parochial in our outlook nor too concerned in the affairs of our local clubs, that we lose sight of the overall picture of our hobby throughout the country.

We have talked and we have dreamed of a national photographic body for many years and now that we have succeeded in the formation of this body, let us ensure that we all add our small contribution to its progress, for if we are interested in S.A. photography, I have said before, there is no better place to show our interest than in P.S.S.A. itself.

Policy. There are certain policies which I have advocated during my term of office which have been built up from experience of the past, and the insistence that mistakes of previous attempts of "National affiliation of our Photographic Clubs" should never again occur.

It has been a firm understanding that the various interests within our photography are to be organised from different centres of the country, the rotation of Congress venue each year also follows this policy. However it must be clearly understood that a co-ordinating centre is necessary under the direct control of the President himself and whilst I do not for one moment think that the administration of P.S.S.A. will be permanent in Cape Town, I consider that it should not be changed every second year with the election of each new President.

But there is another important aspect to the structure of P.S.S.A. for I have been insistent that all Committees, Divisions or sections of the Society should have complete autonomy within their own spheres of activity, but in this policy I now see a real danger to the parent body itself, for autonomy per se is all very well but it must never reach the stage of complete independence for that would mean a disintegration of the great unity which is in fact the main feature of P.S.S.A. One must watch this point carefully, ladies and gentlemen, for I personally consider it one of the foundation stones on which our edifice has been built, so let me repeat that whilst I advocate autonomy of committees, Divisions and sections, I do not advocate their complete independence. They must continue to work within the framework of the Society not only for their own benefit but also for that of the parent body itself.

Administration. The administration of any Society on a National scale presents many difficulties which do not exist in local and smaller bodies. I am satisfied however, that we have worked out an excellent system within our Directorate for the smooth functioning of P.S.S.A. on a democratic basis. Each

Director's views are carefully correlated and integrated. It naturally entails considerable correspondence and the frequent use of tape recordings which is a necessary expense of the Society.

Tape Recordings. On referring to our Balance Sheet for the year the administrative expense of tape recordings have been shown under the heading of the Tape Recordings Committee. It is only fair to point this out for the Committee itself is functioning very favourably under the able guidance of Lionel Bevis of Durban, and Clubs are making good use of the six or more programmes at present available. I am pleased to announce that several more are in preparation and those of us who have attempted to produce a programme will realise the immense amount of work and care necessary to maintain the high standard set by P.S.S.A. in these matters.

Journal. The greatest asset to any organisation is usually its Journal and P.S.S.A. is no exception. Every month, exactly on time, "Camera News" is distributed to all members and also on public sale. The production is one of exceedingly high merit on International standards, and one such as we have never before known in our country. I cannot extol the efforts of our Editor and his Team sufficiently in words such as these, and therefore it is better that I should say quite simply "Thank you Mr. Vertue for this outstanding effort".

I would like to make special mention of the regular articles by Nat Cowan and others, and the monthly Club and Society contributions. Our print critic, Fred Harris of Cape Town has done a great job to guide our pictorial efforts, and we are proud to have these monthly reviews by a master with such wide experience. I would appeal in this address to all delegates and members of congress to assist with a regular series of articles and prints, in order to maintain the very high standards already set by "Camera News".

Print Collections. An entirely new feature of our photography in this country has been the distribution by P.S.S.A. of many fine collections of one-man exhibits by overseas masters. This has entailed an immense amount of work and P.S.S.A. is indebted to Dr. Denfield who is Chairman of this Committee with a team of Regional Representatives for print distribution to Clubs.

Motion Picture Division. Another completely new development of our Southern African photography has been the inauguration of this Division of the Society to cater specially for the requirements of the cinematographer. This division was inaugurated under the supervision of Dr. Sergay just one year ago, and as a result of his enthusiasm there has been steady development in the co-ordination of Amateur Cine Club efforts on a national scale. It is hoped that more emphasis will be placed on individual membership of P.S.S.A. for enthusiastic amateur cinematographers, as there are great benefits to be derived from individual membership of a large national body such as ours.

Membership. Our membership Chairman, Mr. Rosewitz of Johannesburg, has done an outstanding job for our Society. He has appreciated the importance of rapidly building up the membership until to-day we are only just short of his target of 1,000 members. One realises the tremendous enthusiasm for photography in S.A. when we assess this membership figure in proportion to the small population of our land. Mr. Rosewitz' great efforts have earned for him the wide respect of photographers throughout Southern Africa.

Overseas Visitors. As a result of the existence of a national body such as ours, it has been possible to arrange for lectures to various clubs throughout the country by such great masters as Charles Rosher of Hollywood fame, and G.L. Hawkins, world renowned pictorial photographer.

Also we have had the opportunity of meeting and attending talks by visitors at various times, and the names soon come to mind of Isadore Berger, Dr. Harold Lincoln Thompson, Allan Cash and Stan West, the Chairman of the Laguna Beach Camera Club in Mortensons home-town, not forgetting of course the ladies, Mrs. Thompson, Mrs. Cash and Mildred Baer.

These visitors have all brought with them new ideas which are badly needed and which we hope will result in the advancement of photography in our country.

I regret that I shall be unable to continue as Chairman of the Overseas Visitors Committee and here is a job awaiting anyone who is not afraid of hard work.

Congress. It is always a great pleasure to meet fellow-photographers from different parts of the country and the annual Congress of Southern Africa has provided this very meeting ground. I would like to pay tribute to all the organisers of this Congress in Cape Town for their efforts in providing such a fine fare. I'm sure we shall take home most pleasant memories of this great occasion.

During the year Directors accepted an offer from the Northern Rhodesian Photographic Association for a combined Congress of International Photography to take place at the Victoria Falls next July. I am pleased to announce that we shall have a distinguished visitor from London at the Congress, for Dr. S.D. Jouhar, FRPS, FPSA has accepted an invitation to join us at Victoria Falls. He is a world-renowned pictorial photographer lecturer, author and writer, and he will be one of the judges for the 2nd P.S.S.A. International

Salon to be held with the Congress. Invitations to leading workers in Britain, the United States and in the East are being seriously considered and there are distinct possibilities that some of them may join us.

The joint organisers - Andrew Hayward and John Chadwick are both working very hard on the arrangements and are to be congratulated on their fine efforts in the North; perhaps the Northern Rhodesian delegates here to-day will give us more details later in the proceedings.

Whilst on the subject, I would like to mention the great work being done by the Northern Rhodesian Photographic Association under the Chairmanship of Dr. Frank Hanford and the firm links which have been formed between our respective organisations.

Government Liason. Many difficulties have been encountered by Clubs and Societies over customs and censorship. A Committee under Nat Cowan of Johannesburg has already had a most successful interview with the Dept. of Education and although the results of their efforts may not be evident for some while, the long term prospects of these negotiations will likely be of the greatest benefit to photography and cinematography in S. Africa.

Company Secretary. Our Hon. Secretary, Mr. Penny has continued to handle all matters concerning the Registrar of Companies as well as considering amendments to the Constitution. He is to be congratulated on the efficient manner in which this has been done. I would also like to thank our Hon. Auditor, Mr. Wilson of Durban and Dave Abramson our Treasurer.

Portfolios and Colour Collections. A matter which will shortly be brought up for consideration, is that of the inauguration of colour slide collections for Clubs. Bill Murray-Brown of Durban has made some valuable contacts in his recent visit overseas and numerous interchanges of slides can be arranged. We hope these will prove more popular than print portfolio exchanges for there is a wave of enthusiasm at present for colour transparencies. The RPS/S.Africa Print Portfolio has been slow on its rounds but is proving a valuable link and the third exchange circuit is about to commence. Dr. Du Toit of Pretoria is the Secretary of the first circle.

Honours and Awards. This afternoon the matter of inauguration of Associateship of P.S.S.A. will be under discussion when the report of my own committee on the subject is presented to the Annual General Meeting. I shall therefore not dwell further on this matter at present.

P.S.S.A. International Salon. For years the thought has been prevalent in the minds of many, of a fine International photographic exhibition in this country which draws the fullest support from all corners of Southern Africa. The Centenary exhibitions of both Durban and Pretoria held in conjunction with our First and Second Congress' respectively, have paved the way for this thought to become reality. The 'picture-potential' of the Clubs of Southern Africa has clearly shown the need for P.S.S.A. to proceed with the inauguration of an International Salon to be held each year with Congress.

The first P.S.S.A. International Salon thus came into being, and has been organised here in Cape Town by the oldest photographic society in the country. Our distinguished visitor, Mr. G.L. Hawkins was one of the adjudicators and the exhibition will be officially opened later in the Congress proceedings. You will therefore see for yourselves the results of these fine efforts, and it is encouraging to know of the support which was forthcoming from all parts of the country. The organisers are to be congratulated on this milestone in our photographic history.

There are neither awards nor medals for this photographic exhibition and P.S.S.A. Salon stickers will be eagerly sought after. This will add to the dignity and prestige of the Salon throughout the country.

A word or two on the Cine aspect - for here was the first attempt at a co-ordinated Amateur Cine Festival for 8, and 16 mm films, and the 32 entries from all parts of the Union & Rhodesias was a great triumph for the Motion Picture Division organisers. The main award of an 'assegai' will surely become the hallmark of the highest standards of Amateur Cinematography in our land.

Directorate. I would like to pass on our congratulations to the following Directors on their International Honours during the year, Gordon Maddox (Associateship of the Royal Photographic Society), Dr. Denfield (Associateship of the Photographic Society of America), Andrew Hayward (Associateship of the Institute of British Photographers) and Dr. Sergay on gaining a place in the "Ten best Amateur films of the year in the United States".

I would like to thank our retiring Directors who are not seeking re-election, namely Messrs. Abromowitz, Cowan and Maddox, also Mr. Poole who has acted as an alternate, as well as all the Society executives. To our new Directorate I wish the best of luck under their leader, Robert Bell; and may I reiterate my sentiments from the last issue of "Camera News" that the future of our Society be assured and its progress unhindered in the years ahead.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it has been a great privilege and honour for me to have been your first President. Although a heavy burden, it has certainly been a pleasant one. I retire this afternoon in the knowledge that the basic structure of our Society has been built. We have covered a great deal of ground since we met 2 years ago in Durban and founded this organisation.

It is a source of great pride to many in this country, for we have never before known greater enthusiasm for photography in our land.

I would like us all to take away to-day just one thought, namely that of the great fellowship of photography. That is the spirit of P.S.S.A. and that is the very foundation of this great new organisation with which it has been my privilege to be so closely associated.

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