

*Farm House, Irene, circa 1918. Built by Nellmapius, circa 1889.  
Architect: De Zwaan. View from the West.*



*Farm House. View from the North.*

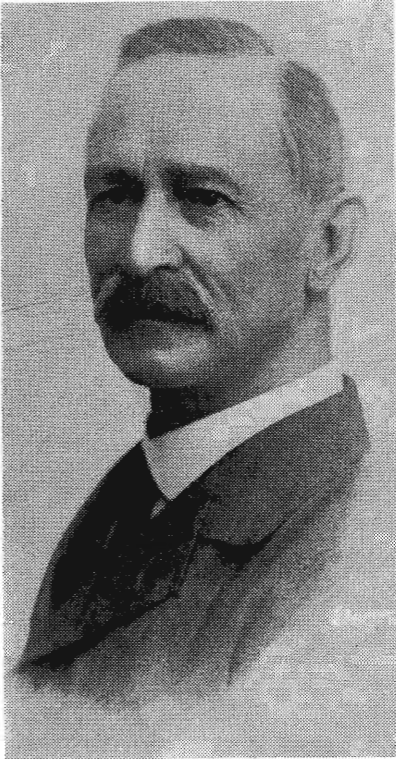


*Lower Barn, Irene Estate. Built by Nellmapius.*

into three parts and he named the central portion after his daughter who was about two years old at the time. The word Irene is derived from a Greek word meaning Peace.

Irene Violet Nellmapius was born on 21st May, 1887; her mother was Johanna Cornelia (Hoffman). Irene married Mr. Hendrik Jacobus Smit, a Johannesburg stockbroker, in 1910. After Mr. Smit retired they farmed on the well-known farm Moorddrift near Potgietersrus where Irene lived until she was unfortunately killed in a motor accident on 30th January, 1961. Her two sons now farm on Moorddrift. She used to pronounce her name with three syllables: Ireenee.

A. H. Nellmapius used to entertain lavishly at Irene and amongst his guests were many well-known personalities including President Kruger. He built a fine farmhouse designed by the architect de Zwaan and he erected impressive stables and a dairy which are in good condition to this day. He employed experts in every field; his stock expert and veterinary surgeon was Dr. Arnold Theiler who became famous for his work on rinderpest and the establishment of the Onderstepoort Research Institute and Veterinary College. Nellmapius was engaged in laying out a large garden with the



*Johannes Albertus van der Byl*  
1856–1943

assistance of his manager, a German horticulturalist named Fuchs, when he died on 27th July, 1893. It is believed that he spent £80,000 in developing his property at Irene which was known as the Irene Estate and which was sold out of his estate after his death.

### **J. A. VAN DER BYL**

**H**AVING been told by Sir Percy FitzPatrick that the Irene Estate was for sale Johannes Albertus van der Byl came up from the Cape to see it in 1895 and, having inspected it, decided to buy it. When he brought his family to Irene his son, Alexander Henry, was eight years old. They came from Nachwacht near Bredasdorp where J. A. van der Byl had been responsible for preserving the very rare Bontebok from extinction. At Irene he proceeded to build up a dairy herd and set about improving the property by constructing a number of water furrows and dams and by developing the limeworks. He also kept ostriches and Wildebeest and



*Hack's Store before it was demolished in 1952.  
From a painting by Monica van der Byl (born Rissik).*

several species of antelope and gamebirds. On one occasion a fierce old Wildebeest bull attacked him and was savaging him on the ground when Mrs. van der Byl rushed up and kept the enraged beast at bay by rapidly opening and closing her sunshade in its face while a visiting friend, Alec Cloete, a brother of "Kaffir" Cloete, pulled Mr. van der Byl to safety.

Louis Joel Hack came to Irene in 1898 and established Hack's Stores near to the railway station. He and his family have provided Irene's shopping facilities for the last 65 years. Louis Hack lived in the old house on Plot No. 1 at the crossroads until he died in 1943; the house has since been rebuilt. David Hack is now in charge of the business on the site of the old shop, but in buildings which were rebuilt in 1952.

### **THE ANGLO-BOER WAR**

**T**HE advent of the war of 1899-1902 put a stop to development. The battle for Pretoria in June 1900, which was hardly a battle at all, began with a skirmish near Irene, whereupon Lord Roberts decided to outflank the main defences to the South of Pretoria by following a route roughly along the Hennops River and then entering Pretoria from the West. After



*LOUIS JOEL HACK*  
1873-1943  
*Founder of Hack's Stores Ltd.,  
Irene.*

the capture of Pretoria one of the regiments which were encamped at Irene was the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. A strong point was constructed on Limeworks Hill, and a fort was built on top of Cornwall Hill, so named after the regiment. These Cornishmen were excellent stone-workers and the fort still stands having been constructed with rough-hewn chert blocks without the use of mortar. Four Casuarina trees planted at the Officers' Mess are still growing on the slope to the East of Irene Station. When Deneys Reitz was on commando with the Boers they once raided the British lines near Pretoria and, despite the investment of the area, crossed the railway line at Irene.

A Burghers' Refugee Camp (Concentration Camp) of about 5,000 people was sited at Irene on both sides of the river, and relics are still to be found in these areas. The hospital was sited where the hotel site now is and the cemetery is opposite the Irene School. Many people unfortunately

died in the camp due to the spreading of disease. Among those who worked hard for the improvement of conditions was Johanna van Warmelo and another was Major Bruce after whom the street on which the school stands was named. There were also some casualties amongst the soldiers, one of whom was killed when he walked up to one of Mr. van der Byl's Sable Antelope thinking it was tame; alas its sharp horns went through him like a sword! One of the problems in the camp had been the lack of pure water, but a pure supply was found and then there was much less sickness.

## **AFTER THE WAR**

**A**FTER the peace Mr. van der Byl set about rehabilitating the area and in 1902 a Police Station was established and Irene Township was laid out with 337 one-acre erven. Development started at the Southern end near the railway station; the station was at the end of Nellmapius Drive which was then known as Station Road, but the name was recently changed as the station had been moved further to the North in the 1930's. The new township's opening was advertised in the very first issue of the Rand Daily Mail on 21st September, 1902, and it was described as the Parktown of Pretoria!

As these notes may assist the teachers at the Irene School to instruct the children in local history, it is only right that the school should be mentioned. It was founded in 1904 and began in the house now known as The Wedge in Pioneer Road before being moved to its present site. The wood and iron film room used to be the Police Sergeant's house before it was moved to its present position from where the playing fields now are. The Principal, Mr. R. E. Schormann, who was appointed principal in 1927, has served the pupils, the school and the community uninterruptedly and with distinction as principal for no less than 36 years. When he retires at the end of 1963 he will leave an unrivalled record in the part he has played in the history of Irene.

In the same year as the school was founded, 1904, the Irene Homes, under the charge of the Sisters of St. Mary the Virgin, Wantage, came to Irene and occupied some forty erven on the West side of the township. Their first building was St. Annes and the main building was completed in 1908. The Homes provide protection and training for backward girls, and care of the aged and infirm, and presently comprise the Irene Homes, St. Margaret's Nursing Home and St. Michael's Hostel.

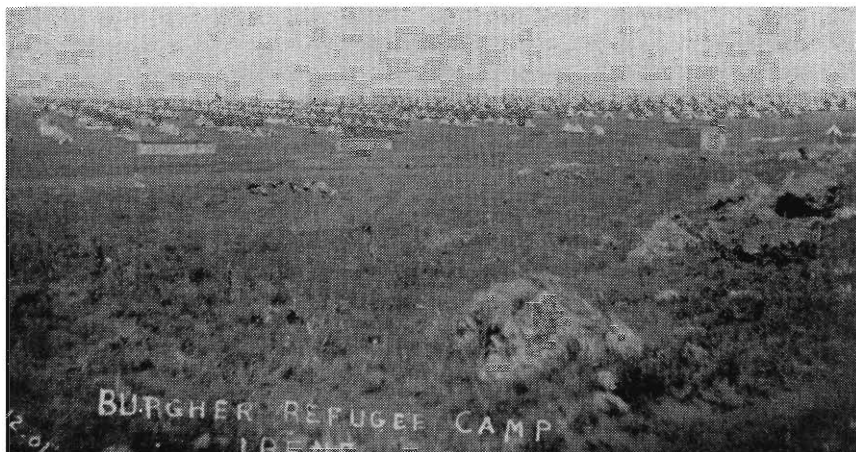
Also at about this time the Government established a forestry nursery where the Irene Club now is; and there was a police dog training camp on the East side of the railway line below the Aloe Koppie.

## **JAN CHRISTIAN SMUTS**

**O**N 3rd September, 1908, General Smuts, who was then the Colonial Secretary of the Transvaal, bought from Daniel Elardus Erasmus, son of Michiel Erasmus, his third of the farm Doornkloof. He also bought



*Brickmaking at the Irene Concentration Camp.  
December 1901.*



*The Concentration Camp at Irene. December 1901.  
View from the North East.*