Contents

Rietfontein: a farm in the North Onder-Bokkeveld:  
Nigel Amschwand  
2

The Liesbeeck River: its importance and its problems in the early colonial period:  
Yvonne Brink  
9

Doornboom in Heidelberg, saved at last:  
Hans Fransen  
17

The Namaqualand stockpost:  
Lita Webley  
21

Cover illustration

“An oval matjeshuis, Leliefontein, Kamiesberg, with forked pot rack”  

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The gravestone of H.B.C. Mostert at Rietfontein: “Gebore Louw, Gebore 14 Maart 1884, Oorlede 30 Dec 1933. Ges. 102:3, Vry van Sorge” [Free from Sorrow].

(Transcription by Mariette van Wyk and Willem Strydom)
Rietfontein: A farm in the North Onder-Bokkeveld (Farm No. 631)

*Nigel Amschwand*

It is ten years since the Vernacular Architecture Society started recording threatened farm complexes in the Onder-Bokkeveld, an area to the north and south of Nieuwoudtville, in the Northern Cape. The results of the first investigation were published in 2001 as a special booklet on the farm Matjesfontein. Other articles have appeared since in various editions of the VASSA Journal and more farms will be described in the forthcoming book *A Short History of the Onder-Bokkeveld*.

The interesting thing that is common to many of the farm complexes is that they are built on what is commonly called a vierkant (literally four sides). This area is where the water source for the farm was located, and even after the bulk of the land had been subdivided, usually between the offspring of the first owners, the vierkant was still owned on a share basis. This resulted in a multitude of houses and attendant farm buildings concentrated in a small area and built over a period of time. The farm which is the subject of this article, while not possessing a vierkant, has other interesting attributes.

**The owners and occupants of Rietfontein**

According to a survey taken in 1850 there are seven farms named Rietfontein in the District of Clanwilliam. Of these, four could be described as being over the Olifants and Doorn Rivers as they are situated in the Veldkornetcies of the Voor and the Agter Hantam, the Onder-Roggieveld and the Noord Bokkeveld. With such vague descriptions it is difficult to identify which farm was granted to whom. However, by tracing family relationships and the granting of other loan farms in the same areas we can be fairly certain who occupied this particular Rietfontein during the rule of the Dutch East India Company. After that, we can check the title-deeds that were drawn up when the loan farms were converted to perpetual quit-rent ownership, following the second conquest of the Cape by the British.

An interesting fact is that for most of the last 200 years Rietfontein has been owned by the same persons who owned the adjacent farm Avontuur (Fig. 1). In 1940 most of Avontuur and the whole of Rietfontein were amalgamated into a new farm of over 4860 morgen, named Grasberg. Confusingly, for the first 50 years some of the owners of Avontuur were also owners of another farm called Rietfontein in the Veldcornetcy of the Agter-Hantam (45 kilometres to the east). However, we can differentiate between the two farms by reading travellers accounts, namely Thunberg (1986: 294) and Patterson (1980: 96) who mention the more easterly farm, and with reference to the loan farm records in the Cape Archives.

The first known grant for the loan farm was to Eduard Mostert on the 8th September 1752\(^1\) and it seems to have remained in the family until 28th February 1789. We can confidently say that this was the Eduard Mostert married to Johanna Catherina Ras, as the Ras family also had ties to the area. Mostert (or Mosterd) had already registered the adjoining farm Bokkefontein in 1744, relinquishing it in 1760 to his brother. He was also the step brother of Nicolaas Loubser who lived at Groenrivier. Mostert probably died in 1789 as in January 1790 his ‘widow’ was listed as a beneficiary of her mother’s estate.

We do not know if Eduard Mostert ever resided at Rietfontein in the 18th century. It is probable that his son Nicolaas Hendrik visited the area, as he married the daughter of the owner of an

\(^1\)CA RLR 13 P. 111.
adjoining farm (Margaretha Maria Carstens of Klipperivier). His younger brother also married into the local community.

Who was living at Rietfontein after 1789 is unknown. By this time the Dutch East India Company was having financial problems and perhaps the farm registrations were not made. The next owner of Rietfontein was Willem Adriaan Nel. From the inventory taken on the death of his wife Hester van Wyk, we learn that it included the values of the buildings on Avontuur and Doorn River (at Rds 3333:16s and Rds 1666:32s respectively). However, the building on Rietfontein was not valued as the farm was not registered and therefore not evaluated.

The inventory value totalled Rds 12 678:36s\(^3\) and included among the household items porcelain tableware and 15 books, one of which was the bible, indicating perhaps that they enjoyed a good standard of living at Avontuur. Farm implements included a horse wagon and an ox wagon and two ploughs. Livestock comprised 16 wagon horses, 24 other horses, 28 trek oxen, 56 cattle and 1400 sheep. They also had 11 slaves.

Willem and Hester had seven children, four daughters and three sons, and it was the last child, Elias Albertus Nel, who took over the farms. Elias married a neighbour’s daughter, Johanna Sophia Steenkamp from Bokkefontein at Tulbagh, on the 7\(^{th}\) March 1818. It is not known when Willem died, but by 1819 when Rietfontein was surveyed (Fig. 2) it was in the name of Elias Albertus.

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\(^2\) CA MOOC 8/55 ref 33 11\(^{th}\) February 1804.
\(^3\) More than R 3 million in today’s terms using the comparative values of sheep.
Figure 2. Copy of the Rietfontein farm diagram (Farm 631, Calvinia District) showing the Ordonnantie (reference point) adjacent to the spring (which is described as giving water the whole year round) and the various areas of pasture.

In the tax records (Opgaafrolle) of 1827 Elias and Johanna had one son and one daughter (an earlier son had already died), a household servant and 24 Khoisan workers of various ages. Also
living on their farms Avontuur, Rietfontein, Klienkloof and Doorn Rivier were Baron Mouton with a Khoi man and woman and two children; Jacobus Stephanus Smit; Arie Trion (Theron?) with two Khoi men, three women and five children and Nicolaas Russouw with three Khoi men, three women and five children. One would assume that Mouton, Smit and Russouw supervised the three outlying farms while Nel resided at Avontuur.

In 1832 Rietfontein was granted to Elias as a perpetual quit-rent farm of 2345 morgen and 175 sq. Roods (2009 hectares). It is not known when Elias died but his wife remarried in 1845. Rietfontein was transferred to the ownership of Elias’s three sons called Jan Harmse, Willem Adriaan and Abraham Johannes Jacobus. It remained in the Nel family ownership until the early 1900s, when it was transferred to Herman Henry Buhr (married to Hester Christina Nel) and his son Elias and two van Zyls, Elias Albertus Nel van Zyl and Izak Jacobus van Zyl who were also related to the Nels by marriage.

**The farm and its buildings**

An aerial photograph (2008) shows the layout of the werf (Fig. 3). On the left (west) is House 1 (Fig. 4). This comprised three rooms: at the northern end is a kitchen with a stone rectangular chimney, in the centre is a living area, and at the southern end perhaps the bedroom. Only the centre room has gables (indicating a pitched thatch roof) and these were raised at one time to increase the height. Both end rooms appear to have had sloping *brakdak* roofs. It seems that the central room is the oldest as both the end rooms’ walls abut the gable ends. However, the kitchen has stone lintels whereas the central room and the bedroom have factory-made door and window frames that appear to have been built in at the same time that the walls were constructed. A conjectural date for this building would be the early part of the 20th century.

Below and in line with House 1 is a threshing floor and attached barn.

*Figure 3. Aerial photograph of Rietfontein, being a section of photographic map 3119 AC (Courtesy Chief Directorate: Surveys and Land Information).*
On the other side of the fence line, running to the east of House 1, are three more dwellings, another threshing floor and a stone kraal. This fence seems only to date from 1976, when Grasberg was subdivided, but the presence of two threshing floors indicates that at some time two separate groups of people may have lived at this place.

Figure 5. House 2.
House 2 (Fig. 5) is situated to the east of the fence and above (north of) the road, and Houses 3 and 4 are below the road and further to the east (Figs 6 and 7). They all appear to be of similar age, having factory-made door frames, etc. However, House 2 was found to have one of the door sills made of cedarwood, indicating that the frame was later replaced but the wooden beam at the bottom that was built into the wall was left in situ. The positioning of House 2 in relation to the spring (Fig. 8) and the other outbuildings leads one to believe that these are the earliest structures and formed the nucleus of the farm. During my two brief visits to the farm, no visible traces of any more dwellings were seen.

Figure 6. House 3.

Figure 7. House 4 differs from the other buildings in that it is partly constructed of mud brick.
Final observations

What is evident is that compared to other houses in the Onder-Bokkeveld those on Rietfontein are of a simpler design, being narrow two or three room long-houses, leading one to assume that the people who lived there were not as wealthy. The main interest of this farm is that throughout its existence it has not been the main residence of its owner and therefore demonstrates what types of buildings were occupied by the less affluent members of the colonial farming class.

A graveyard on the property contains, as far as could be determined, 20 interments. Some are only mounds, some have headstones with inscriptions, and a few headstones just show initials. Of those with inscriptions (6), all are Mosterts or people married into this family. The dates of birth range from the 1870s to 1938, and of death 1930 to 1940. This is not to say that no Mosterts were buried at earlier dates but that there were no inscriptions. None of the deceased can be found in genealogical sources, such as Heese and Lombard, but one can assume that these are all members of the family of the original Johannes or Eduard Mostert. It is quite possible that some members of the Mostert family never left the farm after its registration to the Nels, but continued as bywoners.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks for the hospitality of Ernst and Mandy Kotze, owners of Grasberg/Rietfontein. Val Taylor, Jenny Viotti, Mariette and Willem van Wyk and Willem Strydom accompanied the author to the farm and made useful suggestions and Antonia Malan skilfully commented on the text.

References

The Liesbeeck River: its importance and its problems in the early colonial period

Yvonne Brink

This article was first presented as a talk to the Archaeological Society in March 2008.

It is without a hint of nastiness that I tend to think of Holland as a little wet rag of a country which has had to constantly fight for its existence against adverse weather conditions and unpredictable onslaughts from the North Sea. Rather, this thought enhances my admiration for the hardy and determined nation which has achieved so much with so few natural resources. The Dutch were tough from the beginning. They are descendants of Batavian tribes who resolved to take on the challenges of nature rather than endure domination by the Roman Empire. So they settled in the Hol-land, which means Bog-land, rolled up their sleeves and proceeded to wrest habitable land from sand and water. George Masselman has described them as half-barbaric mudworkers, which I interpret as ‘workers’ who set about dealing with the ‘mud’. Looking down at Holland from a plane landing at Schiphol, Etienne van Heerden (2008) has described it as “a landscape where the human hand has left nothing untouched”. What those human hands achieved is amazing, because by the 17th century Holland had become one of the leading mercantile and cultural countries of Europe.

So, when the first Dutch colonists arrived at the Cape they were probably not too disconcerted at having to wade through the cold waters of Table Bay to stand wet and bedraggled on the sand. Wet and bedraggled was what they were most of the time. Damp, mist, moisture, the sea – they were used to it all – and we can begin to understand why they built their fort as close to the sea as possible – right on the beach, where spring tides periodically flooded the entrance. They seemed to feel comfortable close to water and when they replaced their makeshift fort with the Castle, they tried very hard to surround it with a moat. Van Heerden, too, is aware of the togetherness of the Dutch and water. He says: “One walks around Amsterdam with the sea under one’s feet. The water table is just below one’s living room floor. All day long and all night long one feels slightly wet.”

Rivers and streams were obviously important to them. Rather optimistically they named one Cape waterway, seemingly deserving of the title ‘river’, the Amstel – Amsterdam’s river – and settled the first free burghers along its banks in Rondebosch. I have not yet been able to discover when the name was abandoned, but they must very soon have realised that the Liesbeeck was no Amstel. In fact, by Dutch standards, it is not even a river at all. This little waterway turned out to be no more than a “beek”, which, according to Van Dale’s dictionary, is “a narrow stream, shallow enough for wading across in its entirety”. With “lies” meaning reeds, which can include a variety of species, they renamed it more appropriately. In Holland, a river is deep and wide and is formed by the convergence of a number of “beeken”. So not only would it be interesting to know when the name changed from Amstel to Liesbeeck, but also when the name Liesbeeck became the tautological ‘Liesbeeck River’, which literally translates as Reedstream River. This probably occurred during the British period. Capetonians are not aware of the tautology: for us the status of the Liesbeeck remains that of a river, and it is our River, not Amsterdam’s.

Problems and issues

Although the free burgher experiment was meant to solve the problem of insufficient food production at the Cape, it also introduced the Company to new problems. The first grants were
issued to nine free burghers who elected to farm in two groups, calling their land *De Hollantsche Thuyrn*, and *Groenevelt*. There is still a Groenevelt Road in Rondebosch.

From 1657 onwards more burghers asked for their papers releasing them from Company service and the Company soon discovered that what can be smoothly drawn on paper is often less smoothly transferred to the ground (Fig. 1). Land grants introduce friction of all sorts into a variety of relationships, chiefly because people are rarely satisfied with what they have. The first free burghers soon complained about their land being too barren and stony and asked for the boundaries to be shifted. Within a few months the grants had to be amended at least twice, and this was only the beginning. From then on farmers frequently requested extensions to their land and often encroached on their neighbours’ property. Margaret Cairns has said that most free burghers thought nothing of shifting boundary markers for their own benefit.

In 1693 the Liesbeeck free burghers lodged a major complaint about difficulties in getting their grain ground as all the established corn mills were in Table Valley. They asked to establish their own mill on the River. A piece of land measuring over 29 morgen, called *Molenvliet*, was duly selected and a mill erected on it. In his book on mills, James Walton describes this land as situated “in the Liesbeeck valley across the Durban Road, just west of the bridge over the river” (Walton 1974: 35).

Again, there were problems from the beginning. The burghers complained that bakers continued to buy meal from Stellenbosch instead of from the burgher mill and some farmers continued to send their grain to other mills for grinding. Income from the mill was not enough to cover the high maintenance costs and by 1724 the burgher mill was in total disrepair. The burghers asked for a new mill as even the foundations of the old one were falling apart. A VOC survey showed that no land in that area was suitable for building as the soil was too boggy and waterlogged. The *Molenvliet* mill was closed down and the land and buildings were sold to other farmers.
In 1768 Molenvliet belonged to Jan Willem Wilkens, who had a set-to with his neighbour, Cornelis de Waal. The latter complained that Wilkens had unilaterally annexed the land between the two farms. De Waal maintained that this land was his and requested that a judicial commission settle the dispute, which it was unable to do. De Waal then requested that his land be resurveyed, that new title deeds be issued, and that both parties agree to the surveyor’s findings. Wilkens responded by submitting papers of his farm, Molenvliet, likewise requesting new title deeds. All of this meant a lot of extra work for scribes in the Deeds Office, and bear in mind that everything was handwritten with a primitive nib that required frequent dipping into an inkwell.

This is just one example of the kind of fights and arguments the Company had to deal with and its task was not always easy, not least because some farm names were duplicated or very similar. For instance, in the Platteklip area there was also land called Molenvliet belonging to a P.J. De Wet. There was, as we shall see, an Oude Molen on the Liesbeeck, somewhere near the present Pinelands, and another at Stellenbosch. So, not getting confused when dealing with similarly named land was also one of the things the VOC had to watch for.

It was not only the VOC that had to deal with problems about land ownership. In 1795 the Cape was handed over to the British for safekeeping. In 1803 the British returned it to the Batavian Republic, but in 1806 the British decided they would like to have the Cape for themselves and so they took it by force. Looking at history at this sort of scale, as we generally do, obscures the affects that big events have on individual lives. I have often wondered about how these many administrative changes in such a short period impacted on the everyday lives of colonists, and my search for information about the Liesbeeck has given me a few glimpses into the inconveniences both colonists and administrators encountered as a result of the changes. This points towards a region worthy of further study.

In July, 1805, for example, portions of land between farms on the Liesbeeck were sold to farmers for the benefit of a fund which had been set up for improving agriculture and the breed of cattle. Lourens Pieter Cloete purchased two of these plots. A few months later he requested a small addition of land adjacent to his lots, but it seems that in the process of transition this request was mislaid and he had to go to the trouble of reapplying for the land in 1806.

Much the same thing happened to Cornelis Cruywagen, who bought one lot in 1805 and requested an extension in November of that year. When nothing came of his request, the matter was referred to the Inspector of Lands who informed him that because of “the surrender” (i.e. to the British at Blaauwberg) he would have to reapply in 1806. Although Alexander Van Breda’s request regarding his farm Boshof does not pertain directly to the Liesbeeck, it is interesting because the reply he received can only be illustrative of the irritations many farmers must have experienced during the times of administrative instability. The authorities simply informed Van Breda that he would have to wait, as they had more important matters to attend to.

These are just snippets of information picked up from Leibbrandt’s Précis of the Cape Archives and other sources, but they raise interesting questions begging for answers: ‘Fund of the Commission for Improving Agriculture and the Breed of Cattle’; an ‘Inspector of Lands’ – this does not sound like the VOC period. Do such institutions point towards improvements instigated during the period of the Batavian Republic? It is well known that Commissioner De Mist was appalled by the poor state of administration the VOC had left him to sort out.

Even this very cursory search for information about the Liesbeeck River has led me to realise that the period from 1795 until 1806 (and at least a few years after) must have been a rather crazy time for ordinary citizens at the Cape. Problems with land grants give us some idea of what was going on.
Towards the end of VOC rule some farmers (including some of the Liesbeeck landowners) had become wealthy. Juriaan de Vries owned a farm called De Oude Windmolen which must have been substantial as in a document from the British period in 1806 it is referred to as “the Estate”. This might have been the Pinelands Oude Molen. It may be possible to find out whether or not this is so. In 1750 Cornelis de Waal owned Valkenburg. Wilkens of Molenvliet fame, too, was doing well. There were, however, Liesbeeck River farmers, who had to continually struggle against poverty. Andries Daniel Grové seemed to find it impossible to make his land work for him. Eventually he was forced “to sell everything and live in the veld”. Having been promised a piece of land along the Kromboom River, he wrote requesting that this land be granted in freehold. One wonders what happened to him and whether perhaps he was one of the ‘lazy, drunken louts’ the Company so often complained about to ‘the Masters’ in Holland.

On the other hand, the Company frequently did not treat its retired servants very well either, as witness the woes of former junior merchant Johannes Swellengrebel. Upon requesting his discharge in 1716, Johannes was ordered by the Fiscal, acting on orders from the VOC, to sell his garden plot on the Liesbeeck, even though he had been unable to get a fair price for it. Two years previously he had been forced to sell his lands in Tygerberg. This after having remained in service for 13 years beyond his contract. Tantalisingly, reasons for his being forced to sell are not given.
The VOC’s main problem had to do with its relationship with the indigenous Khoe herders. Van Riebeeck had received explicit instructions to locate the best lands and pastures and then to map them in order to “show possession”. But the lands and pastures on the Liesbeeck had been exploited for centuries by Khoe herders who were obviously not happy to relinquish them. The Liesbeeck valley thus became an early area of contention, discussed by Daniel Sleigh (1993) in detail in his book on the VOC outposts.

In order to protect the free burgher farmers a line of small, manned redoubts was erected stretching from the Paradise forest all along the eastern bank of the Liesbeeck to its junction with the Salt River. A thick and thorny hedge was established between the redoubts. The largest redoubt was named Coornhoop and was situated midway between one of the first land grants (Hollantsche Thuyn) and a neighbouring farm. Business premises now occupy the site, although the name Coornhoop has been preserved and the nests in the old fowl runs are still there. This redoubt, along with the smaller Ruiterwacht I and II, were the closest to the part of the Liesbeeck that runs through Observatory. Soldiers stationed in these forts had to ensure that no Khoe people visited the free burgher farms or houses. What the Company feared most was cattle theft and private cattle trading between settlers and Khoekhoe and the feeling was that social mixing would lead to this. Sleigh (1993) explains the functions of the redoubts and how the Company dealt with Khoe issues in detail.

**Women**

Of course, for every man on the Liesbeeck, there was probably at least one woman too, but of them we hear very little. One exception was Catharina Ustincx who, as a feisty 21-year-old widow, came to the Cape all on her own from Lübeck in Germany. In September 1662 she married the free burgher Hans Ras, who had a farm on the Liesbeeck. This 20 morgen of land was one of the earliest grants and had been first transferred to Jakob Cloete in 1657. He was the great-grandfather of Hendrik Cloete of Groot Constantia.

Catharina, or Trijn, as she was more generally known, proved herself to be an excellent farmer, who was given acclaim by no less a person than Commissioner van Rheede in 1685. She was also rather a wild character and Van Rheede described her children as resembling ‘Brazilian cannibals’ (McKinnon 2004: 108). Her story has been told by both Celestine Pretorius (1998) and June McKinnon.

Trijn’s new husband Hans was no sissy either, as while returning to the Liesbeeck from their wedding ceremony in the Castle he got involved in a fight with the driver of another wagon which was trying to overtake him, and was badly stabbed several times. (This was probably the first case of road-rage in South Africa.) Hans was saved from death by his friend Herman Remajenne, himself a roughneck unbefriended by Van Riebeeck. As one of the leading lights in a petition of complaint to the Commander in 1660, Remajenne was threatened with banishment to Mauritius if he did not behave properly in future. McKinnon says that Remajenne did indeed do a few stints on Mauritius.

Although my sympathy lies with the free burghers who were on the whole much maligned by the VOC officials, one has to realise that the authorities had some very rough types to deal with. Trijn nursed her husband back to health and they had four children on their farm which straddled the Liesbeeck. It was Hans’s job to maintain a bridge over it. In 1671 Hans was attacked by a lion while out hunting and died from his wounds soon after.

Trijn married again the following year. Judging from his probate inventory, Francois Champelaer, husband number three, was a struggler, but he did at least help her to run the farm. A year later in 1673, he went hunting with seven other burghers and none of them were seen or heard from again. Trijn married her fourth husband, Laurens Cornelissen, the same year. It is
not clear whether they continued living on the Liesbeeck or whether they moved to town where Laurens had a small house. I would opt for the farm, though, as they had to keep it running and the town house was pulled down in 1676 because it was too close to the Castle. Here the story becomes really weird, because Lourens, too, died in an accident: he was trampled to death by an elephant while out hunting hippo.

Trijn’s connection to the Liesbeeck was broken after Laurens’s death. According to McKinnon, Laurens was an incompetent farmer and a bad businessman. At his death the farm measured only 11 morgen 400 square yards (which should surely be square roods). McKinnon’s account of how Trijn lost the property on the Liesbeeck is not clear, and neither is her referencing. But it seems that Simon van der Stel granted Trijn a piece of land on which to farm and build a house. She named it Zwaaneweide It later became Steenberg, which is now a well known hotel and golf course. Here Trijn married her fifth husband who, it seems had been her knecht, or foreman. She did not outlive this one and died in 1708 aged 66. According to both sources, there were stories about how Trijn used to ride her horse furiously, bare-back and with legs astraddle, her hair streaming out wildly behind her. She must have been one of the characters of the Liesbeeck.

**Figure 3. Windmills in Salt River (version of Johannes Schumacher panorama, 1763, engraved by Tringham and published by Scheneider; detail from Vergunst 200:76-77).**

**Mills**

With bread being the ultimate in staple foods – of which there always seemed to be a shortage at the Cape during early VOC times - milling was an important business. By the time the burgher’s mill on the Liesbeeck was constructed several mills had already been established along mountain rivulets in Table Valley. In order to work efficiently, though, water mills need a constant supply of water and a good, steady stream. With wind probably being a more reliable resource than water on our Peninsula, you might be wondering why the VOC did not rather make use of windmills. Well, actually the Company did build windmills, or tower mills, as they were called, besides water mills. But windmill construction is more complicated than water mills and the local ones were crudely built and did not last. In 1717 specialist builders and materials were sent out from Holland and by February 1718 a mill, later known as Oude Molen, was completed. According to Walton it stood “between the present Pinelands station and the Black River”. Several similar tower mills were later built along the Liesbeeck and Black Rivers. One of these became known as the Clapperton Mill. It was named after an owner in
1855, but research by Margaret Cairns shows it must have existed in 1773, when the land was described as follows: “het oude land op Raapenberg en Liesbeeck bij de windmolen”, and the accompanying plan shows the windmill. When Clapperton sold the land in 1879 it was described as being “on the east side of the Liesbeeck River, being part of the place Raapenberg and Liesbeeck”.

All in all, the Dutch tower mill builders left a whole string of mills in the vicinity of the Liesbeeck stretching from Mowbray to Salt River (Figs 2 and 3). Many were illustrated by various artists and some of these works are reproduced in James Walton’s wonderful book on mills. Tower mills also appeared in other areas and we still have with us the well known Mostert’s Mill in Mowbray and the lesser-known, crippled little Onze Molen in Durbanville that has its own rather sad story. There seems to have been a revival of water mills along the Liesbeeck during the British period, the Josephine Mill being the most well known. Walton, once again, produced a superb book on this mill, in collaboration with Margaret Cairns (Walton 1978).

**Brewing**

The Liesbeeck also had a role to play in brewing at the Cape. In 1695 the VOC sent out a brewer, Rutgert Mensink. He was granted land above the Liesbeeck called Papenboom which, the brewer said, had the finest possible water for brewing. Walton and Cairns trace some of the owners until it became the property of Anders Ohlsson in 1881, by which time the name had changed to Anneberg.

Mensink might have been a good brewer, but he was also a problematic troublemaker and not the VOC’s favourite person. Nigel Penn tells the story in his Rogues, Rebels and Runaways (1999). The chapter is titled “The fatal passion of brewer Mensink: Sex, beer and politics in a Cape family, 1694-1722”. This is recommended reading as it gives an excellent idea of how the VOC often had to deal with not the most savoury of characters at the Cape, and some of these were connected to the Liesbeeck through land and property.

**Houses**

I cannot end without just one observation about Cape colonial houses in general. We need to think about how extremely ‘not-Dutch’ the area along the Liesbeeck must have been for the settlers. Boggy and half-familiar along the banks it might have been, but just a few square roods away there was land for the taking – real land, and plenty of it, not the very precious, manufactured Dutch soil wrested from the sea. In this geographical context it was surely unlikely that the farmers would continue to build houses like those in Holland. There would have been no point in building a poky, four-storeyed Dutch dwelling on a 20 morgen farm stretching away into the fynbos. There was no need to build up into the air when there was so much space on the ground – space enough for a large voorhuis, a kitchen and several other rooms. It was inevitable that the dwellings at the Cape would become ‘not-Dutch’, like the land itself.

**Conclusion**

My ‘research’ on this topic has really amounted to little more than casual and rather random reading, but I have found it quite fascinating. First, because it has made me realise that from very early on an area along the Liesbeek became an important area of activity and a node of connection affecting a number of aspects of colonial life at the Cape. Second, because of the many questions which need answering and issues which need to be properly investigated. As far as I am aware, no specific study on this important area of the early colony exists, yet there is a lot that needs sorting out and collating.
Studying the developments along the Liesbeeck opens up a number of avenues for further research. For one thing, it is the place where the free burgher enterprise was initiated and this in itself introduced the VOC to new kinds of problems that it would be destined to deal with for the rest of its rule, not least of which were issues to do with Khoi/VOC relationships. Proper research would mean following up on shreds of information about people and places and their possessions gathered from here, there and everywhere, making connections, consolidating information and putting it all neatly together in order to make sense of it. It would involve digging up bits and pieces from the mound of information buried in historical documents and then practising a different kind of cross-mending. This is partly what excavation in historical archaeology is about.

The following are examples of questions which remain unanswered. There appear to have been three different types of grant along the Liesbeeck – farms, gardens and plots. What, precisely, are the differences between them? Who was entitled to which type of property? Why, and under what circumstances, were some farmers forced to sell their land, even when they could not get a fair price? And, of course, what were the consequences for the farmers of take-overs by the Batavian Republic and the British? Can we find out when the name of the river changed from Amstel to Liesbeeck – and when the Liesbeeck became, once again, a river? Is it possible to precisely locate some of the early windmills illustrated by Walton? Very importantly: how, in the longer run, did colonial occupation affect indigenous lives and identities in the Liesbeeck region?

References

Doornboom in Heidelberg, saved at last

Hans Fransen

The article by the late André Pretorius on the house Doornboom in Heidelberg that appeared in VASSA Journal No.12 of December 2004, shortly before his death, was simply one of the most definitive ever published by us. It was also one of the most timely, for at the time it looked as if the house would not survive another winter. Although another VASSA member, Joanna Marx, then working for SAHRA, had reported on it a few years earlier, and despite the efforts of the then owner, Rev. Willie Fourie, plans for its restoration had come to nothing.

When I personally first came upon the sadly run-down house, I could immediately see it was of considerable age. In a neatly laid-out village like Heidelberg (1855), the houses initially all stood lined up along the street boundary, leaving the erven behind uncluttered for maximum cultivation. The Auld House, as it was locally known, stood diagonally on its erf, which could only mean that it pre-dated the foundation of the town itself.

As André Pretorius’s research also shows, the house, or at least its nucleus, was must have been the one in which Louis Fourie – son of Huguenot settler Fleury – lived from about 1728 on the farm Doornboom, close to the ford across the Duivenhoks River on the great East wagon road. This makes it one of the oldest surviving dwellings in the entire Cape (the only other serious contenders are the Schreuderhuis and one or two others in Stellenbosch; the Posthuys in Muizenberg is now thought to date from the 1740s).

André still had the satisfaction to report that in 2004 Doornboom – or Fourie House, or the Auld House – was bought by a local triumvirate, Henk Rall, Jurie Uys and Jan Geldenhuys, to establish a trust and have the building restored, mostly out of their own pockets. This has now been completed and, as I put it in an article in Die Burger, die skuinshuisie on the corner of Fourie and Rall Streets, until not so long ago regarded as a “kasarm” (eyesore) by its neighbours, had become Heidelberg’s chief monument.

Its restoration was done in a somewhat unorthodox fashion, without an architect and with the building itself as its own chief evidence. Several modern lean-to’s were removed, and although several walls had collapsed during several severe Cape downpours, no bricks were used to rebuild them, but Jill Hogan from McGregor was called in to use her own method of “cob” walling which helped to retain the “pioneering” look of the old building. Where necessary, old timber was recycled to fashion doors, and the corrugated iron roof was replaced by thatch. That its roof-ends were given neither straight gables nor half hips but with the thatch slightly projecting, and that the “ears” of the window lintels were left exposed, were details that have been criticized (by Mike Visser and Gawie Fagan respectively).

But no-one can deny that, thanks to the vision of three locals, Doornboom once again lives up fully to its one-time name, the Auld House. A “Friends of the Fourie House” society was formed, whereby the undersigned was among the proud initiators, and on Heritage Day last year it was officially (re)opened. Since then the grounds, too, have been cleaned up and a splendid rose garden installed, looking out over the water furrow that still flows across the grounds, with a view towards the Duivenhoks River a few hundred yards further down.
One matter that remains unresolved is what to do with the house. It would make an ideal little restaurant, antique shop or conference venue – or all three in one. Profit plays no role here, but it would be a fitting reward for the selfless initiative of the three locals and the assistance of several others if the Fourie House could make a contribution to life in the charming but rather unexciting little town along the N2.
The Namaqualand stockpost

Lita Webley

My interest in the indigenous settlement of Namaqualand began in 1981 when I accompanied staff from the University of Stellenbosch to the Leliefontein Communal Reserve. I was amazed to discover that many of the inhabitants (descendants of the Namaqua Khoekhoen) were living in matjies houses, exhibiting a lifestyle which I thought had long since disappeared. I started with a number of ethno-archaeological projects based in Leliefontein, but later extending also to the Steinkopf and Richtersveld Communal Reserves (Fig. 1). Ethno-archaeology is concerned with studying the ethnographic present in order to understand the archaeological past. My concerns were mainly orientated toward pastoralist settlement studies, but I also recorded information on leatherwork, the slaughter of domestic stock and on hunting. This research resulted in a master’s thesis in 1984 and a doctoral thesis in 1992 on aspects of the archaeology and ethnography of Namaqualand.

This article is based on research in Leliefontein, Steinkopf and the Richtersveld Communal Reserves in Namaqualand from 1981-1987. Four separate field trips were undertaken in 1987 involving a total of eight weeks. A number of stockposts and settlements were visited and a total of 30 domestic units in Steinkopf and Leliefontein were mapped and photographed. I also visited a number of settlements while they were occupied and shortly after they were abandoned. A total of 32 formal interviews were conducted in Steinkopf and 46 interviews in Leliefontein.

The aims of research undertaken in 1987 were to:

(a) map the distribution of herder settlements in a number of different ecological zones in order to arrive at a set of criteria which would determine herder site location. This included recording the ‘pull’ of environmental factors such as water and pasture.

(b) undertake a comprehensive photographic, diagrammatic and descriptive account of these settlements while they are still in existence. The spatial arrangements of herder features such as huts and kraals were mapped and inhabitants’ perception of the use of domestic space recorded.

The research is predicated on the assumption that there is a direct historical link between these small stock farmers and the Namaqua Khoekhoen encountered in the 17th century.

Background to the Little Namaqua Khoekhoen

According to Elphick’s (1985) hypothetical model of Khoekhoen dispersal into southern Africa, the Khoikhoin, a pastoralist group speaking a click language, moved southward from a centre somewhere in northern Botswana some 2000 years ago. The Namaqua tribal ‘cluster’ moved west and settled in Namibia and Namaqualand. The Namaqua Khoekhoen are rarely mentioned in correspondence dating to the first 30 years of Dutch occupation at the Cape. However, by the late seventeenth century, the Namaqua were observed by travellers to be concentrated in the Kamiesberg Mountains, although they moved itinerantly, south to the Olifants River and north to the Orange River.

Early reports suggest that population numbers were small and the people very sparsely dispersed. The Commander of the Cape, Simon van der Stel, met with at least five Namaqua
kapteine (captains) while he was in the Kamiesberg in 1685 (Waterhouse 1932), suggesting that there were at least five kraals although we are not given the number of huts at each kraal.

However, extensive and illegal trade in livestock between the Dutch Trekboers and the Namaqua resulted in a rapid decline in stock numbers. Smallpox epidemics decimated as many as half the population (Elphick & Giliomee 1979). In 1779 Robert Gordon observed that captain Wildskut’s kraal was composed of nine huts and totalled only some 50 men, women and children. Apart from Wildskut, there were also four other Namaqua captains and the entire nation numbered 400 souls. A tribe of 400 people comprising five lineages means that each lineage numbered less than 100 people. Many Little Namaqua are reported to have fled across the Orange River to join family members in Great Namaqualand.

**Figure 1.** Namaqualand (www.namqualand.com).

**Background to Leliefontein**

In a bid to retain some of their grazing lands the Namaqua appealed to the church for assistance. The Reverend Bernard Shaw of the London Missionary Society established a mission at Leliefontein on the Kamiesberg in 1816 (Shaw 1970). The farm granted to Captain Wildskut in 1772 and the mission of Leliefontein formed the core of the Leliefontein Communal Reserve, granted a Ticket of Occupation in 1854. Shaw soon realised that in order to preach to his
congregation he would have to accompany them on their seasonal round. Wildskut and his followers followed a fairly regular transhumance pattern between Leliefontein (on the Kamiesberg) in summer and the Bethel in the Sandveld in winter. Other individuals moved briefly into the dry north-western area on the edge of Bushmanland called Norap. Shaw took over the authority of the chief and encouraged the community to take up agriculture and build permanent houses in villages in order to curtail their nomadic lifestyle.

Nineteenth century accounts record that the residents of Leliefontein moved down to the Bethel valley every winter and returned to the Lily Fountain station every spring. Shaw reported that: “There is not a sufficiency of grass for all (on the Kamiesberg) and here (in the Sandveld) there is sufficient room for their cattle, but in summer the fountain will not supply them with water” (Shaw, unpublished journals). When the main water sources dried up during the 1890s, Kharkams replaced Bethel as the winter outpost area. Many inhabitants, unable to survive on the reserve, became employed on the copper mines or worked as shepherds for white farmers on adjoining farms. Other communal reserves were later established at Steinkopf, Komaggas, Concordia and the Richtersveld.

Seasonal mobility

The Leliefontein Communal Reserve is 194 000 hectares in size. It is located in the central part of Namaqualand, straddling the Kamiesberg Mountains. The western part of the reserve lies in the Sandveld and the eastern section falls in Bushmanland. Leliefontein has the best lands and best springs of all the reserves. Although rainfall varies from west to east, the mission station of Leliefontein records an annual rainfall of 350 mm which is the highest in Namaqualand. The central mountainous zone reaches a height of 1 300 metres above sea level and snow is not unusual during winter.

The movement from Leliefontein to Bethelsklip involves a distance of 23 km and a vertical displacement of 1 000 metres. The distance from Leliefontein to Kharkams is 18 km and the difference in altitude is 1 100 metres.

The early historic period (pre-1824)

Information relating to the pre-1824 period is sparse. However, travellers such as Olaf Bergh in 1683 (Mossop 1931), Robert Gordon in 1779 (Raper & Boucher 1988) and John Barrow in 1801 (Barrow 1801 & 1804) all referred to a seasonal movement between the mountains and the plains due to the extreme weather conditions on the Kamiesberg during the winter months.

The historic period (1824-1900)

In this period livestock movements became regulated by the missionary and his Raad (Board) of corporals (korporale). They instituted a formal seasonal cycle between Bethelsklip and Leliefontein. The minutes of the Management Board of Leliefontein dating back to 1876, show that the missionary set the date for the general exodus. Various Baster families with large herds of livestock had settled in Leliefontein by 1853, they lived in Norap, the dry north-east. They moved into Bushmanland in summer, and according to van der Merwe (1945) they were responsible for digging the skeppute (wells) on the edges of a string of pans such as Bosluis, Bitterputs, Maan se Pan, etc. by 1884. The reserve boundaries were surveyed in 1854 but herders continued to cross the western borders into Bushmanland which remained Crown Land until the 1930s.

Contemporary period (1900-1985)

One of the aims of the research project was to document the herder movements of this period in order to establish whether they reflected in any way those of the earlier periods. During the
early 1980s herders followed a seasonal cycle between larger summer settlements (*stasies*) to winter stockpost localities (*veeposte*). However, in the last few decades movements have been restricted to within a 15 km radius of the various villages. The reason for the closing of the radius is the attractions of village life.

**The location of the stockpost**

During ethnographic field work the herders explained that between two to six families (consisting of brothers or father and sons) as well as friends settled together between 50 to 150 metres apart in a specific area during the winter months. This was so that the herder is close enough to have a visual line of sight to his neighbour, yet far enough apart to keep their respective herds separate. The preferred localities have been identified through intimate knowledge of the landscape and generations of use. The ideal combination of shelter, water, pasture, and so on, means that a certain area may be re-used every year. Oral sources suggest that certain families (i.e. lineages) lived in specific localities for generations, and herders often return to their same stockpost locality every year, depending naturally on the availability of pastures.

Theoretically, anyone may occupy a winter stockpost site; they do not ‘belong’ to anyone. In practice though livestock, especially goats, are reported to be creatures of habit and are very territorial. If someone else occupies your site, it is likely that your livestock would return to their old camp and become mixed up with the herd of the new occupant. Herders go to great lengths to prevent their herds from getting mixed up, hence the custom of keeping 100 metres apart. Herders are therefore prone to return to the same locality whenever pasture allows, but never on top of the previous camp. Premium sites are in short supply because they have to conform to specific requirements.

Herder sites are often arranged on one side of a valley with their back to the slope and the entrance facing east to north-east. The majority of people interviewed stated “you do not stand exposed”, and this view is repeated by Mussgnug (1995) with respect to the Richtersveld. All emphasised the importance of shelter during the cold, wet and windy winter months. Herders look for a little *kopje* (hill) or the lower slopes of a mountain to provide themselves, and more importantly their stock, with adequate protection. Further protection for the animals is naturally provided by the kraal, but the proximity of the hill takes the edge of the worst wind. A woody and vegetated area also provides additional shelter.

Other factors which are often not mentioned but are implicit in any choice, are the quality and quantity of the grazing nearby and the proximity to water in arid areas. Stockposts are rarely located within 100 metres of a major water source. This is because the livestock are attracted to water even if the herder is not present. Not only do they muddy the water source, but since they only need water every second day, more frequent watering will disrupt livestock management practices and make them impossible to control in dry seasons. In addition, children as well as livestock may drown in water sources. Drinking water is often transported considerable distances by donkey cart. Winter sites are often located close to a little spring for human needs.

**The layout of the stockpost**

This article concentrates on the components of the stock post at the winter outpost area (some examples of layout are illustrated in Figs 2 to 6). Here I shall discuss data obtained through field observations supplemented by discussions with older informants on the stockpost. Their contribution suggests that, with the exception of the kraals, settlements have changed little in the last 60 years. This is so, I submit, because they are uniquely adapted to the specific lifestyles enjoyed by the semi-sedentary pastoralists in Namaqualand.
The traditional Khoikhoin hut is a portable structure ideally suited to people who require a high degree of mobility. It consists of a lathe framework covered in mats made of reeds. The mats may be removed and together with the poles loaded onto a wagon (in the past oxen were used) within the space of a few hours. The erection of a hut takes about half a day. Huts are generally 3-4 metres in diameter and provide sleeping space for the nuclear family which may include up to 10 children. The height of the hut is about 1.5 metres in the centre. Each hut has two entrances although only one is used at a time, depending on the direction of the prevailing wind.

The average hut is comprised of a framework of 40 to 60 poles which have already been shaped into a semi-circle (for a detailed description, see Haacke 1982). They are tied together in a hemispherical shape. The ends of the poles are dug some 100 mm into the ground. Poles are difficult to obtain in a largely treeless landscape and therefore prior to the establishment of the eucalyptus plantation in the reserve, most people bought or traded for poles from the Orange River area. Poles may last up to 16 years if the herder does not move too often. Travelling shortens the life of the mat hut as the poles tend to snap off at the base and become shorter. The huts are covered by at least 12 mats. During the 1980s the majority of people in Leliefontein used a combination of mats and tarpaulin. Huts are generally weighed down by stones at their base.

The floor of the hut is first surfaced with a layer of clay, obtained from a clay hole or even the fine sand of an ant hill. Cattle or goat dung mixed to a paste with water is applied to the surface with a reed brush. The dung has to be re-applied every eight days. It is very common for a fire to be made in the hut, especially at night during the cold winter months. Although meant for warmth, food may also be cooked on it. The hearth is located in the middle of the hut, but close to the entrance (i.e. some 800 mm from the doorway).

The children sleep on the floor on skin blankets. Generally, the parents sleep on the bed, although in the past they too slept on the floor. According to informants they sleep on the right hand side close to the door, while the children sleep on the other side. There appears to be no sexual division of space in the hut, although older girls and boys generally do not sleep next to each other (Hoernlé 1913). The furniture in the average hut comprises a bed, a number of cardboard boxes or old suitcases which function as storage for food and clothes, a basin for washing, the wheat grindstones, a number of skins, etc. One informant recalled the practise of constructing a platform raised on four forked branches; it stands at the back of the hut and blankets are stored on it.

**The cooking shelter (kookskerm)**

Two types of cooking structures were identified; the *kookskerm* and the *kookhuis*. This article is concerned with the *skerm*, which is more commonly encountered at the stockpost. The kookhuis is generally found at more established village settlements.

The skerm may be described as a roughly circular arrangement of bushes enclosing a central hearth. Its functions are those of kitchen and general living area. Skerms may be attached to the hut but the majority are located from two to five metres away. The reason for this is the danger of fire spreading from the hearth in the skerm to the hut. Huts are highly combustible and there are many reports of their accidental destruction. Most skerms have two entrances at right angles to the prevailing wind. Only one entrance is used at a time, the other is closed with a tin sheet. The entrance of the skerm therefore often does not line up or face that of the hut entrance. In Leliefontein the kookskerm entrance faces the north-east in March and the east in August.
Skerms are constructed from specific plant species which are pulled out in the vicinity of the site. The bushes are piled about a metre high. Occasionally poles are planted around the base as support. There are several variations on this construction.

A few bush skerms have a base of stone walling. More rarely a herder may incorporate natural features as part of the kookskerm perimeter, for instance a tree or the natural boulders of the kopje. Skerms are more or less the same size as the huts, i.e. 3-4 metres in diameter. According to informants the reason for constructing open skerms at the stockpost is so that they may more easily keep an eye on their livestock. Herders are frequently observed to stand up in a skerm and look towards the kraal. The most important feature of the skerm is the central hearth on which most cooking activities take place. There are a variety of reasons why people prefer to cook in a separate area rather than in their hut. The first is that of the danger of making a large fire in the hut for fear of burning it down, cooking in an enclosed hut in summer can be extremely hot, which informants said was unhealthy; and cooking attracts flies which people try to keep out of their sleeping environment.

The hearth is about 500 to 800 mm in diameter. It is made of clay and its outer edge is either of stones or of the rim of a wagon wheel. The clay hearth with its stone edging is generally raised above the level of the kookskerm floor. The clay is firmly baked by building a large fire on top after completion. The skerm floor is swept regularly. The construction of the hearth is often related, I believe, to the presence of a woman at the stock posts. Although the older male shepherds may also construct them, the younger men seldom do.

The use of space in the skerm and kookhuis is the same and therefore there is a similar arrangement of furniture. Most people have a low wooden table along one side. On it are a tin containing the few pieces of cutlery (usually spoons and knives), a metal teapot, some tins containing sugar and tea, etc. A few enamel plates and mugs, and some 500 ml and 800 ml jam tins hanging from the n//a pole. There are several little wooden stools and a few plastic water bottles. Each skerm has a braai grid leaning against the bushes. A few rags are generally found drying on the skerm bushes. Skerms in which women are present are always very clean, but young men tend to be more relaxed about this.

Other elements associated with the kookskerm are the n//a pole, the ash heap and the wood pile.

The n//a pole

The n//a pole or poles (there are generally more than one) are two to three metre long forked branches which are inserted along the skerm perimeter and are frequently at the entrance. Certain wood species are selected for their strength as a variety of objects may be hung from them. The n//a pole, also called the haakstok (hanging stick), appears to be a multi-purpose storage device. Most commonly empty milk buckets and tins are hung from them.

The word n//a however, is associated with meat and some informants confirmed that it was used for this in the past. Meat was hung from the pole when fresh so that it could wind dry. Others maintained that a separate, larger pole was used (it has to be sturdy in order to support a sheep carcass), and that the meat was only hung from it immediately after slaughter to drain the blood. There appears to be some uncertainty therefore as to its origin. Finding a good n//a pole is apparently quite difficult, because of the absence of many big trees, and for this reason the n//a poles are always transported to the new site and are not left behind.

The ash heap

It is invariably closely associated with the skerm as it is here that the ash from the hearth is dumped every morning. In Leliefontein the ash heaps are invariably within five metres from the skerm. There is also some evidence to suggest that the more permanent the settlement, the
further the ash heap is located from the skerm. The reason, as I have suggested elsewhere, is related to the comparatively larger werf (the cleaned area around the structures) at these settlements (Webley 1986). A greater range of activities take place around the permanent structures requiring more space which means that rubbish has to be dumped further afield. There may be more than one ash heap at a stockpost. The ash heap is generally two square metres in size after an occupation of about six months. Larger ash heaps relate to longer occupations or repeated use of the same dump area. The ash heap serves as a general midden and the accumulated rubbish of the previous day is usually burnt every morning on the ash heap. The position of the ash heap relative to the kooskerm entrance does not appear to be related to any aesthetic feelings, in other words approximately 50% of ash heaps were visible to occupants sitting in the skerm. At more permanent settlements, people dig holes at the edge of their werf in which to dump the ash.

The wood pile

Since wood is used for the hearth in the skerm, wood piles are generally found adjoining the skerm, to the left or right of the entrance. Sometimes the area in which the wood is located is surrounded by a circle of stones. This serves to demarcate the area from the rest of the werf which is kept swept every day. The wood pile leaves a great deal of debris in the form of twigs and bark which, in the absence of a stone enclosure, is usually removed and burnt on the ash heap. Sometimes the wood is carried into the skerm and stored to one side so that the occupants do not have to repeatedly get up to replenish the fire.

The werf

The area around the hut-skerm complex, which is cleared of all vegetation and movable stones and is regularly swept, is called the werf. This practice is an attempt to keep insects and snakes away from the living area. A variety of activities take place on the werf, including the pegging of skins and the scraping of skins. The edge of the werf generally just touches on the ash heap.

Kraals

Although the historic accounts show the kraal to be the central feature in the Cape Khoekhoen settlements, the ethnographic accounts suggest quite the opposite for contemporary stockposts. The kraal is approximately 15-20 metres from the hut at the temporary stockpost and some 30 metres from the huts at the more permanent establishments. The reasons for this appear to be related to hygiene considerations and the smell. In the majority of cases at Leliefontein the kraals were located behind the hut and more rarely to the side. On a few occasions kraals may be situated in front of the hut. An examination of the stockposts shows that in the most cases the kraals are situated on the lower slopes of a rocky outcrop, a kopje or a larger hill. The reason for this is that livestock require adequate shelter from the elements in winter. Shelter is provided as much by the kraal as by the local topography. The Leliefontein area in particular experiences extremely cold winters with snow on the Kamiesberg not uncommon. The lambs and kids are especially vulnerable as they are born between May and September. For this reason, all herders whom I visited had kraals while at their winter stockposts.

Shelter is not the only reason for kraals. Herders reported that livestock are more inclined to trek (move) at night in the winter months, in search of pasture. They appear to be more tractable in summer when there is not much incentive to move at nights and they are reported to bunch together naturally. One major consideration for constructing kraals however, revolves around the milking of livestock during winter and spring. Kids and ewes are kept apart during the day and at night so that the ewes may be milked for human consumption. One way of doing this is to have a kraal. Since only one animal is milked at a time, the milking process is controlled with the aid of the kraal. In the evening the ewes are let into the kraal, and one lamb at a time is released from the lamb kraal. After suckling for a while from the mother, the ewe is milked by
the herder. This process is repeated until all the ewes that have kids, have been milked. The kids are then returned to the lamb kraal. The rest of the livestock are then herded into the kraal for the night. The next morning, they are let out and the kids are reunited with their mothers before the latter are milked again.

Ewes produce less milk as the season progresses and by November they are only milked in the mornings. The kids are thus able to go out to the veld with their mothers during the day and are only kraaled separately at night. The practice of keeping lambs and kids separate at night is especially important soon after birth when they may be easily trampled to death at night if left with the adult animals. The lamb kraal is more important than any other kraal and is generally built first. Several informants who have recently moved to a new site and have not had time to build a lamb kraal have complained to me that milking becomes extremely difficult and time consuming.

Kraals also afford livestock, especially the young, some protection from predators who are especially active during the winter months. Jackal and caracal, and in the past also leopard, can cause havoc in a herd. In summer, however, few people have kraals. The major reason for the construction of kraals at permanent settlements (in summer) is to keep livestock out of the wheat fields. Herders who moved into Bushmanland also reported that kraals were not necessary. Livestock generally stand out in the open, often against a nearby hillside. In the past it appears that they would stand on the werf at night, today only kids and lambs may be kept near the settlement unit.

Kraals are made from a variety of materials. Today herders use wire, poles, and bushes and occasionally stone. The lamb kraal is generally constructed from bushes which are piled fairly high to provide shelter. The kraal should not be too big as the lambs need warmth. Even fairly large numbers of young are herded into kraals of 2-3 square metres. These kraals are generally round. The main kraal is usually made of wire and is rectangular. Often bushes are piled against the fence to protect the stock from cold wind. Some estimates have previously been made on herd size relative to kraal size (Webley 1984) but it was not possible to obtain much new information on this topic.

In the past small stock kraals were constructed from bushes. The *raf* (literally rough) stock comprising the cattle, horses and donkeys were kraaled in a separate stone kraal. The stone kraal is described as a *voortydse ding* (something from an earlier time). These stone kraals are invariably located close to a rocky ridge for raw materials as well as shelter. Donkeys and cattle were herded together, but calves had their own stone kraal. Stone kraals cannot be used to house goats as they are very agile and climb over. The only exception to this which I have seen was the kraal constructed for goats at Noonams in Steinkopf, where the walls were 1.5 metres high. Stone kraals for cattle are much lower; they are usually less than a metre high.

It was difficult to obtain an estimate on the amount of time spent on building a stone kraal. This depends on how many other activities one is engaged in and the number of helpers. One informant maintained that they usually took more than a month of labour. Old stone kraals are generally circular and are rarely more than 8 metres in diameter, thus they are smaller than the average stock kraals. This probably relates, I believe, to an average cattle herd of 8-12 adults in the past.
Figure 2. Englebrecht family, Goeiemaskuil; 1986.
Figure 3. Cloete family, Khiribes, 1986.

Figure 4. Brand family, Khiribes; 1986.
Figure 5. Cloete family, Klein Nou Rivier, 1986.

Figure 6. Beukes family, Kleindikkopskraal, 1986.
Discussion

Arrangement of huts

We know from historic drawings and early accounts that the Khoekhoen kraals in the Western Cape consisted of numerous huts, arranged in a large circle with their entrances facing inward. Livestock, including cattle and sheep, were ‘kraaled’ in the centre of the circle. However, was this circular arrangement of huts the norm pre-contact across all pastoralist groups, or a phenomenon of the Western Cape Khoekhoen and the result of the perceived threat posed by the arrival of the Dutch in the 17th century?

An examination of historical drawings of Namaqua and Korana ‘kraals’ (Burchell 1953; Campbell 1815; Chapman 1971; Paterson in Forbes & Rourke 1980) appears to support Carstens’ claim that the circular residential pattern of the Cape Khoekhoen was the “function of habitat and expediency” and did not, in fact, occur among the Namaqua (1969:97).

He is of the opinion that “local groups tend to be small and discrete, even though this may be to their economic disadvantage” (Carstens 1969:100). Even when 50 or more huts are mentioned in one kraal, we are unsure whether they took on a circular pattern or were spread out among the hills and valleys. I have argued (Webley 1986) that the circular residential pattern cannot be a tolerable settlement arrangement for any length of time. If huts are arranged in a circle, they are unable to have an entrance facing the east (which is the preferred situation, at least in the 20th century), and the close proximity of the livestock to the huts creates danger for children and compromises hygiene.

Previous research (Webley 1982, 1986) has indicated that the basic unit of production in Namaqua society, at least during the 20th century, is the nuclear or extended family. It is the domestic group who owns the resources (i.e. livestock) and controls the means of production. As Hoernlé stated: “Each family acts independently of the rest, only their desire for social intercourse induces them to form a camp” (Carstens 1985: 27).

For some months of the year, several domestic groups may reside together to pool their productive resources, including labour. These groups are frequently called camps in pastoralist literature, so Hoernlé (Carstens et al. 1987:22) remarked on her journey through the Richtersveld, that “the huts are scattered about the kloof”. She termed them ‘werfs’, which are the equivalent of the stockposts described in this article.

Arthur (2008: 205) has cited “the focus on deeply stratified archaeological deposits in caves and coastal middens at the expense of open landscape surveys” and “the lack of research into eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Khoekhoen” as the reason why archaeologists have failed to find the large circular encampments reported in the 17th century literature. However, I would argue, that the reason that archaeologists have not recovered the circular arrangement of huts in the archaeological record is because they were not very common. The more common arrangement, pre-contact, would have been loose groupings of huts scattered in a settlement area.

Nama poles and kraals

The other element of the stockpost for which historic antecedents exist is the wooden storage pole. Daniell’s illustration entitled “A Korah Hottentot Village on the left bank of the Orange River” (c. 1804-05) shows the n/la pole with wooden milk bambus in front of the mat house.

One issue which needs further consideration is that of stone kraals. While the herders in the reserves called them a voortydse ding (something from earlier times), it is important to question
whether they had been taught to build stone kraals while employed on Trekboer farms, or had brought this tradition with them.

The origins of the skerm

There is very little historic information on the origins of the skerm. It is never mentioned in the early literature, but there are at least two 19th century illustrations of a mat arranged in a semi-circle enclosing a cooking fire. The one is a lithograph by Alexander and shows a Namaqua settlement on the Orange River c. 1838. The other is a painting of a Namaqua settlement by Charles Bell c. 1850. I have shown that the skerm dates to at least the mid-19th century. What are the historical antecedents for the skerm? If the origins of the skerm date to the 19th century, what are the reasons behind this?
Historically, the women owned the huts and were considered to be the head of the house. With respect to the division of space within the hut itself, Hahn (1971:19) has shown that the woman occupied the right side of the house and the right side of the husband. She also slept closer to the east, or chief door. Archer (1994) has proposed that the location of the ash heap also has gender implications. It is the woman who disposes of the ash, and she is considered to “own” the ash heap. If another stockpost is established nearby, the inhabitants will not use her ash heap, but make their own.

As a result of his research in Steinkopf during the 1960s, Carstens (1966) suggested that the two separate structures at the stockpost reflected greater sexual division in Namaqua society. He observed men discussing political issues in the mat hut (private domain) while women prepared food in the skerm (public domain). He proposed that the separation of the hearth from the living area during the nineteenth century may be linked to the rising authority of the men because of their involvement in agriculture and transport riding.

No such division between men and women, however, was observed in Leliefontein or the Richtersveld. In fact, all forms of entertainment, including all-night beer parties involving both sexes, take place in the skerm, not in the hut. It is quite uncommon for strangers to be invited into the mat house, which is considered private space.

There are numerous accounts of Dutch Trekboers in Namaqualand living in mat houses, like those of their Khoekhoen employees. In fact, this was quite common among white farmers in Namaqualand right up until the 1940s. Moreover, these settlements all had separate cooking shelters (Conradie 1909). An alternative view to Carstens’ hypothesis that the skerm relates to sexual division of space, derives from research undertaken by Patricia Scott and James Deetz (1990) on the changing view of domestic space amongst British settlers in the Eastern Cape. The emergence of a kitchen, separate from the main dwelling house, arose from a desire to escape flies, the stifling heat of the fire in the summer, but more importantly, the desire to maintain both a social and physical separation between employer and employee. It seems likely that the settlers’ employees emulated this settlement arrangement when they returned to their homes in the reserves.

It is possible, therefore, that the emergence of a separate cooking shelter (or skerm) during the nineteenth century constitutes a Namaqua adaptation of a European trend, and not a pre-colonial settlement design.

References


