
Foreword

Dr Keith Meintjes

I first read *Frontier Family* by Johannes Meintjes before I was a teenager, in the late 1950s.

This is Johannes' story of his family and the place where he grew up, Grootzeekoegat, a farm near Molteno in the Eastern Cape. This book, and his later semi-autobiographical novel, *Manor House* are not only first-hand descriptions, but also evoke the fascination and affection Johannes and others had for the place.

Later on, I became much more familiar with Johannes and his work as an artist and sculptor, and as an author and historian. Certainly, in my estimation, the man was a genius.

He died in 1980 and his wife, Ronell, moved to Graaff-Reinet. They had no children. The 'manor house' at Grootzeekoegat was abandoned and fell into disrepair. The roof was not maintained, and the elements began to dissolve the walls made of mud and cow dung. The house was stripped of its timber, and became quite uninhabitable.

I first visited Grootzeekoegat in late 2011, with my sister. We had both become students of Johannes and his work. The house was a ruin, but the experience of being there was unforgettable. When we returned a few years later, it was to find access had been fenced off. Luckily, a passing farmer had keys to the gate, and let us in. Time had not been kind to the ruin.

There was born the idea of suggesting to the Vernacular Architecture Society of South Africa (VASSA) a project to document Grootzeekoegat. I am very grateful that Antonia Malan took on that idea, and found a capable project manager in Lita Webley. This work is the outcome of that project. It includes not only Grootzeekoegat, but also the Meintjes Dorphuis in Molteno and the Keyter family compound in Riversdale, where Johannes was born.

I believe this report will prove to be a significant contribution to South African micro-history that would otherwise have been lost. We are indeed fortunate to have not only VASSA's documentation of the buildings, but also the many contemporaneous accounts and images of these places created by Johannes and others.

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Self-portrait of Johannes Meintjes, 1956.

