



Rose's

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ROUND-UP

A privately-published monthly newsletter covering snippets of mainly Karoo history * Copyright: Rose Willis

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IT'S THAT TIME AGAIN.

It is time to visit the Karoo once more for the ever-popular annual Prince Albert Olive Festival. This year's event, scheduled for April 27 and 28, will center around the Fransie Pienaar Museum, Market Square and spill out across the nearby school's sports fields. Highlights will include: stargazing, history and ghost walks, witblitz, wine and olive tasting, plus an olive pip spitting competition, a half marathon for the energetic and trips across the Swartberg Pass and into Gamkaskloof, The Hell, for explorers. Entertainment will be provided by Chris Chameleon, The Eden Minstrels and a *Boeremusiek orkes* that will play in the Beer Garden. Short cooking courses are available and restaurants will serve delicious olive and Karoo mutton dishes. As usual it promises to be a festival not to be missed, so remember to book your accommodation early.

TRAVEL TIPS FROM 'BEYOND THE GRAVE'

The Royal Geographical Society recently reprinted a travel guide which British writer, Sean O'Neill, says "brings back tips from beyond the grave." *Hints for Lady Travellers*, initially written in 1889 by Lillias Campbell, was designed to advise unescorted, independent ladies what to take along when travelling abroad. Among her suggestions is a portable bathtub "disguised as a suitcase". Lillias advises that those who can afford it to consider having a small incision made in an arm or leg and inserting a few diamonds there in case they are faced with "an economic emergency". She is quite pragmatic about train travel and advises ladies to pack "eau de toilette" to freshen the air of less aromatic and salubrious foreign railroad carriages. She also offers fashion advice and states that the "deerstalker caps affected by many travelling women suit very few. "Their effect is not at all becoming, in fact it is distinctly the reverse." In this quirky book Lillias discusses intrepid explorers, such as archaeologist Gertrude Bell, and Isabella Bird Bishop, the first woman inducted into the Royal Geographical Society. The book, an amusing read for anyone interested in the history of travel and exploration, is available from Amazon and costs about \$8.

PLEASE CLOSE THE GATE

Barbed wire changed life in the Karoo. This American invention, first proposed by Louis Francois Jannin in 1865 and perfected by Joseph Glidden in 1874, began to appear in the Karoo towards the end of the 1800s, says Bartle Logie in *Traveller's Joy*. With the coming of roads South Africa farms had to be fenced and the "beksaner" gates made its appearance. These barbed wire gates – literally part of the fence - recoiled, hitting the inexperienced 'opener' in the jaw and enveloping him in a cocoon of wire and poles, if he was not careful. They were extremely difficult to close, but a law was passed in 1912 which made it an offence to leave a gate open. The fine for doing so was £10. By 1963, when the Fencing Act was promulgated, the fine was upgraded to R30 or three months in goal.

CLASS DISTINCTION

Author Jose Burman divides South African pioneers into three classes – hunters, traders and farmers. "In South Africa the hunter preceded the others," he says in *The Unofficial History of the Cape*. "The hunter shot for the pot, shot for profit and shot for pleasure. It was not long before the game retreated drawing *trekboers* and San hunters ever northwards. The Khoi khoi also hunted, but they were basically cowherds and shepherds, so they followed more slowly. Their movement drew the cattle traders northwards. Initially it was difficult for cattle farmers to follow because Government policy protected the Khoi khoi and prevented them being ousted from the land. The smallpox epidemic, which hit the Cape in 1715, drastically changed the whole picture. The Khoi khoi has no resistance to disease and so were decimated. The way was open for the cattle farmers to enter the hinterland and the 'trekboer' (migrant farmer) became a major role player in the South African story.

A Tribute to the Medical Men of the Great Karoo

FROM 'BOSSIEDOKTERS' TO THE WORLD ARENA ...

Medical men have played a vital role in the history of the Great Karoo and some sons of this region have risen to great heights in medicine. The *trekboers* migrant farmers learned about medicinal plants from indigenous people and so it is not surprising that the initial healers were “*bossiedokters*”, who using veld plants and “*boererate*” as well as lotions, potions and powders mostly from trusted little boxes of Lennon’s remedies. Nevertheless, their success rate was great and these unqualified men (and women) were trusted and respected. One who practiced at Klaarstroom was highly acclaimed in Judge Juta’s memoirs. Among the top “*bossiedokters*”, of the Karoo was Auntie Hettie Grootboom. She was a firm believer in the efficacy of Karoo acacia, the “*soetdoring*” and she made very effective use of various parts of this tree. She mixed finely chopped roots into baby food to prevent colic, recommended that the tips of young leaves be chewed to relieve indigestion, and for more serious stomach complaints, such as diarrhea and dysentery, she boiled up a mixture of bark and leaves. When this concoction had cooled the patient had to drink a glassful three times a day, writes Bartle Logie in *Traveller’s Joy*. A similar “tea” made only from bark and sweetened with sugar was recommended as a gargle. At the first inkling of a snuffle Auntie Hettie made a paste from the gum, bark and leaves to rub on the sufferer’s chest to clear the nose and head. The same paste was used to treat cuts and grazes and warmed with vinegar to make a poultice to draw out inflammation.

... AND SO THEY TROOPED ACROSS THE STAGE

In time the herbalist healers were joined by highly-educated, well-qualified counterparts who arrived armed with degrees from top European universities. Among them was John Fraser, the eldest of Beaufort West’s Dutch Reformed minister Rev Colin Fraser, and his second wife, Maria Elizabeth Sieberhagen. John studied medicine at Kings College, in Aberdeen, Scotland, returned to the Karoo to practise as a doctor. He once acted as a locum for Richmond’s Dr Maurice Hoffa one of the first German doctors to come to South Africa. John later switched to law and in 1871, he was appointed Private Secretary to John Brand, President of the Orange Free State. Fraser was later knighted for his services to the Free State. Cecil Alport, the son of a Beaufort West shopkeeper’s assistant, studied at the University of Cape Town and in Europe. He also returned briefly to South Africa and in time pioneered a cure for a nephritis, a kidney complaint, which was named Alport’s Disease in his honour. In the early 1900s he wrote an expose on the horrors and atrocities of the Egyptian medical system and as a consequence had to flee that country, barely escaping with his life. Then there was Christiaan Neethling Barnard, the son of a Beaufort West mission preacher, who rocketed to world fame on December 3, 1967, when he transplanted the world’s first human heart. On that historic day his brother, Marius, was a member of the transplant team. Marius rose from the same humble beginnings to become a highly respected doctor and esteemed politician.

OTHERS FOLLOW IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS

Several other Beaufort Westers made names for themselves in medical circles. One, Daniel Pieter de Villiers, born in 1900, and fondly known as “DP” studied medicine at the Universities of Cape Town and Liverpool in England. At the latter he met the great, highly respected, internationally known, professor of obstetrics and gynaecology, Blair Bell, who became a lifelong friend. Blair guided DP on a career path similar to his own. DP was one of the first doctors in South Africa to start as private hospital. He also played important roles in agriculture and in the preservation of the country’s cultural heritage. Another Beaufort West shopkeeper’s son, who distinguished himself in medicine, was Victor Dubowitz. He pioneered major developments in pediatric neurology and made meaningful clinical and research contributions in the fields of neonatal neurology and neuromuscular disorders in children. In 1965 he described a rare and difficult to diagnose, genetic disorder, which was named Dubowitz Syndrome in his honour. Victor and his wife, Lilly (nee Sebok) co-authored a book, entitled *The Floppy Infant*, still today considered a classic throughout the world. Yet another Beaufort Wester who has made a name for himself in medicine was Nathan Finkelstein, known throughout South Africa as Mr Pharmacy. Natie’s his lifelong friend, Beaufort Wester Eugene Weinberg, went on to become one of South Africa’s leading paediatric allergists and head of the Department of Paediatrics at the Red Cross Children’s Hospital in Cape Town. Cyril Karabus, former Professor of Paediatrics, at the University of Cape Town and later head of the Oncology and Haematology Unit of Red Cross Children’s Hospital in the Mother City also came from Beaufort West. In May 2009 Nathan was honoured for the long and meaningful role he played in the South African Pharmaceutical industry, and given the freedom of Beaufort West. Nathan is a cousin of Victor Dubowitz.

BONES AND LENSES SALUTED IN RICHMOND

Richmond's Dr Maurice Hoffa's son, Albert, also played a pivotal role in medicine. He studied in Germany and followed Julius Wolff (known for Wolff's Law) as a professor at the University of Berlin. He described a rare fracture of the knee, characterized by enlargement of the fat pad and aggravated by exercise. It was named Hoffa's syndrome in his honour. In time he became known as the "father of modern orthopedics", and his *Textbook Book of Orthopedics*, published in 1891, that brought him world recognition. This work is still in use and so are many of his other writings on fracture, dislocation and massage. Legend has it that it was Albert who recommended Albert Eugen Fick, the man who developed the contact lens, to bring his ailing wife to Richmond in the Karoo because it had a large, friendly German-speaking community. Touched by children with poor eyesight, Fick began his research into a lens that could fit onto the eye in Richmond. He perfected when he returned to Germany. Initially he tested the lenses on the eyes of rabbits. He was also the first person in the world to wear contact lenses.

INSPIRED BY LISTER, FLEMMING AND BARNARD

Another son of the Karoo, who hails from Hanover, also hit world medical headlines. Lionel Henry Opie considered one of the world's foremost scholars of heart disease, was inspired by three men - Lister, Leonard Flemming and Professor Chris Barnard. Lionel was only 12 when Fleming, received the Nobel Prize, yet he vowed he would pursue a similar career. A great admiration for Barnard led him to researching the heart and do ground breaking work in understanding of the causes of heart attacks and the use of medication for heart disease. He was presented with The Order of Mapungubwe in silver, South Africa's highest Presidential award in 2006 "in recognition of his national and international contributions to cardiology". Lionel wrote hundreds of articles and books. Two were translated into Chinese. One has become a standard reference on the treatment of heart disease.

VISITORS ALSO PLAYED A VITAL ROLE

The stories of several "visiting" doctors are also woven into the chronicles of the Karoo. Several of these great medical men served at the Imperial Yeomanry Hospital at Deelfontein, near Richmond, during the Anglo-Boer War. Perhaps the greatest of them was Dr John Hall-Edwards, who headed the X-ray unit. Known as the "father of British X-rays", he was also hailed as the publicist for military X-rays because of his efforts to have units sent to South Africa for use during this war. These efforts and the work done at the IYH at Deelfontein cost him his right hand and fingers of the left due to radiation burns, yet he went on to practice hobbies such as photography. Another of the surgeons who served at the IYH in the Karoo was Dr John Brian Christopherson, was nominated for the Nobel Prize, after his discovery in 1918 that an ancient poison, antimony, could be used to treat bilharzias. The IYH dentist, Frederick Newland-Pedley, gave his name to a special porcelain crown which he devised and one of their colleagues, Dr Howard Tooth, who worked at Portland Hospital, was honoured (with two colleagues) for research, on a hereditary progressive neuropathic muscular atrophy that affects nerves that stimulate movement (the motor nerves) of the legs and feet. The disease is named the Charcot-Marie-Tooth disease and symptoms usually begin between in mid-childhood and early adulthood. While working at the IYH the medical superintendent, Colonel Arthur Sloggett, discovered a rare vlei rat, which was named *Sloggett's Vlei Rat Otomys sloggetti* in his honour. He was not the only medical man interested in the South African ecology. Way back in the mid-1700s a medical doctor, William Gill, came to practice in Somerset East turned his attention to botany and in time a major Eastern Cape college was established in that town and named Gill College in his honour.

THE MAGIC OF 'SNAKE STONES'

Snakes occur across the Karoo and consequently there are a great variety of remedies across the region for snake bite. During his travels Carl Thunberg came across small, flat and porous stones used in the treatment of snake bite and called "snake stones". He said it was possible to test whether a stone was genuine or not simply by placing it on one's palate. A genuine stone clung there and this is what made it effective. "Locals said that when placed on a wound the stone would stick fast, absorb the poison and fall off only when all the venom had been extracted," states Bartle Logie in *Traveller's Joy*. "The stone was then purified by placing it in milk. When the milk turned blue, the stone was ready for use again. Snake stones were used by Khoi khoi herders, farmers and by doctors. While large sums were paid for these stones many preferred to make a poultice of the leaves of *kruidjie-roer-my nie*, *Melanthus comosus*, to treat wounds, bruises and snake bite."

OH WHERE, OH WHERE IS THIS PLACE?

When Earl Macartney took over as governor in May, 1797, he found the country in a state of turmoil, disorganized and its people demoralized. Graaff-Reinet was in open rebellion. Merchants and others throughout the Colony were cautioned against giving any account of the circumstances of this country in their letters to foreigners. Macartney again instituted an oath of allegiance to the British Crown, and one of his first acts was to tell Magistrate Bresler and Rev Kicherer, whom the Graaff-Reinettters had expelled, to return to the town. Both refused to do so. The Governor then instructed his secretary, John Barrow, to go with them. "I think you should accompany these men to the presence of these savages," he said, adding, "I have another motive for wishing you to go. We are shamefully ignorant of the geography of this country. I neither know, nor can I learn, where this Graaff-Reinet lies - whether it is 500 or a thousand miles from Cape Town, I do not know."

FAMILY HONoured IN MANY AREAS

The Meintjies family history is closely interwoven into the story of the Karoo. Jacobus Johannes Meintjies, born on March 14, 1800, was one of the first Magistrates appointed by Lord Charles Somerset. He married the sister of Sir Andries Stockenström, and moved to Beaufort West where he built a magnificent home, which today is the guest house, Matoppo Inn. Another family member, Stephanus Jacobus, born on January 11, 1840, made history by being the first member of the family to qualify as a doctor. He practised at Aberdeen, Willowmore, Adelaide and Uitenhage. Yet another, Laurens, became the cycling champion of the world on 15th August, 1893. The earliest reference to the Meintjies Family in this country dates back to January 14, 1709, when Hendrik Meijntjes van den Berg from Munsterland in Germany, married to Christina Bastiaanz, the 21 year old widow of Heinrich Gozelke, says Keith Meintjies, who researched the family history. Hendrik, who was born in 1675, came to the Cape in 1708. He was employed by Heinrich Oswald Eckstein, a Stellenbosch wine-farmer, until 1711 when he was granted land of his own. He did well, but oddly ended up penniless and poverty stricken and had to be cared for by his eldest daughter. He died in 1762 aged 87. Hendrik had eight children, five daughters and three sons. His eldest son, Francis, died young, and the youngest, Pieter, never married, so it was the offspring of the second son, Johannes, Jan, who flowed across the Karoo carrying the family name into towns like Graaff-Reinet, Cradock, Hanover, Middelburg, Aberdeen and Willowmore and further afield to Pretoria

STAR OF THE SPORTSFIELDS

Somerset East-born Herbert Hayton Castens, captained South Africa's first rugby team and the country's first cricket team to tour overseas. Born on November 23, 1864, he was sent to Rugby School in Warwickshire, England, to "get a good education." This institution is said to be the place where the game of rugby originated and while there Castens proved himself to be an outstanding sportsman. After proving his abilities on the sports fields at school he never looked back. He went on to study law at Oxford University and in 1887 obtained full rugby colours there. He then played for some English rugby clubs before returning to South Africa to practice law in Cape Town. Back home he joined Villagers, the country's oldest rugby club and played cricket, for Western Province. He made a name for himself in many events and in some instances performed some unique feats. He was the first person to practise systematic coaching in South Africa, he qualified as a referee and he held management positions in some clubs. According to the *The New Dictionary of South Africa Biography* Castens worked in the Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) government service for some years. He died on October 18, 1929.

THE TALE OF A STONE

In 1778 a 50cm high stone was erected 200 paces from the Seacow River near Colesberg to commemorate the visit of Governor Joachim von Plettenberg. The full story of this stone is told by Roger Stewart a recent issue of *The Cape Odyssey*. He states "Information about this beacon is scanty. It was placed 50 km from Hanover, 28 from Colesberg and 8km from the navigational beacon at Sinjeeshoed (Chinese Hat) and its purpose was to record the governor's visit and lay claim to the northern reaches of the Colony for the VOC. The stone was destroyed by the San, it was lost and it is surrounded by intrigue. Questions have been asked as to why the Governor did not proceed to the Orange River. Colonel Robert Gordon was in his party and knew the exact location of the river because he had named it. Some say the Colonel was not up to travelling as he had injured himself falling into a hippo trap, others say he jealously guarded the river for the House of Orange and that he feared the governor might rename it. Some early travellers report seeing the stone, others went specially to see it and did not find it.

We learn from experience that men never learn anything from experience – Douglas Adams