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Irene Violet Nellmapius (m. Smit). 21/5/1887—30/1/1961.

A SHORT HISTORY OF IRENE

IT is thought that two thousand million years ago there was a large inland sea with high mountains round its edge and that out of these mountains gold was washed down into this sea by rivers which deposited the gold in their deltas which in the course of time became petrified in the form of the banket reef now being mined under the Witwatersrand and neighbouring areas. During this period the place where Irene now is must have been overlain by some thousands of feet of rock, but its modern existence is not unassociated with gold and its discovery as, lying between Pretoria and Johannesburg, it has ties with the golden city and the capital city; even now prospecting for gold is being carried out not far from Irene and it may even be found under the farm Doornkloof at the centre of which Irene lies.

When the Earth's surface had assumed its present form we know that early man lived and hunted at Irene, for artefacts have been found in the bed of the Hennops River here. These have been dated as early Pleistocene, that is as much as a million years ago. You may still find some of these primitive stone arrowheads, blades or axes if you are observant.

PRE-WHITE MAN

OWING to the lack of written records little is known of the people who lived in this area in the eighteenth century or earlier, but it is known that early in the nineteenth century these parts were inhabited by the Bakwena tribe, known as the Crocodile People, and that in about 1825 Mzilikazi, a Zulu who had broken away from his tribe in Zululand, moved into this area with his impis from the East annihilating the Crocodile People and driving the remnants toward the Kalahari Desert. These Zulus became known as the Matabele.

About a mile to the South of Irene Station is what is known as the Big Tree Hole which is a large hole in the ground with a group of trees growing out of it. It is known that when Mzilikazi's impis were chasing the Bakwena the terrified inhabitants fled down this hole which was then much bigger than it is now; there were a number of underground caves which were large enough to hold many people. Unfortunately the Matabele discovered that these people were down there and made fires and caused smoke go down into the caves and thus asphyxiated the people who stayed down; those who came up were assegaied and so the sad story was that everyone of them was killed. Most of these caves have since fallen in and you can see very little, but some years ago a treasure hunter sank a shaft from the surface down into the caves below in order to try to find the Kruger millions, but all he found was bones!



Alois Hugo Nellmapius (1847–1893).

Photo: City Council of Pretoria.

THE COMING OF THE WHITE MAN

UP to this time hardly any white men had seen what is now the Transvaal. Bartholomew Diaz first rounded the Cape in 1487, but it was not until 1652 that Jan van Riebeeck set up a permanent settlement there, and it was shortly after his arrival that Gerhard and Pieter van der Byl, the ancestors of the founder of Irene Township, settled at the Cape and later acquired the farm Vredenburg near Stellenbosch.

Although there are no clear records of it, it is probable that white hunters penetrated into the hinterland and crossed the Vaal River even before the Matabele arrived in these parts, but the first record of such a visit seems to be that of two Scots traders, Robert Schoon and William McLuckie, who visited Mzilikazi in the Magaliesberg or Cashan Mountains

on 12th July, 1829. In the few years that followed there were other such visitors, but most of those which are recorded were of Churchmen who were perhaps more careful to write things down than the hunters and traders were. The Rev. James and Mrs. Elizabeth Archbell, David Hume and Robert Moffat were amongst the first, and J. P. Pellissier recorded his visit in 1833.

Early in 1836 Louis Trichardt, perhaps the most intrepid of the Voortrekkers, crossed the Vaal on his famous trek to the North and was apparently lucky to avoid Mzilikazi's attentions, for, only a few months later, the Matabele impis unsuccessfully attacked a large Voortrekker laager at Vegkop in the Orange Free State on 15th October of that year.

At this very time a remarkable individual, Captain Cornwallis Harris of the Royal Engineers who was on leave from the Indian Army, was visiting the Transvaal on a hunting expedition. He was careful to keep on good terms with Mzilikazi whom he visited on 22nd October, 1836, and obtained permission and even assistance for his hunting adventure. Harris had heard of an unnamed antelope which had been seen by Schoon in these parts, but Schoon had not been able to identify it. Harris was therefore most excited when he came upon a herd of antelope not very far from Irene; he had been hunting elephants which were plentiful as the name of Olifantsfontein nearby suggests, but he immediately gave up that chase and pursued the "Swart Bokke" for three whole days before he was able to shoot one. Imagine his excitement when he came up to this magnificent Sable Antelope. For years the species was named after him—the Harris Buck. Fortunately for us Harris was an excellent artist and a good narrator, if somewhat flowery with his language, and has left us an excellent book "Portraits of the Game and Wild Animals of Southern Africa" which is profusely illustrated. His painting of *Aigocerus Niger* (the Sable Antelope) is one of the best.

While Harris was celebrating his good fortune the Boers, Potgieter and Maritz were preparing for an expedition designed to teach Mzilikazi a lesson. The expedition was soon carried out and by the end of 1837 the Matabele had been finally and decisively defeated at a place called Gabeni in what is now the Western Transvaal; and so the territory which was to become known as the Transvaal was opened up for settlement by the Boer People.

SETTLEMENT BY THE BOERS

SHORTLY after these events Daniel Elardus Erasmus settled on the farm Doornkloof which, when it was surveyed several years later, proved to be slightly more than six thousand morgen in extent. The Erasmus family settled here in the late 1830's and not long afterwards J. G. S. Bronkhorst settled where Pretoria now is. Both farms were probably chosen because of the plentiful water.

From about 1848 Doornkloof became the "Kerkplaas" for the district;



that is the place where the itinerant Dominee from time to time performed baptisms, marriages and so on and conducted nagtmaal. The original farmstead was close to where the Full Gospel Church now stands; unfortunately nothing remains of the house. Doornkloof was the Kerkplaas for several years and was the centre of the Boer community until Elandspoort superseded it in 1854 and became Pretoria in 1855.

When Daniel Elardus Erasmus died in 1875 he left his farm Doornkloof to his three sons, Daniel Jacobus Elardus, Stephanus Petrus and Michiel Christiaan Elardus, and they remained the owners until 1889. Daniel Erasmus was known as "Rooi Danie" and was a member of the Transvaal Volksraad.

A. H. NELLMAPIUS

ON 17th October, 1889, Alois Hugo Nellmapius, who was born in Budapest on 5th May, 1847, bought from Daniel and Stephanus Erasmus their two thirds of the farm Doornkloof, i.e. the Northern and Western portions; Michiel retained his South-Eastern third until he died in 1896 when it passed to his son Elardus.

A book could be written about Nellmapius who was a most colourful character, but the history of his short life cannot be given here as he was concerned with so many different ventures. In 1875 he started a transport business using native bearers between Lourenco Marques and Pilgrims Rest, but the Sekukuni War put an end to this; later Sir Percy FitzPatrick with Jock of the Bushveld, and other pioneers were more successful with oxen. Nellmapius made and lost fortunes and one of his more successful ventures was the establishment of the gin and whisky factory at Eerstefabriek, East of Pretoria; maize grown at Irene was used in the making of the whisky. Nellmapius also made a start with the Irene Limeworks which ultimately became a profitable business manufacturing building lime from burnt dolomite stone before there were any cement factories in the Transvaal; the Irene Limeworks is still in production after three-quarters of a century. He attempted to train Zebra and Eland to pull in harness and had some success with the Eland.

"IRENE"

NELLMAPIUS had a little daughter named "Irene" and when he bought his portions of the farm Doornkloof he had them re-surveyed



A. H. Nellmapius and his guests at Irene in 1893. Nellmapius (who died in the same year), standing third from left, and next to him (with hat) J. S. Marais (Auditor-General). Seated (left to right): Christiaan Joubert (Head of the Dept. of Mines), Genl. N. J. Smít, J. N. Boshoff (Treasurer-General). Ninth (front row), with panama hat: Leo Weinthal (Editor of "The Press").

Photo: City Council of Pretoria