

**To:** Schmelen-Kleinschmidt Foundation  
**Subject:** SKF Newsletter 5

Cape Town, August 2009.

Dear relations and friends,

The concept of a Foundation has not progressed towards a concrete proposal yet, but I am 'heading' toward this if it has your support and ideas. Thank you those who have already indicated your support. This communication itself brings us a step closer.

### **1. Otjimbingue Graves**

In previous communications I wrote (and sent pictures) of the small cluster of three Kleinschmidt damaged graves where six relatives are buried on the northern side of the Swakop River on the edge of Otjimbingue. They include the graves of Heinrich and Hanna, the missionary couple. These graves pre-date the establishment of a cemetery in the former town. A truck or tractor drove into and broke the main headstone in two as well as badly bending and ripping apart the wrought iron fence around the graves.

I had gone to Namibia and together with distant cousin, Peter Mueller from Windhoek, we went to Otjimbingue to assess the damage and to draw up a list with measurements, of what needed doing to restore these graves and their surround. We then identified a qualified and experienced workshop in Walfish Bay (200 km away) to undertake the restoration. Very kindly Mr. Sigg Steinhilber the proprietor of *Hot Iron – Kunstschmiede und Bauschlosserei*, decided he should take a weekend trip to Otjimbingue to decide what materials he required to do the work (neither water nor electricity is available in the vicinity). To his and subsequently our utter surprise, he returned to tell us that repairs had been done to the graves and iron surround. Consternation!

Mr. Steinhilber's visit took place at the beginning of July and to date no-one could be found (and thanked) for this welcome surprise. Was it the one who caused the accident? Was it the colonial war graves maintenance unit? Was it the local congregation or the national Evangelical Lutheran church? We are making enquiries, but as yet we don't know.

In the circumstances we did not need funds for the restoration – other than a small amount to recompense Mr. Steinhilber. We will keep you posted of any further news. A photo of the restored graves and surround is attached.

### **2. The Komaggas graveyard.**

On Monday 31st August I will be travelling to Komaggas and spend the night as guest of Ds. Jetro Cloete once more. I will be going with friends who were active in the anti-apartheid campaigns in the USA and after the independence of Namibia they went to teach at the Augustineum, originally established in Otjimbingue and one of the oldest training institutions for Black pastors in Southern Africa. Peter and Solveig now live in Fish Hoek, near us. Together we will attempt to trace further historic connections up the western coast of southern Africa, maybe even find Sarah's family.

In Komaggas the intention is to initiate a project to have a fence put around the old graveyard, where our earliest identified forebear, missionary Hinrich Schmelen was buried on 20 July, 160 years ago. There are many graves of historic relevance here but at present they are in a sorry state as donkeys graze here and trample on what is left of the headstones.

### **3. A fund to do the repairs**

In Otjimbingue we were lucky not to have incurred costs, but the next project will require money. I am now writing to you to ask for donations. Thank you to those who have already made donations! I have no idea how many donors there are out there, but as an indication I will put R1,000 per month into the account. Lesser or higher amounts are equally welcome! If there is spare money after the initial project it will be used for the next project, such as the house where the Schmelen's lived, or the church which is now a ruin – and importantly also a local community project.

I have opened a dedicated sub-account in my small consultancy. This avoids, at this stage, paying costs associated with registering a fully-fledged new entity. I will provide periodic reports on the account in the form of an income and expenditure statement. I repeat that I seek no personal remuneration from this.

Some of you who are included in this mailing may feel too distant to make a financial contribution and I understand that. Those who can contribute please do so and make payment to:

**Account: SCHMELEN KLEINSCHMIDT**  
**BANK: ABSA Heerengracht**  
**Branch code: 632005**  
**Account Number: 9225527034**  
**Type: Savings**  
**Swift Code: ABSA ZAJJ**

Please indicate clearly in the transfers that money is to go to the Schmelen Kleinschmidt account.

### **4. Attending the 180th anniversary of the Rhenish Church in South Africa on 15 August 2009.**

All I was told was: 9 am, Rhenish Church, Belleville. I found no reference to the place in the phone book and no marking on the map book in my car.

I drove to Belleville and headed for the police station. They were ever so helpful but nobody had ever heard of the Rhenish Church. They sent me to the Anglicans. - No, they had never heard of this church either. I should go to Stellenbosch they suggested. I made my way to the Lutheran church but everything was shut; a notice board directed me to what I should and not do to avoid the swine flu, and notices about the Kindergarten - all in German. No telephone numbers. I went off to the other churches in the area: Catholic, Baptist, New Apostolic, but no one had ever heard of the Rhenish.

Despite persistent rain, I thought I should continue my search, for a reason that began to dawn on me. I headed off to a filling station and looked for an attendant who looked 'Coloured'. I said to him, "where do the Coloured people of Belleville live?" He directed me to what is called Belleville South, over a bridge, literally to the other side of the rail track. It's a huge area and I had never been there. I asked around. Here people had heard of the church but they were not sure where it was. For the next 45 minutes I drove around and asked. It was obvious I was in the right area, but the most stunning discovery was the incredible number of churches here. In every block I counted 3 or 4 churches, mostly modest structures built on a plot where otherwise a down-market house would stand. Poverty and unemployment is palpable. I saw signs of the most outlandish names of sects and then again mainstream churches. Later on I was told that besides the churches there are endless numbers of house churches, break-away groups from churches.

At last I found it. On the opposite side of the Rhenish stood the very modest Moravian church. Proceedings had started and all were standing singing. To my surprise I discovered this was a Woman's event with no male's present. But I was taken by the hand, as though I was expected, to the top table; my desire to explain who I was, failed. I felt awkward and self-conscious. I stood out like a sore thumb, male and white. I worked out that Julia (whom I had not met before) sat at the same table; she was also fair skinned and taller than most others. She had come from Germany to address the gathering. It was her email that got me here.

Formally the proceedings were in English but every speaker changed to Afrikaans at the drop of a hat. Julia delivered a fine and scholarly speech on 'The impact of Mission Work on wives and children of Missionaries'. As emissary, bringing greetings from the VEM (United Evangelical Church in Germany) her

link to the Rhenish Church here was apparently important in helping to heal a deep rift.

I'm not sure I know or grasp the import of the rift or rifts in their totality but the following seem to be elements of it: When the Rhenish Mission withdrew from South Africa in the 1930s, its leadership, in toto German, handed 'the mission congregations' to the Dutch Reformed Church, or rather the DRC mission arm. This happened without consultation of the congregations and not surprisingly was considered an affront by the Coloured-designated congregants, not least because they would not have chosen the DRC, which then as now, is seen as deeply conservative and white dominated in South Africa. Quite rightly the Rhenish congregations felt that agreements had been made between white supremacists, German and Afrikaans, who had affinity to each other and who looked down on the Brown Mission churches. The notion of 'brotherly love' were secondary. Some ten congregations did not subject themselves to the DRC and formed their own, the Rhenish Church. From the evidence on that Saturday I could feel the passion with which the women present embrace their church. The Rhenish Church in South Africa is, as a result of this past development somewhat unique; it has no White counterpart and therefore is without the umbilical cord that still defines other mainline churches in South Africa. It is best described, I think, as a Brown church and serves poor and maybe lower middle class people.

The rift with Germany has had several further episodes, right into recent times and appears to involve links and support from Germany to the Evangelical Lutherans in South Africa to this day, but not similar support to the Rhenish. One further remarkable consequence of the German Rhenish withdrawal from South Africa is the break-away from those churches that were handed to the DRC, to form the Calvinist Church - not least caused once more by the identification of the DRC with apartheid. The earliest break-away was in Komaggas in about 1956 and is the reason why there are today two new church buildings flanking the nearly totally collapsed church structure of Missionary Schmelen and his successors, to which both churches claim propriety, the one the Reforming Church of South Africa (Ds. Cloete), the other the Calvinist Church.

The original Rhenish missionaries did their job well it seems. Discipline and acceptance of authority are traits that have not withered. Even in the 1980's, I was told, there were (verbal) fights within the Rhenish over the extent to which congregants got involved in the struggle for liberation. A second walk-out took place when those who felt there was a duty of Christians to side with the forces of freedom joined the, by now established, Calvinist Church.

After the morning tea break I was introduced as a descendent of one of the missionaries who had arrived in Africa ten years after the establishment of the Rhenish Church 1829. I was then asked to address the Conference, which I did briefly, feeling this was a day organised by and for the women. Several women came to me afterwards to tell me of their German ancestors. Indeed I noticed that a range of German surnames prevails. I felt great warmth from everyone over this ancestral affinity and expect to be invited to speak about my research into the family mission history to congregations in due course.

There also seems a local sense that the multiplicity of church structures needs to be overcome and with it a feeling that the missionaries' zeal to banish the cultural expressions of local people and replace them with German values and attributes, has to be re-visited.

My discovery of the total absence of any knowledge of the Rhenish in white Belleville earlier that day is descriptive of the deep racial divisions that persist in a large part of South Africa's churches to this day.

Hope you find my engagements interest.

Kind regards,

Horst.