

QUILLIAM FARM - A SAGA OF THE SOUTH

BY J H QUILLIAM

In the Southern Courier Vol. 12, No. 40, 26 October 1982, there appeared an article entitled "Relics Found in South" together with a picture of a Voortrekker house on Quilliam's farm. As a member of the Quilliam family, I have in the past made a point of becoming acquainted with its history, some aspects of which might be of interest to readers.

The farm is approximately 2 000 acres in size and incorporates the beautiful Klipriviersberg Range which is to be preserved as a nature reserve. (Also referred to in The Courier dated 24 October)

As you stated, the farm house was built in the year 1843 by a Voortrekker whose name was Marais. When he died, Jacob Marais his son, inherited the farm which was purchased by my late father in 1917. (2 000 acres for £6 000!)

Jacob died in the early 30's and was about 100 years old which indicates that he was born approximately in 1830 and so took part in the Great Trek.

All the members of the Marais family are buried on the farm in a stone walled cemetery. Some have tombstones of slate on which are carved by hand in "High Dutch" language the details of the deceased. On one tombstone it is stated that the deceased was born in 1819.

Grandpa Jacob, as I new him, lived on the farm as a squatter, was almost penniless as well as illiterate. He used to visit us every Friday, have tea and cake and borrowed a Ten Shilling note which was promptly repaid on the following Monday. This happened over a long period of time and my father became suspicious, marked a note and received the same note back. On querying this, Jacob said "I just want to have some money in my pocket over the week end".

If you held a plate of cake for him to take one, he always accepted the whole plate and ate the lot!

One Xmas, Jacob was given a large piece of Xmas pudding in which trinkets and "Tickeys" were placed. In case the old man missed some, additional items were placed in the cake. As a young boy, I anxiously waited for Jacob to find them and say "Look what I have found". However the whole piece of pudding was eaten to my dismay without a single trinket being produced. The possible explanation was that the old man was toothless.

In reminiscing, the old man often referred to the wild life which abounded in the early years. They were similar to what is found in the Kruger Park today. The Klipriviersberg today still contains wild life which is fast diminishing.

Over the last 20 years the following have been seen:

Many varieties of snakes, as well as grey duiker, caracal lynx, porcupine, jackal, aardwolf (a degenerated hyaena) which used to eat the Quilliam's chickens. There were also leguans, rock and other rabbits. Bird life abounds.

The strangest story of all from the South is that in 1967, when workmen were putting sewerage pipes in Mondeor, North of the farm, 2 pythons were 2 killed on what is now the corner of Bellefield and Daleham Avenues.

The old farm house originally had a thatched roof. During the Second World War, the house was gutted by fire and the roof replaced by corrugated iron.

The house, because of its originality, and as no others of its age could be found, was the site of many films. At some time after the First World war, a film entitled "Die Voortrekkers" was made by the late I W Schlesinger. During the making of this film, an actress taking a part, Mabel May, was married to the producer.

In 1939 a film entitled "Die Bou van 'n Nasie" was made in which I took the part of Dirkie Uys at Ten Shillings a day. This was never finalised because of the beginning of the 2nd World War.

After the war there followed "The Scavengers", "Stroopers in die Laeveld", "The Battle of Majuba" and "The Battle of Blood River". Before the filming of "Die Bou van 'n Nasie", we received a handsome, sunbronzed, gentleman visitor. He wished to look over the farm as he was to be the Afrikaans director. He was A A Pienaar, famous author of "Op Safari". At that time I was in Matric at school and the Afrikaans set book was "Op Safari". I was very proud to have met the author and boasted of the fact at school.

On the banks of the Bloubos River, there are a number of stone horse jumps - Origin unknown. They were used at week ends by members of the Rand Hunt Club.

When the then Prince of Wales, later to become Duke of Windsor, visited South Africa in about 1926, he was driven one Saturday morning to drive in procession through the streets of Johannesburg. The Quilliam family left the farm early to gain a good vantage point on the route. Before entering the suburbs we noted members of the Rand Hunt Club, all mounted and assembling. One of them rode up to us and said "That gentleman", pointing out a particular horseman, "is the Prince of Wales and we are going to do the jumps on your farm". We immediately retired to the farm to see the prince enter one of six Humber cars and drive past the farm house back to town. A member of the Rand Hunt Club, noting our disappointment, said not to worry as the Prince was going to follow the same route the next morning.

This time we were ready for him. The road past the farm house was filled with cattle, sheep, pigs, etc. completely blocking the route. The six Humber cars duly appeared and were blocked by the animals. One aide-de-camp asked my father to kindly clear the way. My father and I moved from car to car until the one containing the prince was approached. My father doffed his hat, bade the prince good morning and apologised for blocking the way. The prince praised my father for the variety and condition of his stock and the cavalcade of cars passed on.

On the boundary between the farm and what is now Mondeor, where the Bloubos River enters the Klipriviersberg, there is a foundation of rock and a cutting into the hill side. This is still visible today and the area is known as the "Silent Pool". It was an early attempt (some time before 1914) to block the river and turn what is now Mondeor into a water reservoir. History states that Dutch engineers (Dyke experts) were called in and condemned the plan. Because of the geological formation viz. Ventersdorp Larva overlying the Witwatersrand System, the plan could not work as the water would drain away and the work was abandoned.

My mother now 88 years old is living at Dale Lace House having spent 63 years on the farm.

Finally, I make mention of the fact that the producers of the various films referred to above, all stated that they chose the site because of the farm house, it being the only one of its type in the vicinity of Johannesburg.

Surely as the Klipriviersberg is to be declared a nature reserve, the house should be restored to its original and be declared a national monument. Could the suggestion be brought to the attention of National Monuments Commission?

P.S. If you do publish these notes, it might be of interest to photograph the cemetery referred to and accompany this article.