

Pretoriana



TYDSKRIF VAN DIE PRETORIASE HISTORIESE VERENIGING:

GENOOTSKAP OUD-PRETORIA 'GTINGSDIENS

TYDSKRIFTE

JOURNAL OF THE PRETORIA HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

OLD PRETORIA SOCIETY

1996-03-05

PRYS

R 8,00

WAKKODE 214 968

PRETORIANA 1995/107

PRETORIANA, Tydskrif van die Pretoriase Historiese
Vereniging: Genootskap Oud-Pretoria, No. 107,
November 1995
PRETORIANA, Journal of the Pretoria Historical
Association: Old Pretoria Society, No. 107,
November 1995

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agtersy van die omslag se buitekant.
The table of contents of the present issue is on the reverse
side of the cover.

LAND SURVEYOR A.L. DEVENISH
IN WAR AND PEACE IN TRANSVAAL

Introduction by

C de Jong

Anthony Lennox Devenish was born at Victoria West, Cape Colony, in 1852 and became a farmer and well-known land surveyor in Transvaal. Dr. Maria Hugo published an article with his short biography in the "Dictionary of South African Biography"¹⁾. The text of this article follows here.

Devenish, Anthony Lennox (*Victoria West, CC, 16.10.1852 †Pietersburg, 3.5.1898), surveyor and farmer, was the third son of Anthony Lennox Devenish and his wife, Anna Maria Catharina van der Westhuizen.

D. grew up on the family farm near Victoria West, and after attending the Diocesan College (Bishops) in Cape Town (1870-73) he spent two years qualifying as a surveyor. He left for the Transvaal in 1875 where he was employed in the office of the surveyor-general, Sam Mellville. Acting as surveyor-general for three months the following year, D. made the acquaintance of General P.J. Joubert with whose assistance he afterwards undertook extensive surveying work in the Wakkerstroom district; here he married Eliza Francis Short, daughter of Samuel Short, a schoolmaster, on 31.1.1877. D. took his wife to the Ermelo district but as there were indications of a Zulu uprising (1879) they returned to Pretoria, and having in the meantime bought two farms near Bronkhorstspuit, D. decided to farm. While they were living there the battle of Bronkhorstspuit (10.12.1880) took place. D. was commandeered for military service, but since he refused to comply was given a month's grace, fined £50, ordered to provide a horse and equipment for a substitute, and appointed commissariat-officer of the camp at Bronkhorstspuit where the British wounded were cared for.

After the First Anglo-Boer War (1880-81) he decided to move to the Cape Colony but returned after six months with about a hundred ostriches and some breeding cattle. Economic conditions being extremely poor, the ostrich farming a fiasco, and without a market for either his farm products or the coal that was mined on his property, D. sold his farms and went into partnership with the surveyor F.B. Rissik in Pretoria. Shortly after this the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand (1886) caused a tremendous increase in surveying on the goldfields and elsewhere. The government appointed him to survey the town of Schweizer-Reneke, the western border of the Transvaal, and the town which was later named Pietersburg after General Piet Joubert. D., who surveyed extensively in the Northern Transvaal, came

to own several farms in that area, and also worked some alluvial gold-claims on the Tsama River, near the Letaba goldfields, with very satisfactory results.

He took a great interest in the development of Pietersburg, and became one of its leading citizens. Active in civic affairs and chairman of the board of executors, D. campaigned for the building of a railway line to Pretoria. His kindly, genial manner, and his readiness to assist his neighbours in such things as writing a letter or drawing up a deed of sale won him the respect of the community. Streets in Pietersburg, Louis Trichardt, and Pretoria are named after him. After an illness of a few days he died of typhoid fever.

Two sons and seven daughters were born of D.'s marriage to Eliza Short. His widow lived in Pietersburg for many years before moving to Haenertsburg where she died in 1913. Her reminiscences, entitled "Twenty years in the Transvaal Republic" (infra), contain interesting information on conditions during the last years of the Republic.

M. HUGO

Obituary: "The Press", 4.5.1898; - E.F. Short, "Twenty years in the Transvaal Republic", ts. in the possession of Col. A.D. Irvine (grandson), Pta.; - N.C. von Broembsen and A.D. Irvine, "Anthony Lennox Devenish", ts., Jan. 1977, in the possession of Col. A.D. Irvine, Pta.

Source: "Dictionary of South African Biography", volume 5, by Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), Pretoria, 1989. A street in Groenkloof, Pretoria, has been named after Devenish. Therefore the book "Street and place names of old Pretoria" by Tom Andrews and Jan Ploeger (J.L. van Schaik, Pretoria, 1988, p.24) contains a note on him.

The main source of Dr. Hugo is the biography by Devenish's widow, Mrs. Eliza Francis Short, written during the second Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902 for their nine children and edited and printed in a small number of copies by her grandson, Colonel A.D. Irvine at Pretoria on 26 November 1976. I am pleased that this biography is now published in "Pretoriana".

Further Mr. T.E. Andrews published particulars from Mrs. Devenish's biography in his monthly News Letter of our Society in September 1977, p.1.

Mr. and Mrs. Devenish: two different characters

Mr. A.L. Devenish appears to have been a loyal British subject. He refused to take up arms against British soldiers in the first Anglo-Boer War 1880/81 and the Transvaler rebels or independence fighters respected his will to remain neutral. After the war he and his family soon returned from the Cape Colony to Transvaal and he was generally respected and esteemed, because he was always obliging to his

employers and acquaintances and had many prominent friends among them.

His wife Eliza Short was quite a different character. She was the daughter of a well-educated English teacher who immigrated with his wife from London to Cape Town. Eliza was born there in 1857. She became a house teacher of the Cape farmer Guillaume van Niekerk and migrated with him and his family to a farm at Bronkhorstspruit in 1874. On 31 January 1877 she married the land surveyor A.L. Devenish in Transvaal. They had two sons and seven daughters. After her husband's early death in 1898 she made a tour with their children to Great Britain and the Continent. During the war 1899-1902 she wrote her memoirs of her marriage. After the war she returned to Transvaal, as she did after the first Anglo-Boer War 1880/81, but in 1902 Transvaal had come under the British government which she so highly praised. She lived for many years at Pietersburg, moved to Haenertsburg and died in 1913.

She was a very English lady, highly jingoist, much more than her husband was. She had a low opinion of most Transvaler Boers and calls them inveterate liars, young and old, furtive, bigots, braggarts, narrowminded and coursemannered. These are characteristics attributed to a pioneer population in a backward country. In conflicts between white and black people she mostly sides with blacks against Transvalers. Her "bête noire" (scapegoat) was President Paul Kruger as the leader of Transvaler nationalists. She believes every nasty tale told about Kruger. She ~~reluctantly~~ calls the Transvaler Boers goodhearted and kind to prisoners of war. She has great esteem for a few Transvalers, such as Kruger's opponents President T.F. Burgers and Commandant-General Piet Joubert, who became a good friend of the Devenishes as prominent inhabitants of Pietersburg, founded by him in 1886, though she admits that he was anti-English. Her bitter complaints about some Transvalers' behaviour to her husband and her during the first Anglo-Boer War concern trifles for people who have survived the atrocities and horrors of World War I or II or both wars.

She regrets British magnanimity to return independence to Transvaal in 1881, so that this country could no longer enjoy the blessings of British Government, and the Jameson Raid into Transvaal in 1895/96 which contributed as much as the Transvaal independence in 1881 to the outbreak of war in 1899.

She was an educated woman and wrote an interesting biography of her venerated husband full of useful particulars of life in Transvaal in the 19th century.

TWENTY YEARS IN THE TRANSVAAL REPUBLIC

by

Eliza Francis Short (Mrs A.L. Devenish)

This is the story of Mary Trevor-Jones' grandfather,
Anthony Lennox Devenish, written by his wife,
Eliza Francis Short



The picture above is the only known photo of land surveyor Anthony L. Devenish. The persons are from left to right: Audrett, L. Adendorf and A.L. Devenish on the alluvial goldclaim at the farm Frischgewaagd in Northern Transvaal about 1890/91. Adendorf died at Louis Trichardt during the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902. - This information was given by Comt. P.W. Möller, Groblersplaas, Louis Trichardt, 21 April 1957. Photo State Archive Pretoria

Foreword

The author of this chronicle, Eliza Francis Short, was born in Cape Town in 1857, the day her parents and two children arrived from London by sea to settle in South Africa.

Her father was a scholar and school master and, as a friend of Charles Dickens, assisted him in the editing of several of his books.

Anthony Lennox Devenish, whom she married at Wakkerstroom in 1877, was the grandson of Lieutenant John Mearles Devenish of H.M. 55 Foot Regiment who came to the Cape in 1808 with his wife Ellen Stretch on exchange to the Cape Corps.

He grew up on his father's farm near Victoria West and went to school at the Diocesan College, Cape Town, Bishops, and then, after qualifying as a surveyor, went to the Transvaal in 1875 when he was 23 years old. He died at Pietersburg in the prime of his life in 1898, survived by his wife, two sons and seven daughters.

Her reason for writing this chronicle is expressed on page 27 as follows: "If I have enlarged somewhat too much on our experiences and sentiments of these times, it is because I wish our children who may read this, perhaps years later, to know what their father's opinions and trials were, in having been cut off in the prime of his life and work, leaving several children too young to realise their loss. It is for them that I am endeavouring to write down whatever of interest I can remember of his life in the early days of the Transvaal. Moreover, the record of those early days may possibly throw a sidelight on the great Boer and Uitlander question."

After her husband died, she took her children on an extended visit to England and the Continent where this chronicle was written.

She returned after the Boer War (1899-1902) to her home in Pietersburg and later moved to Haenertsburg where she died in 1913 of a heart attack at the age of 56.

A.D. Irvine
 PRETORIA.
 26th November 1976

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Chapter 1

Describes a Boer trek to the Transvaal in 1875

About the time that a number of Boers trekked from the Transvaal to Damaraland (1875) there was an exodus of about fifteen families from Victoria West, Cape Colony. These families were slipping into the places of their more adventurous, if less cultivated, brethren across the Vaal.

A prominent member of these "Trekking" was a Mr. van Niekerk,¹⁾ a well-to-do Dutch farmer of Victoria West. He and several friends had made a very pleasant hunting trip into the Transvaal some months previously. They liked what they saw so well that they decided to sell out in the Colony and begin life anew in that land of promise, thought to be flowing with milk and honey. Of drought and locusts they did not then dream.

Van Niekerk and his wife were a typical Dutch couple, with a large family and primitive ideas as to comfort and cleanliness. They were well fitted to become pioneers in a new and scarcely civilised country. They nevertheless shared the ambition, then just growing amongst the Dutch colonists, to employ a *governess and have their children taught English and music. Having found a lady who could accommodate herself to their way of living, they gave up their children in her care with a feeling that in point of respectability they were beyond reproach.

Van Niekerk and his friends had purchased farms near Pretoria from some of the Damara Trekkers²⁾ and arrangements were now made for the long and tedious journey. Much had to be done before a start could be made. There was endless baking of rusks and making biltong (dried meat) whilst a sale was held of all surplus stock. From Victoria West to Pretoria, a distance of 550 miles, was in those days a three months journey by wagon and with sheep and cattle, a migration in this fashion could hardly be conceived now. Van Niekerk's party alone consisted of four large wagons loaded with baggage, furniture, pumpkins and children. Then what confusion in getting off the different herds and flocks of sheep, inspanning the wagons, saying last goodbyes to weeping relatives and old Colonial servants who had decided to remain in the old Colony.

Then followed a long monotonous trek. The party passed through the outskirts of Colesberg, Philippolis and Fauresmith, halting on Sundays at some farm, being invariably hospitably received by the Free State burghers, a people far superior to their cousins across the Vaal. The Sunday halt was utilised after public worship for baking bread and preparing generally for next week's journey. On reaching Bloemfontein, then a very quiet, sleepy-looking place untroubled by railway, Van Niekerk and some of his fellow trekkers

*The author was the governess. (Note of A.D. Irvine.)

went to see President Brand who received them kindly and wished them success in their new life. To the townspeople the large convoy of wagons, tents, etc., was the cause of considerable interest and curiosity. Both travellers and stock suffered severely from the cold during this trek, as those who know the bleak bare country will fully understand, it being early in July, the coldest month of the year.

Endless flats of almost bare veldt had to be traversed without even the excitement of shooting game, as the buck had all left for warmer veldt. Truly, the Boer is a born pioneer. What other people could endure such hardships and be content to take six months over the journey if three could not suffice? The roads were in a state that defies description, but both man and beast took them quite calmly.

At Potchefstroom a halt was made for a few days. The lovely Mooi River being a glad sight after the long waterless stretches they had had to cross. Here too they were introduced to ex-President Pretorius who did all in his power to make welcome the weary travellers. At length after nearly four months of slow trekking they reached Pretoria and it was with joy they realised that only a few short treks would bring them to their longed-for destination, appropriately named *Rustfontein, i.e. fountain of rest. Having left Victoria West early in May, 1875, they arrived at Rustfontein on 16th August. The journey now takes less than three days by rail.

Chapter 2

Settling down in their new home

The Cape Colonists were delighted with their new home. It was a rambling old Dutch homestead with rather tumbled-down-looking houses, strongly built, with the usual large "voorhuis" or living room with small bedrooms leading off and a kitchen at the back. There were numerous outhouses built on the same plan. The previous owner having had several married children, they each had been provided with a house and garden plot near to their parents' house. A not uncommon plan with the Boers of settling their married children until they were able to purchase farms for themselves. There was a splendid orchard with fruit trees of every kind, but it had been neglected for months so that the tall grass vied with the trees in height and choked the flower garden entirely.

The departure of the previous owners strongly illustrates the character of the Boer. These people had good farms, plenty of stock and everything that should make life worth living to them, but the restrictions of Government, be it ever so lenient, were found irksome and they preferred to start afresh and to endure endless privations and dangers on

*5 Miles north of Bronkhorstspuit. (Note of A.D. Irvine.)

a lengthened journey to a new and unknown land, so that they may live as they pleased and be free to shoot game whenever and wherever they found it, and to manage the natives according to their own ideas.

The caretaker the new settlers found living in one of the smaller houses in a poverty-stricken way, was named MacDonald, a Scotchman, who had lived for many years amongst the Boers. He was quite a character in his way. He could tell the most wonderful stories about lions and defied anyone to discredit the most outstanding improbabilities. He wanted to know if Queen Victoria was still (1875) Queen of England³⁾ as he had not heard anything from the outside world for years. Although his English was so mixed with Dutch that it was hard to make out what he said, and in spite of his having married a Boer woman he was always treated by the burghers as an outsider and hence had stayed behind when his companions left for woods and pastures new.

Van Niekerk had a letter of introduction from his late Pastor the Rev. Mr. Leibbrandt, at present the "Keeper of the Archives" in the Cape House of Parliament,⁴⁾ to President Burgers, then President of the Transvaal Republic. Mr. Burgers welcomed the newcomers most cordially and promised to do all in his power to assist them. His Government was just then on the eve of a war with Secoecoenie and scarcely had the Colonists settled down to their farm work when they were told to hold themselves in readiness to be commandeered at any moment for personal service. This was a heavy blow to them and they thought regretfully of the homes they had left in the Cape Colony, where under the British flag commandeering was unknown. They had heard much of the glorious freedom of the Republic, but here was a sudden and rude awakening for which they had not bargained.

The older men straightaway discovered various ailments of long standing but forgotten in the excitement of the Trek. When the Commandeering Officer arrived and he had taken care that these newcomers were first on his list, he treated their ailments with scant ceremony, saying that if he were to listen to that sort of things there would be no men to fight the Kaffirs. He thereupon read out the order that on a certain date and at a given place they were to present themselves with horse, saddle and bridle, food and what ammunition they had to last for a month. Failing this, a fine of fifty pounds would be the penalty. The newcomers, as has been seen, were not adventurous spirits longing for a fight. Indeed, several declared that as they were forced to go they would keep well behind the Koppies. Several men declared that they would return to the Cape Colony if spared after the war, a vow many of them carried out, returning wiser, if poorer, men. The war dragged on its weary length, causing much misery, and was only concluded with the help of "Tommy Atkins"⁵⁾ after Sir Theophilus Shepstone's annexation of the Transvaal in April, 1877.

Chapter 3

In which appears the hero of these pages

In the same year, towards the end of 1875, that Van Niekerk and his party left Victoria West, three young men, two theological students from Stellenbosch near Cape Town and a young surveyor named Devenish from Victoria West who had just passed his survey examination at the Cape, arranged to make a trip together to the Transvaal, that then almost unknown little state. It had been brought into greater prominence by the recent trek to Damaraland as also the smaller one from Victoria West.

They started off in a comfortable little spring wagonette and six mules with good Cape drivers, plenty of provisions, guns and ammunition for any shooting they may chance to get on the way. The surveyor undertaking to be the pilot, secured a rough map of the route and they were soon travelling along in fine style.

They did the journey in about three weeks and had many experiences, both pleasant and otherwise. Game was now most plentiful all along the route and they often had to resist the most tempting opportunities of bringing down a buck because they could not carry so much. They always left some game at a farm house or Kaffir kraal as they passed. It was always gladly received, for though game was plentiful, cartridges were scarce in those days.

After a fairly enjoyable journey they reached Pretoria and being furnished with letters of introduction to President Burgers and Mr. Sam Melville, the surveyor General of the Republic⁶⁾, and other influential inhabitants of Pretoria, they soon found themselves in quite a whirl of invitations from the kind-hearted and hospitable people.

The two students were only on a visit, but our young surveyor had come to cast in his lot with the Boer Government and begin his career under its patronage. Happening to know Mr. van Niekerk and several other members of the late Trek Party who had all settled more or less in the Pretoria district, they paid an early visit to Rustfontein. They were heartily received and had to listen to the grievances of the settlers. The Transvaal Boers, though seemingly friendly, indirectly threw every obstacle they could in their way and to the end these Colonial Boers were made to feel that they were aliens in the land of their adoption.

After the departure of his friends on their return to the Cape, the surveyor General gave Devenish employment in his own office. It was at this time that he first made the acquaintance of General Joubert, then member of the Volksraad for Wakkerstroom. They became good friends at once and their friendship lasted to the time of his death. At that time General Joubert was living in Pretoria and with the help of a tutor, struggled hard to master the English language. It so happened that he occupied a room next to Devenish's, divided only by a thin wooden partition, and it was almost comical at times to hear this middle-aged man struggling with the syllables of the Child's First Reader and learning to spell and count in English.

This speaks well for the man, he knew that the knowledge of English would be to his advantage in the future. Had Paul Kruger possessed similar ambitions he might have avoided much that has happened since he undertook the guidance of the State.

Van Niekerk soon found that with such doubtful neighbours around him it would be well to have his land surveyed. He wrote to Devenish and asked him to do the survey. He started work at once on Rustfontein and very soon had the survey of the entire neighbourhood. This led to many disputes and even lawsuits. The Boers having in many instances shifted their beacons onto Government or neighbours' ground and held these encroaching beacons so long undisputed that they had grown to think that they really belonged to them. In many cases the man who had shifted the beacon was dead so that the present holder honestly believed that they were his rightful property. When the surveyors came and finding them distinctly out, ordered them to be put back, the owners were filled with righteous indignation and considered themselves robbed of their land. The encroachment had more often been made on Government ground and this gave rise to the Boers thinking that the surveyor was in league with the Government to rob them. The question became a vexed one all around and caused much litigation. A general Survey Law was passed, but was not carried out till many years later.

Soon after the completion of this survey, Devenish was appointed Acting Surveyor General in place of Mr. S. Mellville, who went to the Cape Colony on three months leave. During this time he made many friends in Pretoria and entered fully into all the stirring events of President Burgers' most difficult and thankless term of office. Pretoria was then a quiet social-little place, with grass growing in the streets and water furrows in all directions. Thatched homes nestling among the vines and fruit trees gave it a very rural appearance. At that time money was becoming so scarce that it was quite an event to see a Sovereign, "Blue Blacks"⁷⁾ were becoming the current coin of the State, when the annexation to England came to save the country from bankruptcy.

Chapter 4

Incidents and description of typical Boer life

Rustfontein farm being on the high road from the interior to Pretoria, one often had the small excitement of seeing a hunter's wagon on its return journey, laden with beautiful skins of wild animals, horns, elephant tusks and native curios of every kind, young wild animals and on one occasion a seven week old lion cub. It was so tame that it was let loose and frolicked with the children. Another time a hunter arrived with a family of three dwarfs found somewhere in the interior.⁸⁾ They had been brought away much against their own wills.

Before going on with my story, let me describe the life of the Boers as I knew them twenty and more years ago. They were without exception early risers, and when at home always begin their day by singing a Psalm or two. Many a time have I been awakened by the sounds of their inharmonious dirge,

but it is well-meant, and doubtless serves its purpose. Prayers over, they drink their early coffee and go forth to their several duties. They have breakfast about eight o'clock consisting principally of bread and coffee and sometimes biltong. Their dinner at twelve o'clock principally consists of meat and mealies and sometimes pumpkins. The meat is always cut up into small pieces before cooking and each one helps himself with a three-pronged fork. They always eat with their knives, even the better classes think this good form. Their food is generally well cooked, as it always devolves upon the housewife to attend to this personally. The Boer women are very capable. The husband can go on commando or a hunting trip or transport riding for months, and in his absence his wife will generally, with the assistance of the native servants, sow or reap the crops and attend to everything on the farm. After the early dinner, if in summer, the adults of the establishment take a nap. This is a regular institution which makes up for the early rising. After this, coffee is served all around and is kept going through the rest of the day. The evening meal is at eight o'clock to which all the children are allowed to remain. Prayers are then again read and sung and they all retire for the night without the trouble of undressing, only the shoes are taken off.

Notwithstanding all their daily prayers, the Boers are a most untruthful people. The smallest child is ready with a lie at the least provocation. There are many exceptions, but generally they are not to be trusted and do not trust each other. The younger Boers are often however anxious to copy British ways, especially the girls, so there is hope of improvement in them, especially if English education is encouraged. In courtship the Boer is always most cool and unemotional. When the young man arrives to pay his attention, a casual observer would never detect the particular object of his admiration. His behaviour is the same to all, not even a look will betray him. He appears stupidly indifferent to all the girls and one can only guess at his errand by his arriving on Saturday afternoon with somewhat of a smarter appearance than usual, his great weakness being a bright coloured saddle blanket for his horse. The steed often borrowed for the occasion, having undergone an unusual brush-down and extra good feed, is quite frisky and on arrival at the chosen one's home is made to perform sundry antics which show off his capabilities as a rider and thus captivate the fancy of the women kind.

Another sign of his errand is a blue or green gossamer veil tied around his broad brimmed felt hat. This is a great piece of extravagance which his lady duly appreciates. The lover's appearance generally calls forth a joke against the suspected object of his visit and he is treated by the older members of the family in a slightly contemptuous and offhand manner. However, he makes up for it all later on when the old folks have gone to bed by leaving his lady love all to himself for a little while. The lovers then "sit up" in the front room with a solitary candle to light them. The rule being that as soon as the candle burns out they must each retire to their respective bedrooms, the girl usually sharing

the parents' room. The mother sees to it that the candle is not too long. Hence arises the standing joke amongst the Boers of the "op zit kers", "sitting up candle", for sometimes one or other of the lovers is not above producing a fresh candle when the first is burnt out. The mother is nevertheless equal to the occasion and when she thinks it's time, calls out in an unmistakable voice, that it is time for everyone to be in bed. A hint the lovers dare not ignore.

The Boer women give little thought to dress. A plain full skirt and bodice to match with an apron is the ordinary attire, not forgetting the cappie or sun bonnet which is their constant headgear. They always look their best in their everyday dress. Their Sunday best is often amusing, being a clumsy attempt at the fashion of the nearest "dorp" involving great clashing of colouring. The men generally look clumsy and unkempt, a barber's services being entirely dispensed with and their clothes hanging loosely and ill-cut to their somewhat ungainly figures.

Chapter V

Settled in Wakkerstroom, Shepstone's March to Pretoria and Zulu War

On the return of Mr. Sam Melville, the surveyor General, to Pretoria our young surveyor, whose fortunes I will follow to the end of this narrative, was again at liberty to seek fresh employment.

Through the influence and goodwill of General Joubert he soon acquired an extensive survey in Wakkerstroom District which was the home of the whole clan of Jouberts. Here Devenish settled and soon after, his marriage to the writer to whom he had long been attached, took place. (On 31st January, 1877, his father presented him with a Bible at Wakkerstroom. It was probably a wedding present and is in my possession. A.D.I.)

I had come to the Transvaal from the Cape Colony with his father and sister on a visit. Mr Devenish Senior, a wealthy farmer, well known at Victoria West, had come to the Republic principally to invest in Transvaal properties and he bought some very valuable farms at a fairly low rate.

(From here one page of the manuscript is missing. A.D.I.)

Wakkerstroom being a border town, the inhabitants became very uneasy for fear of a Zulu raid and we decided to move away to a farm called Rolfontein near Ermelo, the residence of the Brothers Robertson, who had a large store there.

About this time Paul Kruger, then acting for the British Government, and ex-President Pretorius, passed through Wakkerstroom to the Zulu border to hold an Indaba with Ketchawayo, the Zulu king.⁹⁾ It ended most unsatisfactorily for hardly had they returned when a Zulu Impi was sent across to seize some Boer cattle. War followed and the Boers fought side by side with our soldiers against a common foe.¹⁰⁾ Other families from Wakkerstroom had come to Rolfontein as soon as the war broke out and here the terrible news of *Isandhlwana

*January, 1879 (Note of A.D. Irvine)

reached us and gave the greatest sorrow and alarm.¹¹⁾ Our principal dread was that the natives living around would take the opportunity to join the Zulu cause and fall upon the isolated farms. Fortunately for us they did not do so. Devenish however soon found that the tension of this insecure feeling was telling upon his wife's health. He decided to move to Pretoria where they would be quite beyond any fear of that kind. He always looked back with the greatest gratitude to the Robertson Brothers for their many kindnesses during this time of terrible anxiety.

Chapter VI

Another move to Pretoria where our surveyor tries farming

It was with a great sense of relief that we settled down in Pretoria and soon we had the gratification of hearing that the war was over and Ketchawayo a prisoner on his way to England.

Surveying work being at a standstill, my husband thought it best to turn his attention to farming and secured two valuable farms adjoining his old friend Van Niekerk's at Rustfontein*.

He made things as comfortable as he could for his family on this primitive homestead and went to Wakkerstroom and purchased a large stock of sheep and cattle wherewith to stock his farms. On his return with the help of native labour he got large crops into the ground for with the Military occupation of Pretoria and other towns, grain and all farm produce were fetching very high prices.

The neighbours were mostly Boers except the Van Niekerks and their party. They looked upon this English speaking farmer in their midst with their usual dislike and suspicion. They disliked seeing his extensive crops which made their own efforts look so small, and tried to influence the natives against him, knowing that insufficient labour during the reaping time would certainly cripple him. This, however, was not so easy, seeing that he always paid higher wages and treated them better than their Boer employers did.

Our nearest neighbour was a Mr. Erasmus,¹²⁾ a wealthy cattle farmer who often came over to see us and made a great show of friendliness, but my husband could never really feel that he was sincere in his attempt at friendship. Later events proved he had good cause to find that his impressions were not at fault. In the coming troubles of 1881 he proved himself anything but a friend. Meantime we led an isolated life without English speaking society of any kind. We were kept fully employed in trying to work the farm to some advantage with so many drawbacks around. This was no easy matter.

To testify to the climate in these parts, I can here state a fact, that perhaps few would credit, that during our sojourn on this farm of nearly six years duration, with a young family, we never had a Doctor in the house or anything serious the matter. Illness came of course, which with God's help, care and the ordinary medicine chest we managed to combat successfully, assisted entirely by a good climate and a healthy outdoor life and occupation. The thatched roof

*5 miles north of Bronkhorstspuit (A.D.I.)

house was cool in summer and warm in winter, though lacking nearly every convenience to be found in an ordinary English dwelling. We had a beautiful fruit garden which proved to me those old "Voortrekkers" must have taken great pains in the selection of fruit in laying out those orchards. They were principally raised from the pips and stones brought from the old Cape Colony.

As the winter approached, we found that the stock would not thrive unless moved to winter veldt. Having 1200 sheep it was a very important matter, so we decided that the whole family should migrate. We were fortunate in being able to buy a most comfortable travelling wagon, almost like a house on wheels compared to the ordinary Boer wagon. This same wagon was purchased years afterwards by Lord Randolph Churchill¹³⁾ and in it he travelled to Rhodesia via Pretoria and Pietersburg. I remember seeing him pass through the latter town and looking at him with a double interest as being my first sight of a real live Lord and the owner of our old friend the travelling wagon.

Having made every preparation we started for the Bush Veldt, where there was plenty of good grazing for the cattle and a nice mild climate with plenty of game and fuel, both agreeable accessories to camp life as those who have experienced it will know. We had to travel very slowly but after about five days trek pitched our camp in a charming spot. We had not been there a week when we experienced a great fright. Our little son, then about three years old, trotted off after one of the shepherds without being seen by any one and soon got lost in the dense bush. A frantic search ensued and after some hours of suspense to both parents, the little fellow was brought home by a Boer who had picked him up in the veldt and thought he must belong to Devenish by his speaking English. Needless to say great care was taken to prevent a recurrence of this alarming incident and that Boer had ever after only to make a request to have it granted by the thankful parents. The days passed very slowly with us, but we had brought plenty of good reading which helped to pass the time. There was always any amount of shooting, both bucks and birds being very plentiful in those early days.

We had Boer neighbours all round but at good distances apart so that their cattle and herds should not interfere with one another. Many Boers, even if they possessed no stock at all, would trek regularly every winter for three or four months to the Bush Veldt, living their ideal life of nothing to do and plenty of game to shoot and biltong to make.

Our stay in the Bush Veldt lasted three months and then we returned to our farm.

Chapter VII

Boer Revolt and Battle of Bronkhorstspuit (20.12.1880)

As time went on, the political situation became more serious, the Boers talking openly of upsetting the Government. Paul Kruger, who had been refused an increase in salary under the British Government, was dismissed from the Civil Service and turned all his attention to the spreading of discontent and sedition on every side. About the beginning of December, 1880, my husband with his neighbour Erasmus,¹⁴⁾ went to Pretoria together on some farm business. While there, they were approached by the Government as to the loyalty of the



Cornelis Johannes Gerhardus Erasmus (1842, Natal, 7/8 Januarie 1909, Hondsrivier) eienaar van die plaas Hondsrivier. Hy het hom ongeveer 15 jaar lank beywer vir die stigting van 'n dorp op sy plaas en het eers in 1909 daarin geslaag om probleme en struikelblokke te bowe te kom. Vier jaar voor sy dood was die stigting van Erasmusdorp uiteindelik 'n voldonge feit en die verwesenliking van 'n jarelange ideaal. C. J. G. Erasmus was vanaf 1870 tot 1877 diaken van die Nederduitsch Hervormde Gemeente Pretoria, terwyl sy vader, Jacobus Lourens Rasmus Erasmus (1810-1880), eienaar van Onderstepoort, in 1854 een van die eerste diakens van Pretoria Philadelphia-gemeente geword het en van toe af vir jarelank as diaken en ouderling op die kerkraad gedien het en 'n steunpilaar van die gemeente was. Hy is in 1853 as volksraadslid verkies maar kon die sitting op Rustenburg nie bywon nie as gevolg van 'n ernstige verwonding deur 'n luiperd langs die Apiesrivier.

Source of the photo and caption above is: H.M. Rex en andere, "Die Nederduitsch Hervormde Gemeente Bronkhorstspuit 1869-1969", N.H.W.Pers, Krugersdorp 1969, p.74.

C.J.G.Erasmus was one of the Devenishes'neighbours.

Boers in their neighbourhood and were asked if they would call a meeting at a suitable place, to ascertain the number of loyal Boers who could be relied on, and to point out to them the desirability of maintaining a loyal front in the event of any disturbance arising, and promising them arms and ammunition wherewith to defend themselves in case of the worst. They did not much like the task set them, knowing that there was a very strong feeling against the Government for which there certainly was some cause. Promises made at the time of the Annexation had not been strictly kept. Besides, a great want of tact on the part of the Government officials at this critical time led to friction and discontent which played into the hands of Paul Kruger and his companions. However, my husband and Erasmus both promised to do what they could. Our friend Erasmus was playing as it afterwards appeared a double game; from the first. It was arranged to call a meeting to be held at Rustfontein, Van Niekerk's farm. It being the most central, and Van Niekerk and his party being loyal, gladly entered into the plan of organising a party of loyalists. Notices were sent out and the day of the meeting arrived. It was very poorly attended, Erasmus only arriving at the last moment, and then he tried to give an impression that he only came by accident, having forgotten all about the meeting. The other Boers who were present were sullen and seemed afraid that they would be betrayed. They would not hear of taking any ammunition from the Government. My husband and Van Niekerk taking the lead, a resolution of loyalty to the Government was drawn up and signed by them and a few wavering timid Boers. Erasmus signed too but saying however that it was not strictly binding to anybody, which remark set some of them more at ease. Erasmus and Devenish again went to Pretoria and reported progress. The latter telling the Government that he was by no means sanguine of much loyalty and Erasmus saying as little as possible. However, they returned with some guns and ammunition which by the way Erasmus offered to take charge of; Devenish keeping one gun and some rounds of cartridges. He felt oppressed by a presentiment of trouble which nothing could allay.

On the 20th December, 1880, the Boers struck their first blow, lying in wait at a favourable position of attack for the ill-fated company of the 94th under Colonel Anstruther.

It was wonderful how the Boers kept their secret, for neither my husband nor the Van Niekerk party knew anything of their preparations or of their intentions to attack the troops though living as it were in amongst them.

On the morning of that day so fatal to many of the 94th Regiment, my husband, suspecting that there was mischief aboard, drove over with his family to Van Niekerk's farm to talk matters over with them. The Van Niekerk's too felt that something was wrong as they had seen parties of mounted Boers in threes and fours that morning riding past. Not knowing that the troops were expected on their march to Pretoria from Lydenburg, we could not think what to expect. Anxious and distressed we returned to our farm and when nearing the homestead, heard sounds like thunder at repeated intervals though there was not a cloud in the sky. This was alarming enough but we never guessed at the truth. We had just reached the home when a Mr. Watkins appeared. He was the local postmaster, an English Colonist, lately married to a Boer

girl, and lived on her parents' farm. He had walked over from his farm not daring to saddle a horse for fear of being asked where he was going to, to tell us the awful news that the whole Company of the 94th had been cut up.

As he spoke stray shots could be heard as here and there a poor soldier was done to death. Watkins told us that his wife had confided to him early that morning that her father and brothers were going to waylay and shoot the "Rooineks" (soldiers) that afternoon but they had not told her the place of attack... At great personal risk he went off immediately after she had told him, in the direction of where the troops were coming and met them at a farm where they had just halted for luncheon. He asked to see the Colonel on urgent business and after much delay as it seemed to his feverish anxiety, was introduced to Colonel Anstruther. Mr Watkins told him that a strong force of Boers were going to waylay and attack them that afternoon. The Colonel asked a few questions but finding that Watkins could not tell much more than bare facts of their intention to attack, treated the matter as a huge joke and said to some of his officers: "Well, if this young man is correct, we shall see some fun to-day." However, he courteously thanked him for his warning. When next Watkins saw that gallant officer he was stricken down with seven bullet wounds. Alas that our English soldiers will always make so light of their enemies.

On hearing Mr. Watkins' tale, we decided to go back to Van Niekerk's farm for the night, where we should not be quite so isolated in case the Boers should follow up their victory by attacking us. Just as we were leaving, a party of natives came running, breathlessly almost scared out of their senses. They were some of the drivers and leaders of the convoy of wagons which the troops have travelled with. They had fled at the first shots, leaving wagons and oxen to their fate. They begged to be allowed to remain on the farm and work only for their food, thinking their best plan of escape was to be in service. They were allowed to stay and never had master more willing servants in their fear of being discharged and thrown on the mercy of the Boers.

We found the Van Niekerks in the greatest trouble and consternation at the news, which had just reached them through a native. The men all kept watch that night, fearing they knew not what as they were all known to be loyal, but their fears were groundless as the Boers were all too busy looting the wagons and personal belongings of officers and men, to give a thought to anything else. They were only anxious to get back to their homes to show their wives and children the many treasures they had captured and gladden their gentle hearts with the tales of the "Rooineks" they had shot down in cold blood.

The next morning the sun shone bright and clear upon the dreaded battlefield, the aching misery of the wounded and the sad task of the burying parties. As we were driving home a Boer mounted on an English charger, armed with rifle and revolver, both captured from the British, rode up and ordered my husband to alight instantly (accompanying the command with a significant movement of the revolver) and listen to what he had to say. The Boer then took a large piece of paper out of his bag and reading from which he ordered Devenish in the name of Commandant Joubert¹⁵⁾ to appear in three days with his