

CHAPTER 3

ATTEMPTS TO SETTLE AND “TAME” THE SAN

I spoke to him of God and his soul and eternity, but he seemed quite indifferent about these subjects, making no reply and asking for a tinder-box.

Reverend John Campbell, on his attempts to convert the San leader, Kiewiet.

Am I not a Bushyman, had found grace?

San convert, addressing a congregation at Bethelsdorp.



○ Towns † Mission Stations † San Mission Stations

LMS mission stations to the San 1799-1850.

After maps in Marais (1962) and Szalay (1995).

San depredations continued well into the second half of the nineteenth century in some areas. As has been mentioned, the reason for these continued hostilities lay partly with the difficulties involved in negotiating with the San. While peace might be made with local bands, the various San bands seldom formed a larger political unit with whom binding agreements could be made. Although many groups, particularly in the later years of the eighteenth century, appear to have had leaders, they lacked the stronger forms of leadership common to more hierarchically-structured groups. Barrow, for example,

reported towards the end of the eighteenth century that the members of a large San camp near present-day Colesberg had stated that “every one was master of his own family, and acted entirely without control, being at liberty to remain with, or quit, any society he might incidentally have joined, according as it might suit his convenience”. This meant that agreements entered into with one San group were seldom adhered to by others, a continual source of frustration for the frontier farmers - although the agreements they “negotiated” were usually overwhelmingly in the favour of the latter.

Another obstacle to peace was that the ethos of sharing, which ran very deep within traditional San society, meant that, in the early stages of contact at least, livestock donated to San by the farmers, in return for an undertaking by the San to end their raids, were sometimes consumed by bands from other areas with whom they were expected to share resources. In other cases they were raided for their cattle by more powerful groups. Without livestock to slaughter and with game increasingly scarce as the springs were taken over by the trekboers, the San were driven by hunger to resume their raids on the Colonists’ farms. Henry Lichtenstein, a German physician and naturalist who accompanied Governor J.W. Janssens of the Batavian administration on a tour of parts of the Colony in 1803, described how, on being asked why he was so addicted to stealing, one of the leaders of the San in the Roggeveld-Kareeberg area who had been taken prisoner by the Colonists “pointed to his body, which hung together in folds, and taking a piece in his hand, drew it out as far as it could be drawn, to shew how much it would hold if it was full”.



20th century San in an emaciated state.

Source: Museum Africa.

In the Graaff-Reinet area, Janssens found the conditions of the Khoe-San in the service of the Boers to be appalling. “Many Hottentots presented themselves with bitter complaints, not about thrashings or nakedness - such things seem no longer worth complaining about - but about the withholding of children or cattle, and even about the murder of relatives ...” he reported. “The cruelties practised

against the Hottentots surpass not only everything that is said about them in Cape Town, but even everything that can be imagined ... Complaints about the withholding of children, cattle, wages and other such matters are so numerous that a volume would be needed to record them.”

Despite these obstacles and the bitterness of the many abused Kho-San who were in the service of the Boers, limited attempts to bring about a lasting peace with the San were initiated by the government towards the end of the eighteenth century. In 1792 Maynier had received instructions from the Company to take steps to ensure that the San in the Graaff-Reinet district were protected from maltreatment by the Boers. In an attempt to improve relations with the San, he employed one of the “better-inclined” Boers to go with a party into the areas occupied by the San and distribute presents of beads and sheep for slaughter amongst them. There is a hint in Maynier’s description of this man that there were divisions within the ranks of the frontier farmers as to how the San should be treated. Some, as has been remarked, were clearly more sympathetic to the plight of the San than others.

Maynier’s emissary to the San was instructed to “use his best endeavours to dispose them to leave off the commitment of depredations, to give them the assurance that then all hostilities on the part of the Colonists would also cease”. These measures had some success in halting San raids, and farmers in the region between the Tarka and Nieuweveld mountains hunted game for the San, who visited their farms to receive food and other presents. From about the end of the eighteenth century, a number of San groups of the north-western and north-eastern frontier districts began to attach themselves to the Colonists’ farms.

Somerville reported in 1799, for example, that a J.P. van der Walt, who had a farm in the Tarka, treated the approximately 70 San who lived on his farm very well, receiving, in return, faithful and reliable service from them. And when Colonel Richard Collins toured the frontier districts in the early years of the nineteenth century, he reported that many San in the north-west appeared to be on reasonably good terms with the farmers in this region. Some independent San visited farms on a regular basis to receive gifts of sheep and tobacco, while others were employed by the farmers and were said to be faithful servants. Most of the San who continued to raid the farms of the Dutch settlers lived beyond the borders of the Colony, and it seems that those raiders who lived within the Colony avoided attacking the farms of Europeans with whom they had established good relationships.

Floris Visser and Macartney’s Proclamation

The first concerted and systematic efforts to make peace with, and “civilise”, the San had been initiated in 1798 by Floris Visser, veldwachtmeester of the Middle Roggeveld, some years before Collins’s visit to the frontier. In this year Visser travelled from the Roggeveld to discuss a series of measures with the Landdrost of Stellenbosch which he believed would solve the “Bushman problem”. He suggested the appointment of leaders amongst the San who had credibility both amongst their own people and amongst the farmers, and he also proposed that areas should be set aside which could be permanently occupied by the San. Both these measures had been adopted previously, but Visser further proposed giving the San the means to support themselves as pastoralists - to change their mode of subsistence from one based on hunting and gathering to one based on herding. He suggested that the San should be provided with cattle and sheep by farmers in the area until they were able to establish themselves as pastoralists on a permanent basis. These proposals greatly impressed the Governor, Lord Macartney, who issued a proclamation in 1798 setting out government policy concerning the way San were to be treated and ways in which the problem of their relations with the frontier farmers was to be addressed. British rule was, then, and in the years to come, to result in significantly lower (even if still unacceptable) rates of attrition against the San than had been the case under the Dutch.



Lord Macartney.

Source: Cape Archives.

Macartney ordered that sufficient land was to be given to San beyond the Sak River for them to sustain themselves by pastoralism and that the inhabitants of the Roggeveld should be encouraged to make contributions of livestock to San in the areas they occupied. The San of the north-western frontier districts, between the Colonial boundary and the Gariep River, were to be placed under the protection and authority of the English government and no veldwachtmeester was to mount any expedition or commit any violent act against them except in self-defence. The capture of children for use as servants was specifically forbidden. San captains (leaders) were to be appointed and given metal-headed canes as symbols of their office, and some of these leaders were to be encouraged to come to Cape Town to “wait upon the governor to receive marks of kindness and approbation from him” and receive gifts for their wives and children. Finally, Macartney declared, because “reclaiming these Bosjesmen from their present savage and deplorable state is not only of the greatest importance to the Colony, but highly interesting to humanity”, those who assisted in this ideal would receive the special favour of the government, while those who obstructed it would be punished.

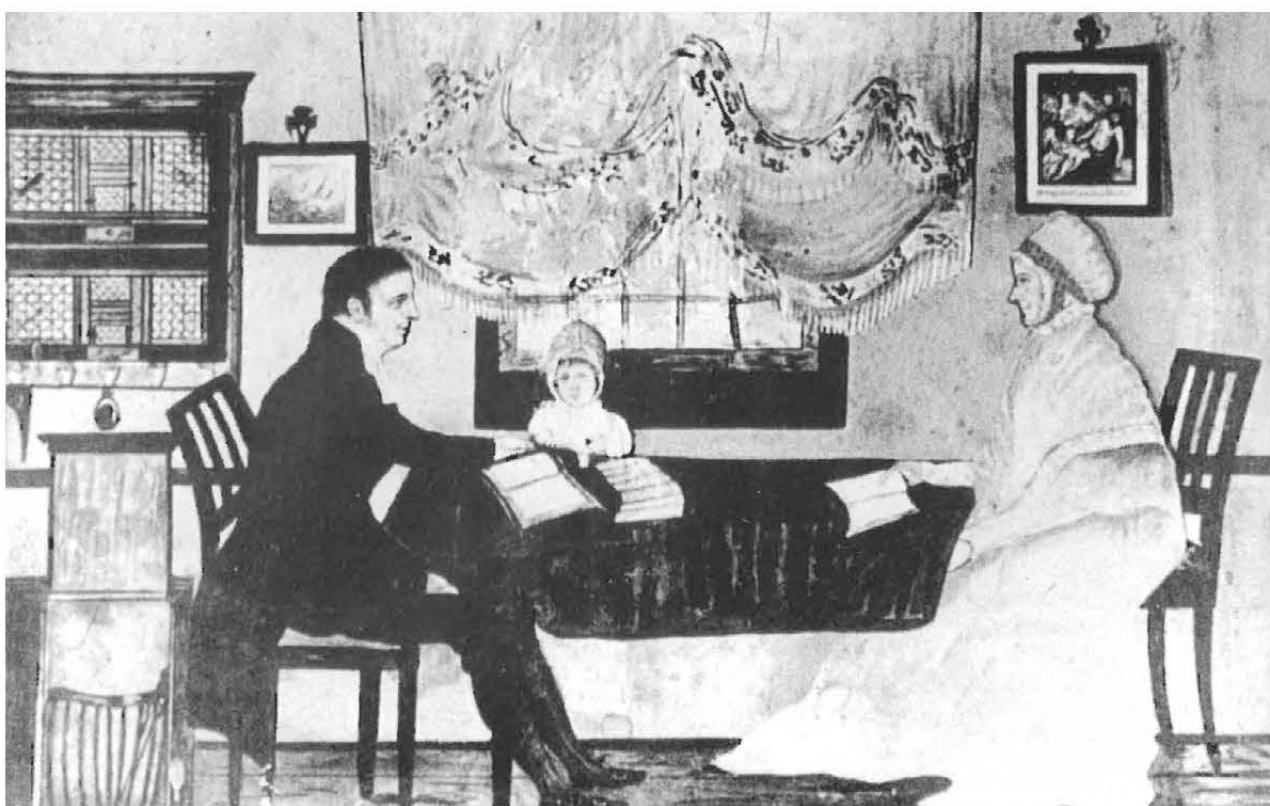
Visser, accompanied by a number of farmers, began to implement this scheme almost immediately. He visited San captains/leaders in the region of the Roggeveld, explained the intentions of the government and distributed livestock to a number of San groups. By early 1799, several San leaders and their followers had made peace with, and accepted cattle, sheep or goats from, the Colonists. Although San depredations continued on some parts of the northern frontier, the scheme had considerable success and was adopted in other areas. It also led directly to the establishment of the first Christian mission to the San, north of the Sak River.

Kicherer and the LMS missions to the San, 1799 - 1806

When Visser returned to the Roggeveld to enter into negotiations with the San early in 1799, he began by holding a peace ceremony. This was accompanied by prayer and singing of hymns by the farmers, and the San present were said to have asked for people to be sent to them who could teach them the Christian religion. Whether or not such an appeal was actually made by the San, plans were soon put in place to bring missionaries to the area to minister to them. These plans were brought to

fruition by the coincidental arrival in Cape Town of four missionaries of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in March of 1799.

Two of these missionaries, Johannes van der Kemp and his assistant, John Edmond, intended to minister to the Xhosa on the eastern frontier, while the other two, Johannes Kicherer and William Edwards, considered establishing a mission in Namaqualand. In April, encouraged by Visser and in accordance with Macartney's wishes, three San leaders from the Sak River area arrived in Cape Town to request that "proper persons might come and reside among them, who would afford them those valuable instructions which would enable them to become as rich and happy as their neighbours". Kicherer and Edwards saw this as a sign from providence and immediately changed their plans and arranged to travel to the Sak River - beyond the Roggeveld, which formed the northern frontier of the Colony at that time. They were encouraged and supported in this by the government at the Cape who wished to incorporate them into their larger scheme of pacifying and settling the San.



Kicherer with his wife and child.

Source: Cape Archives.

Within a short time the missionaries had bought provisions and equipment and had set out for the frontier. They were joined on the last leg of their journey by many farmers, who had come to be ministered to by Kicherer. Swollen with these extra numbers, the party arrived at Visser's farm, where they stayed for about three weeks while Kicherer preached to the farmers of the area. At the end of this period they journeyed for a day north of the Sak River into Bushmanland, accompanied by a train of Colonists, wagons carrying provisions, and herds of livestock. In August 1799 a site for the new mission, which they called Blyde Vooruitzicht, was selected. Kicherer and his helpers immediately began work on the construction of reed houses and a vegetable garden was laid out.

A few days later the farmers who had travelled up with Kicherer and Edwards left them. The missionaries were immediately faced with the daunting task of establishing the mission and of

persuading the “wild” San of the area to settle there. “We are now beyond the limits of the Colony, literally in a heathen land, where men roam around at large, uncontrolled by human or divine laws, doing that which is right in their own eyes” the Reverend T.L.Hodgson was to write when travelling through San-occupied territory in 1822, and something of the loneliness and the sense of alienation experienced by this missionary two decades later must have been shared by Kicherer and Edwards as they contemplated the task ahead of them in Bushmanland. They nevertheless set to work and a party of about 30 San were enticed to the station by handouts of tobacco, “the irresistible herb” as Kicherer described it. Further gifts of tobacco, meat and other presents brought others to the mission.

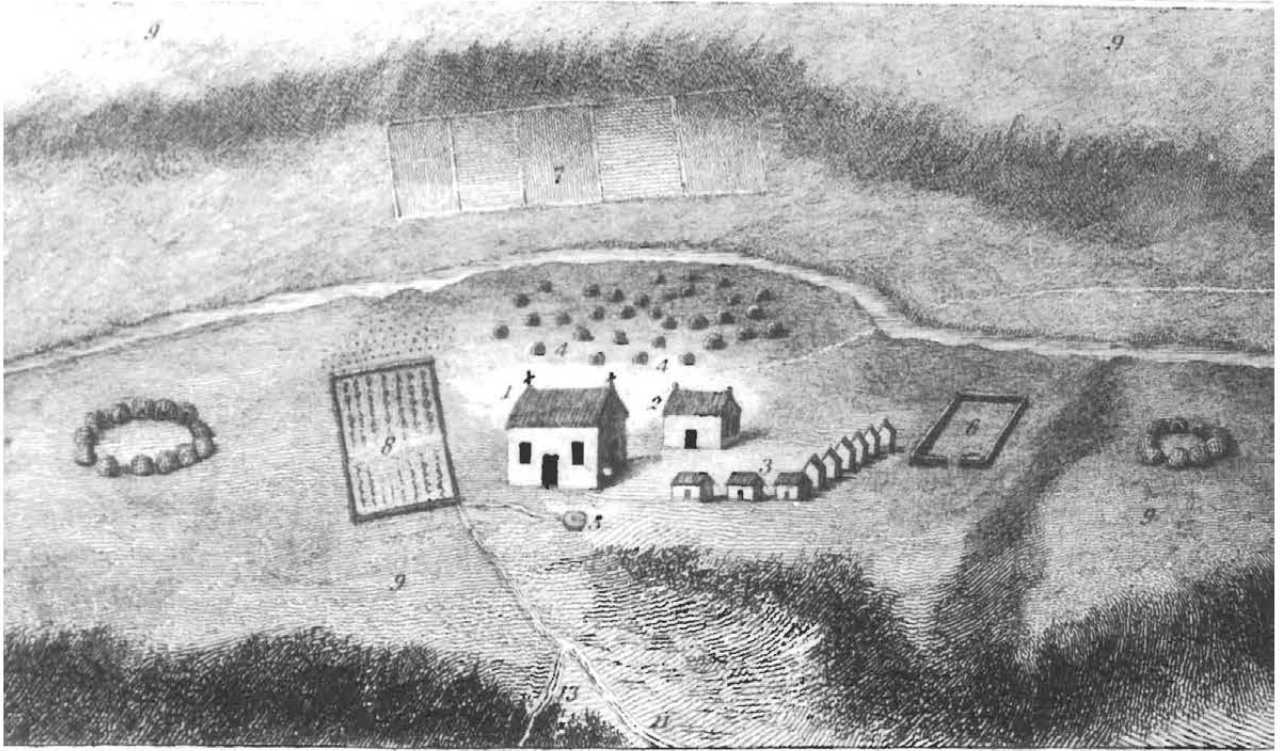
Having succeeded in their first aim, that of attracting San to the station, the missionaries now faced a host of problems, chief among which was that of communicating with their newly-established congregation. The latter obstacle was removed with the arrival of the wife of one of the Khoe men who accompanied the party. This woman, Gertrude Fortuin, who could speak both Dutch and a San language, acted as interpreter for the missionaries, but the problem remained of conveying the concepts underlying Christianity to the San. This proved particularly difficult and there were times when Kicherer despaired of ever being able to communicate the message of the Bible to his flock. San who professed to have been converted were not always sincere in this, since, as Kicherer remarked, “some of them seem to pray with no other design than to obtain a piece of tobacco”.

Kicherer also found it impossible to identify different individuals at the station, but he solved this problem in a novel, if bizarre, fashion. The names of the San were written in chalk on their backs, and whenever they approached Kicherer they were required to turn their backs and shoulders in his direction so that they could be identified. Yet another obstacle was that the San disliked the taste of cultivated vegetables. Kicherer had hoped that the San would acquire a taste for the vegetables they had begun to grow and that this would induce them to settle at the mission, believing, with another LMS missionary, the Reverend John Campbell, that the San’s “tasting the sweets of industry may produce the spirit of it”.

At the beginning of 1800, Kicherer visited Cape Town with nine San from the mission in order to get support for the mission from the authorities there. The extent to which the emotions of Kicherer and his San companions differed as they approached Cape Town is evident from Kicherer’s account of this visit: “I anticipated with delight, the pleasing scenes before me, but they were struck with dread and dismay. Some of the first objects which presented themselves to their affrighted view were several men hung in chains for atrocious crimes, and many of the Bushmen were conscious of having deserved the same punishment. Their terror was soon increased by beholding in a few days the public execution of another malefactor.”

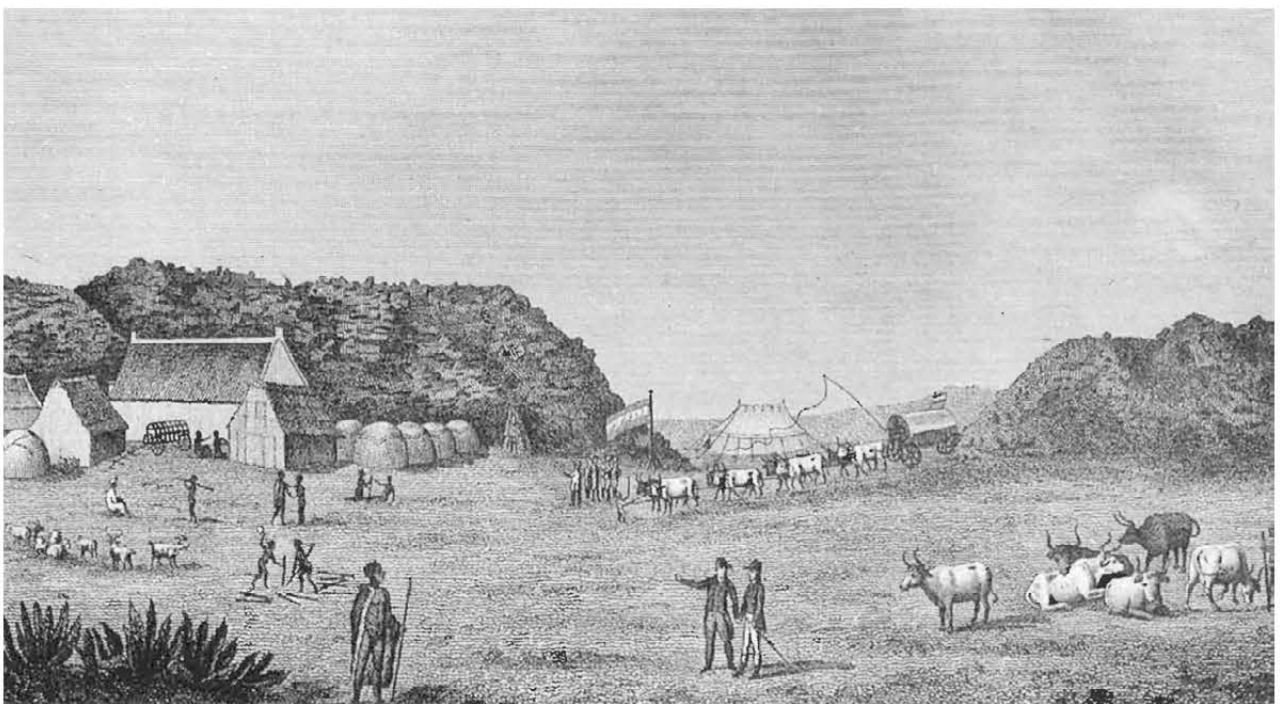
The San were taken to the Calvinist Church in Cape Town where Kicherer had been asked to preach. “(They) were greatly struck with the large number of well dressed people, whom, in their simplicity, they compared to a nest of ants; and the sound of the organ was at first mistaken by them for the noise of a swarming bee-hive”, Kicherer reported. Exhibited before several of the chief magistrates, the “Boschemen, clad in their filthy karosses (or sheep-skins) sitting in a drawingroom on silk covered chairs, or parading before large pier-glasses were the objects of much good natured mirth, as well as sincere compassion”.

When the party returned to the mission from Cape Town in March, they found it faced threats from two San groups - a large kraal of San further to the north and another located nearby under the leadership of a man called Vigilant. Although Vigilant was arrested after threatening the lives of the missionaries and their congregation, he soon escaped, forcing Kicherer to move the mission further south to the Sak River itself. Here they were closer to those farmers who were prepared to offer protection against those who were hostile to its aims.



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| 1 The Chapel. | 5 The Fountain. | 9 The Hills. |
| 2 M ^r Kicherer's House. | 6 The Cattle Yard. | 10 The Sak River. |
| 3 Houses of the Baptized Hottentots. | 7 M ^r Kicherer's Corn Fields. | 11 Road to Cape Town. |
| 4-4 Kraals of the unbaptized Hottentots. | 8 M ^r Kicherer's Garden. | 12 Road to Orange River. |
| | | 13 Road to Rogè - veld. |

The Sak River mission - after a sketch by Kicherer.
 Source: *Transactions of the (London) Missionary Society* (1804) 1 (2). London: Bye and Law.



The Sak River mission as it was in 1805 when it was visited by Henry Lichtenstein.
 Source: Lichtenstein, H. (1928 and 1930). *Travels in Southern Africa in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806*. Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society.

However, while many farmers in the area supported the Sak River mission and visited it to take Holy Communion, others actively opposed it. The latter faction feared that the mission would attract the attention of people of influence who might act on behalf of the San against farmers who had been guilty of maltreating them. Resentment against the mission amongst some farmers increased further in 1800 when the government issued an order forbidding the Colonists from entering Bushmanland. Only San were now permitted to hunt there, although Floris Visser was allowed to enter the area to hunt on their behalf. This order prevented the farmers from making the seasonal treks into the area that had become an integral part of their pastoral cycle. Some Roggeveld farmers were unhappy that Visser had been granted sole rights to the area and were suspicious of the close relationship he had established with the San, a considerable number of whom stayed on his farm.

Faced with opposition both from certain San groups and from some of the European farmers, and feeling that he was making little headway in converting the San who based themselves at the Sak River mission, Kicherer increasingly shifted his attention to evangelising the Khoe and the Basters. In March 1801, an assistant, William Anderson, at Kicherer's request, trekked northwards to the Gariep. Kicherer was attracted by the possibility of winning converts amongst the Khoe, Korana and other groups of mixed descent who inhabited that region, and he and the other missionaries arrived some months later, in July. A church was built at Rietfontein, about 60 kilometres north of modern Prieska, but after some months Kicherer departed, leaving Anderson and another assistant, Cornelius Kramer, in charge of the newly-established station. After an arduous journey he arrived back at the Sak River, and the mission was restarted.



William Anderson (left) and Cornelius Kramer (right).

Source: Museum Africa.

By early 1803 there were about 600 people at the settlement. Most of these were of mixed descent and there appear to have been very few San left at the mission. Although Kicherer had turned down an attractive offer to take up the vacant post of minister at Roodezand (Tulbagh) when he was visiting Cape Town, on the grounds that he was needed by the Sak River Mission, he had difficulty in settling in one place and at this point he decided to visit England to exhibit Khoe converts from the station and raise money to support the mission. Christian Botma, a Colonist, was left in charge at the mission, and, according to Lichtenstein, who visited the mission, he “not only undertook the whole trouble of instructing what pupils remained, abandoning his own affairs for the purpose, but also made great sacrifices of money to support the thing”. However, the loss of Kicherer’s leadership qualities appears to have resulted in the station’s losing many of its adherents so that by July 1804 less than 100 people remained.

Kicherer returned to the mission in October 1805 after being received by the king and large numbers of other dignitaries in England, but a drought with which the Sak River area had been afflicted for almost six years made it increasingly difficult to feed the people at the mission. The game which the farmers shot for the San in order to maintain the peace moved off into other areas and the “wild” San, deprived of their natural source of food, cast their eyes increasingly towards the missionaries’ livestock. A number of raids were made by San on the cattle and sheep belonging to the station, and in July of 1806 the missionaries and their congregation were presented with the alarming sight of one of their horses galloping past the entrance to the church in which they were seated, its body pierced with numerous poisoned arrows. By this time, too, many of the farmers had become fearful of the effects that a good education might have on the San. Under pressure from them, a decree banning the teaching of writing at the missions was issued in 1805, with Kicherer noting that the farmers feared that “the heathen will become too wise by instruction”. His appeals to the authorities to lift this ban fell on deaf ears. All these factors, combined with Kicherer’s decision to leave the Sak River mission yet again, this time to minister at Graaff-Reinet, caused the station to be abandoned in August of 1806.



Kicherer and converts in London.

Source: Cape Archives.

The missions at Toornberg (Colesberg), 1814 – 1817, and Hephzibah (Petrusville), 1816-1817

Approximately two years after the closure of the Sak River mission, Colonel Richard Collins was commissioned by the Governor of the Cape, the Second Earl of Caledon, to undertake a tour of inspection of the frontier districts. In his report, Collins recommended that the government encourage and support the establishment of missions to the San as a way of dealing with the conflict between the Colonists and the San. It was only in 1814, however, after the first visit to South Africa by the Reverend John Campbell, that the LMS decided to try once again to establish another San mission. Campbell, a minister of a Congregational Church in London, travelled extensively in South Africa on two visits, in 1813 and 1820, with, the historian J.S. Marais remarks, “an umbrella to protect him from the sun in one hand, a Bible in the other, and, according to the missionary Robert Moffat, a bottle of brandy in his pocket”.



Reverend John Campbell.

Source: Campbell, J. (1815). *Travels in South Africa*. London: Black and Parry.

Campbell's visit, in 1813, resulted in renewed efforts to evangelise the San, and a number of mission stations were established by the LMS close to the Gariep. The first mission was founded on the site of present-day Colesberg in September 1814 by Erasmus Smit and Jan Goeyman, a former member of the Sak River mission. It was situated between the Colonial boundary and the Gariep, an area heavily populated by San. The mission was named Blyde Vooruitzicht Fontein after the one at Sak River, but became known as Toornberg or Toverberg. In 1816 it was renamed Grace Hill (Genadeberg) by missionary James Read, who gave it this name on account of the great progress he felt had been made in evangelizing and “civilising” the San at this place. According to a report made to the LMS Directors in 1815, the motive in deciding to found this and other stations in the region was to “deprive the Bushmen of that savage ferocity by which they have been hitherto distinguished, and reconcile them to the white men, against whom they had a peculiar enmity; while it will greatly facilitate the journeys of Missionaries and others, who hitherto have been obliged, for safety, to travel in large companies”. Although the missionaries showed themselves over the years to be steadfast protectors of the San when they were threatened by other groups, the sometimes pragmatic, even political, aspects of “civilising” the San, unrelated to the saving of their souls, are evident in this statement.



James Read Senior.
Source: Museum Africa.



James Read Junior.
Source: Cape Archives.



Erasmus Smit.

Source: Voortrekker/Msunduzi Museum.

More than 500 San are reported to have gathered at the mission initially, but their fears that the missionaries intended to turn them over to the Boers severely hampered Smit's efforts. Some months after the mission had been established, all the San, together with their leader, approached Smit and protested against his presence there. They told him that they had had enough of his teaching and demanded that he leave the mission. The primary reason for this confrontation was Smit's attempts to change their beliefs and customs - clearly something which the nature of his calling made it difficult to avoid. Smit's challenging of key San beliefs concerning the afterlife and his insistence that they died only once and were judged after death, for example, induced uneasiness and a strong sense of dissatisfaction amongst his congregation.

His relationship with the San at Toornberg having deteriorated to the point where he felt he could no longer continue to minister to them, Smit abandoned the station in March 1815 and moved to Graaff-Reinet. Here he met up with James Read and William Corner, a member of the LMS from British Guiana, and, with their encouragement, it was decided to try again. Corner joined forces with Smit and Goeyman and in June they returned to the mission. Plots were measured off, vineyards laid out, fields ploughed and planted and a church was built. Smit's wife, only 15 years of age, began to teach the San girls to knit and sew. San from both sides of the Gariep were attracted to the mission and a number of them were baptised, including the San leader Uithaalter. To induce the San to remain at the station they were regularly supplied with corn, tobacco and dagga. They were also occasionally given gifts of sheep "for which", Corner remarked, "they were glad as if they were received into paradise".

There were essentially two categories of San attached to the missions - those who stayed there more or less permanently and those that made occasional visits for longer or shorter periods of time. The

tendency was for a core of San groups to live at the station, adapting their way of life to that determined by the missionaries, while at the same time a varying number of camps of visitors situated themselves on the edge of the station. Those San who were permanently attached to the mission were called “onze Boschjesmans” or “vaste Boschjesmans” (“our Bushmen” or “settled Bushmen”) while those who only visited the mission occasionally and maintained an independent existence were termed “wilde Boschjesmans” or “vreemde Boschjesmans” (“wild Bushmen” or “unfamiliar Bushmen”). Even the settled San, however, continued to hunt and gather from time to time. They made trips into the veld to forage, sometimes for as long as two months, but some returned to the station to attend Sunday services.

Good progress was made in getting the mission on its feet, but tensions had developed between Smit and his assistants, and by the beginning of 1816 both Corner and Goeyman had left the station. This presented a problem for Smit as Corner had developed a good relationship with the Toornberg San and his presence was greatly missed by them. By September 1816 there were only 12 San families living in the mission itself, although about 300 San camped on its outskirts.

Another role was found for Corner and Goeyman when James Read, their superior, travelled to the LMS missions in the north and met Corner in Graaff-Reinet. He arranged for Corner, Goeyman and an assistant to travel to Renosterfontein, or “Tkannee” as it was called by the San, near present-day Petrusville. It was there that they established the Hephzibah mission in September 1816. It was established in order to minister to and settle the approximately 300 San occupying the surrounding area. According to the Reverend John Philip, head of the LMS in South Africa, it and Toornberg together attracted almost 1,700 San at one time.



The Reverend John Philip.

Source: Museum Africa.