

WILLEM ANTON JOSEPH MARIA VAN WATERSCHOOT VAN DER GRACHT
1873-1943

Van Waterschoot van der Gracht was born on 15 August 1873 in Amsterdam, where his father was a notary. He attended the gymnasium and in 1892 became a student of law at the University of Amsterdam. He took his degree in 1899 with a thesis on the regulation of fresh water fishery, *Staatsbemoeding ten behoeve der zoetwater-visserij*. By agreement with his family Van Waterschoot van der Gracht was then free to follow his own inclinations and began studying geology, first at Stonyheast College (England), then at Freiberg (Saxony). In Germany he got to know Josefine Rudolfine Maria Gisella Ferdinandine Freiin von Hammer Purgstall, whom he married in 1901 (they had one son and three daughters). At Freiberg he qualified as an engineer in 1903. In the meantime he had already published his first important paper, 'The deeper geology of the Netherlands and adjacent regions, with special reference to the latest borings in the Netherlands, Belgium and Westphalia' (1902).

Back in the Netherlands Van Waterschoot van der Gracht became secretary to the Board of the Mines in 1903 and a few years later (1905) he became a member of this Board. In this capacity he had a large share in the realization of new regulations for mines (1906). In 1905 he also became engineer-director of the Rijksofsporing van Delfstoffen (ROVD), the government service responsible for mineral exploration. In that capacity, he was very successful. On the basis of extensive scientific research he was able to find rich deposits of coal in the Peel region, at the very moment that the ROVD was on the brink of being abolished because of a lack of results. In the yearly reports of the ROVD he could claim many more new discoveries. As an expert in finding new mineral strata he was also invited to advise foreign governments, in Europe, as well as America. Beginning in 1910, he also worked for petroleum companies (in 1915 for Shell, for instance) and for the Dutch government in the East Indies.

In 1917 Van Waterschoot van der Gracht resigned as director of the ROVD and emigrated to America, where he worked for Shell and other companies. During this period he published little. In 1928 he returned to Europe, established himself at the Austrian estate of his wife and wrote a synthesis of his recent findings, 'The Permo-Carboniferous Orogeny in the South-Central United States' (1931). In 1931 he returned to America for a year to round off this work.

In May 1932 Van Waterschoot van der Gracht became chief-engineer and later inspector-general of Mines, the most important supervisor of the work that was done in the Dutch mines. Although this was mainly an administrative job, he continued publishing on geology, especially on the resemblances between the North-American and European continents. In 1937 he became a member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. During the war he remained at his post and saw to it that many young Dutch geologist, who were no longer able to go abroad, were employed by the Dutch mines to do geological research and to analyze the data collected by the old ROVD.

Van Waterschoot van der Gracht died on 17 August 1943.

Primary works

A bibliography can be found in: *Geologie en mijnbouw* 5, nos. 9-10 (September-October 1943) 66-68.

Secondary sources

L.U. de Sitter, in: *Geologie en mijnbouw* 5, nos. 9-10 (September-October 1943) 65-66; F.R. van Veen, *Willem van Waterschoot van der Gracht, 1873-1943: een biografie* (Delft: Delftse Universiteits Pers, 1996).
A.A. Thiadens, in: *BWN*, vol. 1, 645-647.

[K.v.B.]