

John Robert Lys served on many Volksraad commissions. When his friend, O'Reilly of Maquassi, discovered the first diamond on the Vaal River in 1869, John Robert was asked by the Raad to proceed to the place of discovery with President Kruger in order to delimit the boundary lines between the Cape, Free State and Transvaal. He served on other boundary commissions involving the Portuguese, the Free State and the Rolong on the Western Border. He went to Swaziland, too, when Amaswazi, the chief died, in order to settle the boundaries between the Transvaal and Swaziland and to help choose the next chief. His son, Godfray, went along as a member of the Pretoria contingent of the Commando that went to make a demonstration of force to the Swazis. He was only 13 at the time, but he was from the time he could walk a fantastic natural rider. On riding, Godfray has said,

“My first recollections are of riding in front of my Dad’s saddle, and later when I could bestride him, riding a donkey.” Now there’s a wonderful story about this donkey. Olivia Selina Lys was wild keen to obtain a donkey for her children to ride, but this was extremely difficult in those days. Evidently it was easier to get money out of the Reserve Bank than to obtain a donkey. But . . . the Lys family was a very well-dressed family, their clothes coming from overseas or up from Durban twice a year and John Robert Lys sported a very smart frock coat, which a certain to-be-world-famous person greatly coveted and for which he offered a young ass. In due course the bargain was made to the satisfaction of all parties concerned, and as both coat and donkey were cherished with fond care, their years were many!

Godfray continues: “My next steed was a mule, who bucked me off whenever he wanted to. I shall never forget my joy when four ponies arrived from Basutoland and Dad said one of them was for me. Later when my Aunts arrived from England to live with my Mother – (they were Olivia Selina’s step sisters and the one was to marry Harry Struben and the Other, Alan Broderick) – they were given my Basutho pony to ride, so I asked for the colt which was coming from Heidelberg. When he came, he proved to be snow-white and was promptly called “Sailor”. – (This was the pony immortalised by Thomas Baines.) – Now my wanderings really started. I used to ride away to farms to visit friends and spend weekends. All this mainly, I am sorry to say, to get away from my tutor who could not ride.”

“My earliest remembrance is of horses. I grew up with them and they have always been my best friends. Riding makes one hungry, and that reminds me of a farm we used to pass where the old miser of a farmer would neither sell, nor give away his fruit. So Allen Broderick, Frank Austen, John Fisher and I organised a raid on his orchard one day. We dug under the fence and got into the vineyard. There our clothes helped us considerably – as little boys of those days wore white sailor blouses which could hold an astonishing amount of fruit when well and truly packed in. Unfortunately, we forgot to allow for our

added firth when scrambling back under the fence, and the grapes became pulp on the other side. The last man nearly got caught, but we manfully pulled, and got him through. I think I was the only one who did not get whacked for the state of my clothes.”

But there was a time when John Robert Lys had to whack his darling son, and that was when he put pepper in one of the family’s slaves, Dinah’s snuff box. It is interesting to hear what Godfray has to say about their slaves. He writes . . . “Our slaves, whom Dad got from their chiefs were Frolic, Nicky and Boozie. They were paid a few shillings regularly and got a heifer each every year. Old Frolic took quite a large herd of cattle away when Dad died. The girls were Dahlia, Dinah and Nora. They were like part of the family and refused to be liberated when we wanted to free them. Dinah used to take snuff and well do I remember putting pepper in her snuff. Rather more well I remember what I got for doing this!”

With the Lys store situated behind his house, the children would have often run across to see the arrival of the wagons returning from trading trips to the North. Laden with wonderful tusks of ivory – Pretoria was the ivory-clearing house of Africa – karosses, ostrich feathers, lion and other skins, horns, cream of tartar in the pod, and bearing instructions from John Robert Lys to bring back any minerals of interest, their arrival must have always given rise to excitement, especially when a few crude gold ornaments were brought back or small quantities of alluvial gold and once, oh such joy! some tiny soft leather bags actually filled with nuggets of all sizes.

John Robert Lys was a keen amateur geologist who had personally conducted many prospecting expeditions in different parts of the country until his study had become a veritable museum, filled with gold quartz, silver and leadore and many other precious and base metals. He had personally discovered lead in Marico, and in return for his services to the Republic, he was given by President Pretorius the first mining charter ever to be issued in the Transvaal, which entitled him to go anywhere throughout the Republic and prospect at will.

A mining company was formed, receiving its concession from the Volksraad in April, 1860, and was called the Transvaal General Mining Company. The intention was to mine lead – always much in demand for bullets – but the company was a failure and was dissolved in 1865. The unsettled political conditions had made it difficult to attract development capital, and to recruit both skilled and unskilled labour.

In 1866 John Robert Lys had another shot at forming a mining company, this time called the South African Republic Mining Company. Their concession this time allowed them to mine lead, copper, iron and tin but not

diamonds or precious metals. In return no other company would be allowed to operate for five years. Despite this helpful concession, I'm afraid this company also folded through lack of capital, although some copper was produced, but little more.

But always, despite his mining ups and downs, John Robert Lys had complete faith that there was gold in the Transvaal. Because he had personally discovered a large, fat bit of the main reef, which he called pudding stone, and which remained in his study for many years.

Attached is a copy of the article – “*The Story of the Golden Vlei*” which appeared in “*The Sun of South Africa*”, February, 1934. This also shows the map of the location of Lysvlei.

# THE STORY OF THE GOLDEN VLEI

## HISTORIC SITE NEAR GERMISTON

By Dr. William MacDonald

It was towards the close of a warm summer's day in the year 1867 that two wagons could be seen moving slowly along the Old Pioneer Road that led from Pietermaritzburg, in Natal, to Pretoria, the Capital of the South African Republic. A few hours before this little caravan had passed through the tiny hamlet of Heidelberg, and even now was toiling painfully along the matted grass-grown track that crossed the high and cool plateau, marked on early maps as the Witte Waters Rand. The foremost vehicle, which was about half a mile ahead of its companion, consisted of a light spring American wagon capable of holding four passengers. It was drawn by eight sturdy mules whose general aspect betokened a long and arduous trek, made irksome by torrential rains, flooded rivers and almost impassable roads – all of which had greatly retarded the progress of the little party on their 400-mile journey from Pietermaritzburg to Pretoria.

## **A Hardy Pioneer**

On the box-seat of the wagon and holding the reins that guided the eight tired mules, sat a sturdy, broad-shouldered pioneer with a big sombrero, a long bushy beard, and clad in a serviceable suit of corduroy. In his belt was stuck a formidable looking pistol, while an old type of muzzle-loader was strapped upright and ready at the right-hand side of the driver's seat. Beside this hardy pioneer, who was urging the mules forward by calling each one by its name, sat a diminutive and wizened Bushman, who smote the atmosphere with an immense resounding whip which, nevertheless, never once descended upon the bodies of the animals, because Kleinboy knew that if he struck the mules unnecessarily, he would incur the ire of his master, who could not bear to see any animal misused.

## **The Farm of the Three Fountains**

Behind the box-seat sat four passengers, comprising a big game hunter, a missionary and two traders, who were journeying into the interior of the "Dark Continent". But the outstanding personality in this little veld ship, ploughing its way through a vast ocean of grass, was undoubtedly the retired naval officer on the box-seat – Lieut. John Robert Lys, R.N., formerly of the British Navy, and later the first Englishman to represent Pretoria in the Volksraad of the Republic.

"We must hurry!" he exclaimed, "because there is likely to be much water in the vlei of the Three Fountains (Driefontein) and dusk is coming."

With those words he cracked the great whip and the mules sped forward, and soon the light wagon was swaying perilously in the muddy water of the vlei. At last, the passage was safely effected, and a camp was immediately formed on the north bank of the swamp. Meanwhile, trekking slowly over the nearest grassy ridge came the second part of the transport, namely, a long hooded wagon drawn by eighteen oxen, and having large stocks of wooden boxes roped together, containing groceries, biscuits, liquors, powder-flasks and arms of all kinds.

## **Bogged in Ant Bear Hole**

Presently a message was dispatched to the driver of the trek wagon instructing him to cross the vlei before sunset. And so, half an hour later, eighteen weary oxen plunged heavily into the slimy black turf bog. And now, under the raucous cracks of whips, and sustained by the encouraging yells of the native escort, the bullocks made a herculean effort, and the transport wagon moved slowly forward.

But just at this moment one of the front wheels slid into an unseen ant bear hole which had been covered by the water, and the heavily laden wagon shivered with the shock and stuck fast hopelessly. However, Pioneer Lys, late of Her Majesty's Navy, was never at a loss under any adverse circumstances.

“Roll large stones against the sunken wheel!” he called out to his native boys, who raced to an outcrop of stones lying nearby on the dry veld, carried them into the swamp and laid them around the wagon wheels. Now, as Kleinboy, the little bushman, was staggering under the weight of a large veld stone, suddenly the rays of the setting sun lit up the exposed face of the rock.

“Pas op (Stop), Kleinboy!” shouted the Pioneer. “Bring die klip hier” (Bring that stone here). The astonished Bushman carried the stone up to the camp and set it down beside his master. Lys turned over this piece of veld rock, and found it to be of a curious formation, being dotted here and there with greyish-white pebbles that made it look like an almond pudding. Lys rolled a piece of gunny sack around the stone and deposited it in the old naval kist which he always carried about with him. He then returned to the edge of the vlei, and instructed the natives to get the oxen to make a stronger concerted effort. This was done, and the front wagon wheels, finding support in the vlei stones, rose triumphantly and lifted the wagon out of the slimy ant bear hole and pulled it onwards across the swamp.

That night, when a bright summer moon lit up the gleaming star-studded sky, Pioneer Lys sat tranquilly smoking a pipeful of Magaliesberg tobacco,<sup>1</sup> while a quiet smile lit up his genial countenance. For he had noted that Kleinboy's curious pudding stone showed streaks of “colour”, and where it came from there were likely to be many more. But for the present he kept to himself the secret of the golden vlei. On reaching the homestead at Pretoria, he carefully examined the stone and, having satisfied himself by panning that it was gold-bearing, accorded the unbroken portion of the rock a prominent place in his extensive geological collection.<sup>2</sup>

And in the days to come, over many a camp fire, prospectors and traders used often to talk of the year of the great floods; and so in due course Government cartographers and other map makers, remembering the tale of Pioneer Lys and his two wagons being bogged on the farm of the Three Fountains, in seeking to safeguard future travellers, named and laid off the exact locality of Lys' Vlei.<sup>3</sup>

## The coming of Carl Mauch

About a week after John R. Lys had returned to Pretoria, the eminent German traveller, Carl Mauch, arrived at the Lys Homestead. He was a big, burly man with a sandy-coloured beard, jovial countenance, and a hearty boyish laugh. Robert Lys and Carl Mauch soon became very friendly as both

were engaged in geological investigations.\* Thus it happened that Pioneer Lys told the German geologist about the curious pebbly gold-bearing stone which he had found at Lys' Vlei. Mauch was greatly interested in what Lys told him, and expressed a desire to visit that locality. Accordingly, next morning Lys spanned his light wagon and eight mules and drove Mauch to Krafts farm<sup>2</sup> (Driefontein) on which stood Lys' Vlei.

## The Search for Gold

Lys and Mauch collected some specimens and panned out gold at the side of the Vlei (Lys Vlei), and then journeyed westward to Kromdraai – Grobler's farm – where they also panned out some more gold and then returned to Pretoria. In talking over this momentous trip, Major Godfray Lys told the writer that he remembers, as if it were yesterday, Mauch saying to his father (John Robert Lys) that he was certain the Witwatersrand would prove to be a very rich goldfield.\*

1) Henry Hartley, the South African Pioneer, trader, gold seeker and big game hunter, and founder of the Magaliesberg Tobacco Industry, trekked up from the Bathurst district, in Cape Colony, to the Transvaal in the year 1841. He acquired from the Government the farm of Thorndale, situated forty-seven miles south-west of Pretoria, which remained the home of the Hartley family for over ninety years.

2) President Pretorius granted the first gold prospecting rights in the Transvaal to Robert Lys for his services to the Republic.

3) Now the property of the Witwatersrand and Primrose Gold Mining Companies whose crosslike mynpacht takes in Lys' Vlei.

\*Curious enough, ten years later the same words were repeated to J.R. Lys by Mr. Armfield, who came out to South Africa from Australia as a consulting geologist and mineralogist on behalf of the Transvaal Government.

It may be asked if Lys and Mauch did discover gold on the Witwatersrand why was it not followed up by a gold rush to the Rand as actually happened nineteen years later. The explanation is simple. In the first place neither Lys nor Mauch had sufficient means to prospect on a large scale. Secondly, to reach the Witwatersrand at that time situated as it was so far from the sea coast, entailed a very expensive journey; while the cost of transporting heavy mining machinery was almost prohibitive. Again, although the Witwatersrand was happily situated in a healthy country, much of the intervening country was periodically swept by malarial fever, horse and cattle sickness; while the Transvaal was then encircled by savage tribes, and the early settlers had frequently to go into "laager" in order to protect themselves against the hostile natives. Nevertheless, the search for gold continued steadily from the Tati region on the Bechuanaland border to the Eastern Districts of the Transvaal.

## **Armfield – Australian Geologist**

It will be remembered that on 12th April, 1877, Sir Theophilus Shepstone, Her Majesty's Special Commissioner, annexed the Transvaal to the British Crown. At that time the Transvaal was in a state of complete bankruptcy, with an empty Treasury, as well as being greatly embarrassed by all hostile attitude of Sekukuni and Cetewayo. Shepstone, searching for some means to increase the revenues for the Colony, came to the conclusion that the only thing to put the country in a sound financial condition would be the discovery of gold. Accordingly, he consulted with Robert Lys and asked his advice. Lys recommended that Shepstone should apply to the Australian Government for a highly qualified geologist to report on the gold potentialities of the Transvaal. And so in due course the Australian geologist, Mr. Armfield, arrived and was taken by Pioneer Lys to look at Lys' Vlei. Armfield panned out some rocks in a spruit at Driefontein, and found good gold. Lys then took him to the top of the watershed, above what is now known as Orange Grove, and here also Armfield panned out gold. Having satisfied themselves that there was gold-bearing rock over an area of approximately ten miles, namely, from Driefontein to Orange Grove, the two men then drove over to Grobler's farm at Kromdraai, and in the streams on that property they again found satisfactory samples of alluvial gold.

## **Armfield Goes North**

It may now be asked why Armfield did not continue his search for gold on the Witwatersrand. The answer is that he had already made certain contracts with Button, Edwards and Glynn to prospect for gold in the Northern and Eastern sections of the Transvaal. Consequently, he bade farewell to Robert Lys, promising that he would return as soon as possible and continue his investigations on the rocks of the Rand. Armfield then trekked northward to the Selati country, contracted blackwater fever on the Murchison Range, and died before he had time to prepare his report on the gold occurrences of the Witwatersrand. Speaking of the strange manner in which the gold-bearing reefs of the Witwatersrand seem to have eluded the early pioneers, Major Godfrey Lys said to the writer: "I believe that had Armfield been spared to return and complete his report on the Witwatersrand, these fields would have been opened up several years earlier. But the discovery of gold at Eersteling, Selati, Ohrigstad, Pilgrims Rest and Barberton all tended to take men's thoughts away from the Rand. And so the world's greatest goldfield lay unrevealed until the coming of Fred Struben, whose supreme confidence in the gold-bearing potentialities of the Witwatersrand, together with his steadfast perseverance in the face of great discouragement and innumerable obstacles were at last destined to be rewarded, and won for him the proud title of being the real discoverer of the Gold Fields of the Rand.

It is of interest for me to recall the fact that twenty years after my father showed Carl Mauch the gold on Lys' Vlei I opened up the Main Reef Series on the same spot in May, 1887.

Finally, I might add in order to illustrate the prevalent ideas at that time of what constituted characteristic gold-bearing country, I remember an old and experienced prospector saying to me: "Gold will never be found on the Witwatersrand. It is far too healthy; gold is only found in low-lying malarial districts."

\* \* \* \*

Godfray never forgot his Father's conviction of gold somewhere in the Witwatersrand, and later with his Struben Uncles was to crush the first ever lump of gold found by George Honeyball via George Walker. He and the Strubaens had erected their 5-stamp Sandycroft Mill next to a sparkling stream about half a mile away from the Confidence Reef and were crushing all the gold-bearing rocks they could lay their hands on when Honeyball arrived with that wonderful bit of rock on a momentous day in February, 1886. As a follow-up to John Robert Lys' search for gold for all those years and as a tribute to his faith in the "Golden Witwatersrand", I think it is fitting that we should have Godfray's account of the occasion . . . As a prelude to Godfray's account, I must tell you that Honeyball has persuaded Walker to show him the place where he literally stumbled over the outcrop of the Main Reef and he, in his turn, has broken off another lump and has set off post-haste to Struben's Mill. Like everybody who knew Godfray, he was impressed with his bonhomie and courtesy and was looking for him on that Sunday. First of all, however, he found Fred Struben in the little cottage erected next to the mill. He showed him the lump of rock and asked him if it was gold-bearing. Struben took the chunk of rock and after examining it closely said it was merely a piece of pyrites. "Where did you get it?" he inquired bluntly. "But I'll pan it" he continued "and will tell you if it contains gold." His question had, however, annoyed Honeyball who put the lump of rock in his pocket and walked moodily away. Down by the spruit he came across Godfray, who was in his shirt-sleeves and busily engaged in attending to the mill. His gay and cheery greeting mollified Honeyball, who dived once more into his pocket and drew out the lump of rock. Godfray says . . .

"By Jove," I said. "That's gold."

"Then I paused, for in the flash of that moment, I seemed to see Karl Mauch and my Father and Arnfield, and many others all seeking gold, and I found myself repeating Fred Struben's words that had brought me all the way from Maritzburg – "thousands of men and millions of capital" – and there we were completely down and out, still searching for a payable streak, crushing



tons of poor stuff all our money gone, and insolvency staring us in the face. And suddenly a moody-looking fellow crashed down the path from nowhere and shoves right under my very nose the loveliest bit of banket I had ever seen. I felt myself trembling from sheer excitement.

“Do you think it’s the real stuff?” queried Honeyball, doubtfully.

“Man alive”, I said impatiently, “don’t you see how rich it is? But let us pan it and I will show you the gold.”

“Honeyball hesitated, and started to explain how Walker had first found the Reef, but I cut him short and asked him straight out what he wanted for his information. Then having agreed to pay him £5 for showing me the spot, we at once proceeded to pan out the piece of rock. In my excitement and anxiety to make a thorough test, I spilt a few shillings worth of mercury, but we soon got a fine bead of gold. And then I knew for certain that Honeyball made a great strike . . .”

Well that was it and Godfray and the Strubens went on from strength to strength, which is another story.

Meanwhile back to John Robert and those peaceful pre-gold and precarious days. Or were they that peaceful? Here is an extract from the diaries, written in 1873 describing a trip to Natal. “Had my first experience of the civility of Natal drivers, as we were caught in a narrow place and only saved a din by managing to keep my temper.”

It’s hard for us to imagine those slow, bumpy trips by wagon, but I feel sure time was not as accelerated as it is today and certainly the travelling wagons were very comfortable. Evidently they were very large and comfortably appointed with the hood lined with green baize. They were drawn by a large span of picked oxen, the pride of all concerned. A smaller wagon, also with a good span was used for carrying sleeping tents for the men, cooking utensils etc. and brushwood for lighting fires around the outspan at night. A wagonette with a four-in-hand was used as an “avant coucheur” to the farm houses en route. There were also two extra riding horses. So it was a formidable convoy that set out.

Besides the journeys to Natal, there must have been some to Delagoa Bay, because John Robert Lys was tremendously keen to get the British Government to buy the port at Delagoa Bay. Together with his friend MacCorkindale, he urged the British Government, through Lord Carnarvon, to buy the port from the Portuguese Government for £40 000. When this appeal was turned down, he tried again through his old friend Sir Theophilus Shepstone to get something done, but this was also unsuccessful. One could burst into tears at the thought of the unfortunate results for South Africa

arising from the British Government's refusal to listen to John Robert Lys and buy Delagoa Bay. Just think of what might have been – but, no, it doesn't bear thinking about.

John Robert Lys was not only very alive to any financial benefits which he could see to the Republic, but also to what could be done for the best politically. He was always anxious that the Government should be conducted in a more progressive spirit, so that he welcomed Pres. Burgers' election in 1872 as the prelude to a more enlightened rule.

Before the Sekekuni Wars, Paul Kruger, Snyman and Schoeman tried to depose Martinus Wessels Pretorius and make one of them President. John Robert Lys saw trouble ahead and realized that they must look for an educated candidate. He went down as one of a deputation to ask Brand of the Free State to be the President of the Republic, but Brand saw complications ahead and would not accept, so another candidate popular with all had to be found and they decided on the Rev. Thomas Francois Burgers. He was elected by a large majority.

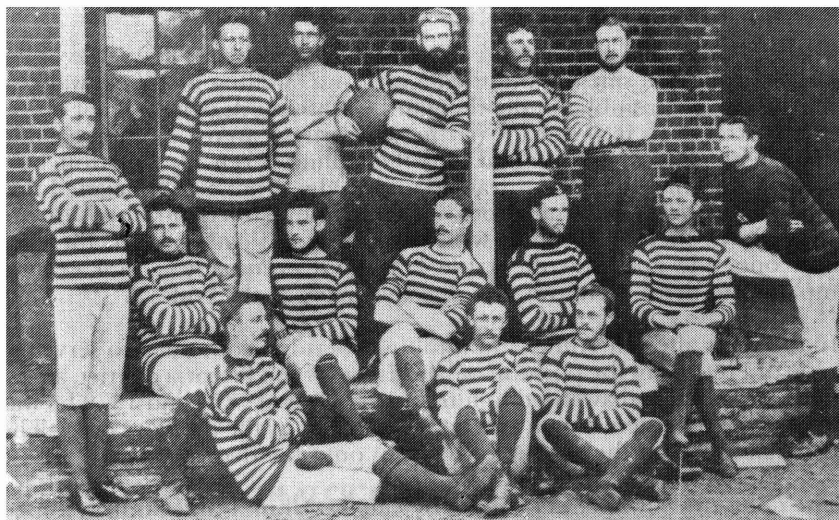
Before the Transvaal was annexed, President Burgers went to Europe and raised a loan of gold. One of the conditions on which the loan was raised, was that a similar amount of green backs – local government bank notes – were to be destroyed. John Robert Lys was put in charge of the burning of these notes and about £50 000 worth were destroyed by burning them in the oven which Delia used to bake the bread in. On this occasion she had a baking ready and put it in and baked it at the same time, and said that her bread was worth £50 000!

We forget today just how real was the threat of hostile African tribes surrounding the Republic. During the Sekekuni campaign, when the Boer forces had retreated from Sekekuniland, a report reached Pretoria that Sekekuni was advancing on the town and that his vanguard had reached Bronkhorstspuit. It was, therefore, decided to fortify some centre in Pretoria where the women and children could take shelter at night. The site selected was the Pretoria Club, and a sandbag redoubt was built before the entrance. The Club, however, was very unpopular with the ladies of Pretoria at that time and they protested very strongly against the site. So strongly, indeed, did they protest that another site had to be chosen and the verandah of the Lys store was then converted into a sandbag fort for the purpose.

Oh that verandah, what pageants of history it must have seen! On the grass in front of it were played the first cricket and football matches of the Pretoria Cricket and Football Team. A photograph taken of them in 1876 shows them in their striped jerseys and moustaches and somewhat self-conscious air as befitting the very first forerunners of the cricket and rugby Springbok greats. Godfray is among them and many of the well-known names of Pretoria.

Then there was the reading of the proclamation of the Annexation of the Transvaal by the British, by a horribly nervous Mr. Melmoth Osborne and the hoisting of the Union Jack by Ryder Haggard. April 12th, 1877 was a lovely day and from the verandah of the Lys store yet another important historical ceremony could be witnessed. There were only about 50 people in Church Square, probably just as many as those who would watch the parade of captured Native Chiefs and their indunas held in the “triumphs” of the Boer forces. And at the end of the ceremony a bigger Union Jack than John Robert Lys’ was floating in the blue sky, and afterwards I bet everyone went home for tea or coffee.

John Robert Lys was a Lieutenant in the Pretoria Volunteers and the first commander of the Artillery Corps, The Dingaans Battery, founded in 1875. Nearly thirty years later, his son Godfray was to be the first commander of a regiment – the Lys Volunteer Corps, which came into being in March, 1904. Later the Lys Volunteer Corps was to be known as the Transvaal Horse Artillery.



PRETORIA'S FIRST RUGBY TEAM (1875)

Back : Julius Jeppe, Bousfield, A. Roberts (captain), Henry Nourse, Stephens.  
Middle: J.T.A. Shepherd, Danny Smithers, Kitwell, Higgenson, Godfray Lys,  
Palmer. Front : Davis, Swart, Juta.

At the outbreak of the Zulu War, Godfray joined the Intelligence Department and was eventually attached to the Flying Column under Sir Evelyn Wood. The Flying Column was composed of three numbered companies, a Naval Section with Gatlings, the Border Horse under Col. Weatherley, the Kimberley Horse under Col. Redvers Buller, and Uys' Scouts, under the great Piet Uys himself. There were lots of skirmishes and then there was the engagement at the hill of Hlobani. Godfray was not present at this engagement, but his Uncle, Vincent Lys, John Robert's sailor brother mentioned earlier, was there. He and Col. Weatherley and Piet Uys were killed. There was a great wall of dead Zulus around them and Col. Weatherley's body was found holding his son, Rupert by the left arm, and one assegai had killed them both. A remnant of the men escaped and Godfray describes the ensuing battle of Kambula in the following words . . .

"We had to leave from Kambula with all the available men, to rescue all we could. We saved many lives and many heroic deeds were done. (At Kambula Cecil d'Arcy won his V.C. and Col. Butler for saving one of his men.) Next morning at crack of dawn we saw a huge Zulu impi in crescent formation coming towards us to attack our laager. We saw them coming towards us over the horizon like great black ants. As they came nearer, we could see their full war regalia of feathers and shields and their marvellous physique.

"No one who has heard a Zulu charge will ever forget it. The rattle of the assegais against the shields, and then a murmur swelling to a great war cry, while the ground trembles under the stamp of thousands of feet. Their object was to surround us in the shape of the two horns of an ox. No horse could stand the shaking of the ground and the yelling. Even my "Cartouche", whom we had bred and I had trained and ridden from a colt, decided that home was the best place and it took me all my time to try and stop him. We mowed down their front ranks with volley fire and gatlings, but they got round one side and into the cattle kraal and eventually it took several companies to drive them out. We defeated them at the end . . ."

In the years after the Annexation, John Robert Lys continued to serve the people of Pretoria in the position of landdrost for the Pretoria district, a post which Shepstone had awarded to him in 1878. But in 1878 and 1879 he was plagued by a persistent cough and he was worried by the memory of a fall he had sustained from the rigging of his ship onto the deck below.

The Zulus, meanwhile, were finally defeated at Ulundi, and Godfray joined Russel's column and marched with them back to Sekekuniland and stayed with them there until Sekekuni was defeated. Then he was appointed Sir Marshall Clarke's A.D.C. Clarke was the High Commissioner for the Northern Districts, whose duty was to settle the Sekekuni nation. This took about 18 months and then one sad day Sir Owen Lanyon came up on a tour of

inspection and brought the dreadful news that John Robert Lys was very, very ill, and gave Godfray leave to return to Pretoria to see his Father. He immediately rode his charger from Spelonken to Blaauberg and then on to Marabastad, where he bought a little mare from an army friend, as by now his horse was totally exhausted. From there it was 24 hours ride for him to Pretoria. But although he had ridden as he had never ridden before and had taken only three days over the journey, he was too late for John Robert Lys passed away on the 14th August, 1880.

John Robert Lys, the beloved Father of his family was greatly mourned by that family. John Robert Lys the beloved Father of Pretoria was also greatly mourned by all his friends, both Boer and British. Perhaps in a way it was a good thing that his brave heart failed when it did, and he was not forced to see either of the two Anglo-Boer Wars, because, although he never really understood the aspirations of the Boers, still they were always his good friends, and those two dreadful Wars would surely have broken his heart.

“He was a generous and public-spirited man, working for the advancement of the Transvaal and living in the hope of a United South Africa.”

Written by Angela P. Makin, the great grand-daughter of John Robert Lys, using family documents, letters, magazines, Godfray Lys' Memoirs and books in my possession.

JOHANNESBURG.  
9th June, 1978

### GENEALOGICAL TABLE OF WRITER

- a) John Robert Lys X Olivia Selina Fry
- b) Robert Oliver Godfray Lys X Phyllis Bruce Taylor
- c) Philippa Olivia Lys X Francois Oscar Ivan Brickman
- d) *Angela Philippa Brickman* X Ian Derek Makin

# DIE ERASMUS-KASTEEL MAG NIE VERDWYN NIE

(deur Ben Cronje)

Pretoria word tans weer met die moontlikheid gekonfronteer dat een van sy historiese landmerke dalk die prooi van tegnologiese vooruitgang gaan word. Pas nadat die stof in verband met die wesfasade van Kerkplein, vir die huidige, gaan lê het (gelukkig nie die wesfasade se stof nie), is die slopingsgevaar aan die oplaai oor die bekende Erasmus-kasteel op die suidoostelike uithoek van Pretoria.

Toe die Transvaalse Provinsiale Administrasie twee jaar gelede aangekondig het dat hy 90 hektaar van die plaas Garsfontein, waarop die Erasmus-kasteel staan, onteien het ten einde onder andere 'n nuwe hospitaalkompleks daar te bou, het Pretorianers met 'n skok tot die ontdekking gekom dat hierdie sonderlinge ou landmerk ook in die pad van die uitdyende stad beland het. Stemme het van oral opgegaan om te pleit vir die bewaring van die ou gebou. Op 'n vergadering van die belastingbetalers van die aangrensende Elarduspark, Wingatepark en die Waterkloof-landbouhoewes, is 'n eenparige besluit geneem dat die Administrateur versoek sal word om die huis te red. Sedertdien het dié aangeleentheid op die agtergrond geraak nadat dit bekend geword het dat 'n inter-departementele kommissie aangestel is om die saak te ondersoek en daar moontlik sprake is dat die hospitaal elders gebou gaan word. 'n Finale besluit is egter nog nie geneem nie. Die Transvaalse Werkedepartement se standpunt is dat indien die hospitaal wel op Garsfontein gebou gaan word en dit nie anders kan nie, die gebou wel gesloop sal moet word. Onder die omstandighede is dit noodsaaklik dat Pretorianers en ander bewaringsbewuste Suid-Afrikaners kennis neem hiervan en betyds sal walgooi teen enige moontlike stappe wat die Erasmus-kasteel se einde kan beteken.

Toe Pretoria nog nie 'n halfeeu oud was nie en Groenkloof, Waterkloof en Garsfontein die name van uitgestrekte plase was, is die eerste soorie van die Erasmus-kasteel se fondasies op 'n hooggeleë plato van die plaas Garsfontein van Jochemus Johannes Petrus Erasmus afgesteek. Sedertdien het hierdie merkwaardige gebou 'n onafskeidbare deel van Pretoria se landskap geword en het hy 'n besondere plekkie in Pretorianers se harte gekry.



Kyk 'n mens terug na die geskiedenis van die Erasmus-familieplaas, dan vind jy dat dit baie moeilik is om vas te stel wie die oorspronklike eienaars van die plaas Garsfontein was. In 'n inspeksierapport van plase om Pretoria wat in Augustus 1841 gevoer is, word aangedui dat die plaas "Garsfontein" behoort aan Susara Johanna Bronkhorst. Daar word ook beweer dat die plaas in die Erasmusfamilie se besit gekom het toe Cornelia Erasmus in 1852 met Jacobus Rademeyer getrou het. Dokumentêre bewys bestaan dat Karel Jacobus Erasmus in 1892 die bakens van die plaas afgepen het. Daar kan egter met redelike sekerheid aangeneem word dat hy die plaas voor hierdie datum reeds besit het. In die familiebegraafplaas wat 'n entjie van die opstal geleë is, is die grafies van twee seuntjies, albei genaamd Daniel Jacobus Elardus Erasmus, wat respektiewelik in 1888 en 1889 gebore en oorlede is. Twee ou opstalle wat voor die herehuis gebou en bewoon is, is ook nog te sien. Ongelukkig verskaf die rekords in die Aktekantoor nie duidelikheid oor die oorspronklike eienaars van die plaas nie. Die storie word vertel dat Karel Erasmus die plaas Garsfontein van 27 000 morges in besit gekry het deur 'n spoggerige fluweelbroek en 'n gesoute perd daarvoor te betaal. Of hierdie storie enige waarheid bevat is nie seker nie. Hoe dit ook al sy, Karel Erasmus en sy erfgename het in besit gekom van 'n plaas wat uiteindelik miljoene rande werd sou wees.