

Jotello Festiri Soga – Family history

We know something about the life and contributions of Jotello Festiri Soga, the first person from South Africa (and probably Africa) to graduate as a veterinarian, and possibly the first Black person to graduate as a veterinarian in the UK. There is also some information about his parents: Tiyo Soga, who was the first black African ordained minister and missionary to graduate from Glasgow, Scotland, where he met and married Janet Burnside, Jotello's mother. But history is never complete – Glynn Catton came across an article in a supplement to the *Mail and Guardian* (November 27 – December 3, 2020), on page 10, written by Dr Nomathansanqa Tisani of the Nelson Mandela University, on Jotello's family.

Dr Tisani identifies MamTshawe Nosuthu Jotelo as a powerful, influential grandmother who was an early convert to Christianity at the Glasgow Missionary Society's Tyhumi Mission Station in the 1830s. Nosuthu was also exposed to formal teaching at this time. She came from a respected family lineage in the amaNtinde House and could be regarded as a Princess when she was married to Jotelo Mtika of the amaJwara House, another respected Xhosa clan.

Nosuthu and Jotelo Mtika's eldest son, Festiri, attended school at Tyhumi and later built his own school with his mother's help, where he taught his siblings, strengthening the family's connection with learning. A younger son, Tiyo Soga, would go on to become an evangelical church leader and a contributor to the *Indaba* newspaper published between 1862 and 1865 at Lovedale and can be regarded as one of the early educated elite African nationalists in the then Cape Colony. And Tiyo Soga would have four illustrious sons, all educated in Scotland, including Jotello Festiri, and three daughters.

Our first veterinarian was apparently named after his grandfather (Jotelo) and uncle (Festiri). The Soga dynasty made important contributions to the history of South Africa. No doubt there is yet more to be added to the background history of this pioneering family.