

Newsletter 20 Invitation to Komaggas!



September 2014.

Dear relatives and friends,

Komaggas family and friends gathering in September 2014!

First announcement.

My Newsletter 19 (about the Zara Memorial) has sparked widespread interest. Within hours over sixty (now over 90) of you responded with most gratifying comments. Also the Cape Times published the story on 21 August 2013.

It has long been the dream of Ursula Trueper in Berlin (the author of the book on Zara), the Komaggas community and myself, for family and interested friends to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the marriage between that exceptional couple, Zara and Hinrich Schmelen.



But there is more to this gathering than the anniversary. In South Africa and in Namibia, segregation and discrimination created a divided society of 'insiders and outsiders', of 'have's and have-not's'. Our family became divided accordingly. Some passed as whites while others were classified 'Coloured'. In Komaggas we hope to bring together relatives who never met because of the social divide.

This is the first letter of invitation! We'd like to hear whether you think you can or might come along. We need to know this so that our (formidable) planning can get started. Please respond and indicate whether you intend to/can come or (at this stage) if might be coming.

The history on how Hinrich married himself to Zara.

2014 correctly marks the 200th anniversary of the union between Zara Hendriks-//Xeigas and Johann Hinrich Schmelen. She was of Khoi-khoi origin; he came from Germany. Her family lived in Bysondermeid/Steinkopf and Pella in the Northern Cape, known as Little Namaqualand in pre-colonial times. As yet efforts to find out more about her family have not born fruit. Hinrich, we know, escaped from his hometown of Kassebruch near Bremen, in 1805 when Napoleon's army occupied Hanover. Napoleon was conscripting soldiers for his impending campaign against Tsarist Russia. Hinrich fled to London. At the instigation of his religious mentor in London, Dr. Steinkopf, he attended a meeting at which Cape missionary J.J. Kicherer presented three Khoikhoi converts to Christianity. Hinrich later wrote that he went to the missionary and said: What you do, I would want to do. The London Missionary Society (LMS) had him trained and indeed, he was sent to the land of the Khoi.



After reaching Cape Town Hinrich travelled by ox wagon north to Pella on the Great Gariep (Orange River).

The church in which Hinrich taught still stands and serves as a classroom behind the Catholic Cathedral and nunnery in Pella. On 6 February 1814 Hinrich baptized his first congregants. They were Jantje Oortman, Tonis April and Zara and Leentje, Zara's younger sister. He describes them as being 20 and 18 years at the time. He says of Zara and her sister that they had "been for several years onder [under] the Gospel, and I trust, have been seized by the grace of God ... Zara some time ago and Leentje recently. They have also made good progress in reading and have answered me every question I put to them above my expectation".

In the same year, 1814, the LMS mission inspector John Campbell sent Hinrich to cross Orange River into Great Namaqualand (today Southern Namibia). The Bondelswarts and other groups were moving into Southern Namibia at this time and some of them requested that they be provided with missionaries. A huge entourage of people, many wagons, cattle, goats and sheep was assembled to make the venture possible. Zara was amongst them, designated cook, after the intended cook went ill on the day of their departure.

The union between Hinrich and Zara, somewhere on the Orange River, on a date unknown and several weeks of ox wagon journey from Pella and any other

mission outpost, was controversial, not least because it took Hinrich some years to tell the RMS that he was now married. And, they already had two daughters, Anna and Hanna.

Hinrich would have been aware of the social prejudice toward mixed marriages. Such prejudice also existed in the London Missionary Society. Well-known missionary van der Kemp was married to a black woman and there were others. At one point the missionaries complained to the Society that they felt they were being looked down upon because their wives were not white. Hinrich was a bachelor, sent into the far-flung reaches of the mission endeavour. His superiors would have been aware of this. And Hinrich, when he thought about a bond with Zara would have been concerned about the negative judgement that would result. But that is not all because the circumstances around this marriage evoked questions beyond the matter of prejudice.

This is why Hinrich eventually wrote to his superiors: "I faced the biggest dilemma, to be alone with a single woman in the wagon, not on account of sinning, but to avoid all suspicion whatever amongst a talkative people whose character I am so well acquainted [with]. My soul was crying out to God continually to conduct me that I might not be an obstacle in the great work set before me. What plans I ever form, I could not escape all suspicion [suspicion]. I therefore at last concluded before I should come in any suspicion, I would pay my address to her, which I did and married her before my people in the same form I am used to marry them."

"I know that this did not set a pernicious example before my people, but had I remained as I were, I would have been in danger." He thus married himself to Zara. There is no record of her feelings or how she reacted. Hinrich thus performed a do-it-yourself wedding in the absence of any other marriage officer. However we judge the wedding, their joint purpose and actions point to a close and co-operative union.

In 1817, after Hinrich made his explanation to, the LMS expelled him on grounds of 'immorality', but in copious letters Hinrich defended himself and eventually the suspension was rescinded. He worked for the LMS until the end of his life. When the LMS withdrew its missionaries from Little Namaqualand, Hinrich was loath to go. He was the only one with family ties in Namaqualand. The LMS allowed him to stay and continued to pay his stipend.

After a period in Southern Namibia (Bethanie) they settled in Komaggas in 1828 where they established a permanent mission station.

He wrote of his wife, "As she belonged to my meeting [congregation] I had formerly seen her and always looked upon her as a truly humple [humble] and pious member of my church. Her character was exaimed before she was baptized, and she had an excellent character amongst the people she lived. I really believe now that a better partner of life in my present situation could not be found for me". And elsewhere he wrote, "She always laboured , in particular to render herself to her own sex by coverising with them about Divine Things. Some

of them were afraid to converse with me; but to her, they opened their minds freely ... Indeed, her prayers sometimes seemed to have more effect upon my hearers than my own preaching”.

During their sixteen years of marriage Hinrich and Zara collaborated and committed to paper the first written grammar of the Namaqua (or Khoi) language. This enabled them to translate the Gospels and many psalms into Nama. The Gospels were published in Cape Town in 1830. On the way back to Komaggas from the launch, Zara died of consumption (TB), not yet forty years of age. Hinrich gives Zara great credit in the complicated task of translating the Gospels into Nama. In this he shows signs of gender recognition not typical for that period.

They had three daughters and a son. The son died young. The oldest daughter, Anna married a Hartwell, seemingly an English colonist working for the copper mine at O’Kiep. It is not known if they had any children. The second daughter, Johanna (Hanna) married missionary Franz Heinrich Kleinschmidt, in Komaggas in 1842. Heinrich had lived in Komaggas for two years. Heinrich came from Blasheim in Westphalia, today Germany. The Rhenish Missionary Society sent him to assist Schmelen after the LMS withdrew from the Northern Cape. In 1833 Hinrich had married again. She was Elizabeth Bam from Cape Town. Her two brothers came to join the missionary venture in Komaggas, one of them marrying Friederika the third daughter of Zara and Hinrich. He was Christian Bam. Shortly after Hanna and Friederika’s marriages they accompanied their husbands to pursue the Rhenish Mission objectives in Namibia.

The Komaggas family gathering targets the offspring of the unions between Johanna and Heinrich Kleinschmidt and of Friederika and Christian Bam. Over some 150 years and six and seven generations later, the group has grown large and diverse. We have traced and are in communication with a great many of them. They are spread around the globe and we hope they and interested friends will come to celebrate and commemorate in Komaggas next year.



The above information about Zara and Hinrich is from Ursula Trueper’s book, “The Invisible Woman, Zara Schmelen, African Mission Assistant at the Cape and in Namaqualand”. Published by Basler Afrika Bibliographien (www.baslerakfrika.ch) ISBN 3---905141---91---4 and ISSN 1660---9638. A new German Edition is also planned. Ursula researched the material for ten years consulting the LMS archive at the London School of African and Oriental Studies, the archive of the Rhenish Church in Wuppertal, Germany, various archives at the Cape and the National Archive in Windhoek, Namibia.

Three days in Komaggas.

Komaggas is a poor but proud village. Very graciously the community of Komaggas have offered to be our hosts. Everyone is welcome!

The organising committee are George Cloete (chair), Ds. Kristo Present, Johan Cloete, George Whitlow, Annie Milford and Richard Whitlow. They are representative of the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa, the Calvin Protestant Church of South Africa and the Anglican Church of Komaggas.

Three days in Komaggas to be entered into your diaries are the 20, 21 and 22 September 2014.

The weekend coincides with South Africa's National Heritage Day, a national holiday in South Africa.

It is important that whoever wishes to participate allows enough time to travel to Komaggas on the 19th and to return no earlier than the 23rd, assuming they set off by car from Cape Town in the south or from Windhoek in the north. There are no longer flight connections to Springbok or Port Nolloth, the bigger towns in the vicinity.

The period should also, subject to rainfall, coincide with the world-famous Namaqualand Daisy season. Every year for a few weeks people travel from all over the world to see this arid, semi-desert covered in carpets of orange, white, blue and lilac flowers. You might therefore want to use this visit to see this unique phenomenon. Obviously one cannot guarantee that the flowers will bloom in that week, but it is viewed as the most optimal time they may flower.

Accommodation.

All visitors will be accommodated privately with local families. Some homes have lots of space because younger members of families have had to find work elsewhere after the mass retrenchments when the nearby de Beers diamond mine closed down a few years ago.

Although there is terrible poverty, especially amongst some families, the accommodation that is being offered will offer electricity, hot water and modern sanitation. Water is scarce though and cannot be used as liberally as the rest of us are probably used to. Water is fit for human consumption.

There are no restaurants in Komaggas but all meals will be catered at homes or collectively.

How to recompense families who provide accommodation and meals etc. will be addressed in a future communication.

A tentative Programme to whet your appetite:

1. A visit to Zara's memorial stone and Hinrich Schmelens grave as well as the graves of the Weich missionary family who succeeded the Schmelens in Komaggas. We will also visit the old manse.
2. A visit to the remnants of the mission church and the manse, and to the two adjacent churches, the Reforming Church of South Africa and the Calvinist Reformed Church of South Africa. Both these churches are successors to the Mission Church.
3. Thanksgiving and worship services with the various congregations.
4. A visit to the communal land where livestock (cattle, goats and sheep) are tended to on a shared and rotational basis – evidence of a history that goes back hundreds, possibly thousands of years. Here is also the remnant of the clay church that Schmelen first built. The visit will be augmented with talks and explanations. This outing takes a day.
5. Performance of a play written by a local teacher, John Cloete, in Komaggas in 1957, meant as a protest against apartheid. In that time open criticism was increasingly made difficult. The play centres on the rich marriage between a white man and a black woman, that of Hinrich and Zara. The script has survived and the actors, now in their 50's have indicated that they would re-enact the play during our visit.
6. For those interested there will be talks on the history of the Khoikhoi people, mission history, colonial and subsequent history, and insights into the Schmelen, Kleinschmidt and Bam family histories.
7. An open-air feast of celebration with the Komaggas community to meet the local community. Teams in the village are already discussing how best to show what local culture and food has to offer.

Other objectives to consider in your trip:

1. A visit to the National Library in Cape Town to view the published Gospels that Hinrich and Zara translated.
2. A visit to the place where we believe Zara was buried. Her grave is not marked but the locality has been identified with some certainty.
3. Some of you might, after the Komaggas event might want to travel further north, maybe go through the Richtersveld and cross into Namibia via pont at Sendlingsdrift. Then head for Bethanien where the first house of the Schmelens stands.
4. Yet further north you could go all the way to Ovambo Region of Namibia and visit the churches and congregations where the Bjorklund and Rautanen branches of our family were missionaries. Missionary Dr Martin *Nakambale* Rautanen translated the bible into Oshivambo. A visit to the Olukonda National Museum is worth a visit.

There is much else whether you trace the missionary trails or the broader history. I can make suggestions and also link you to people with local knowledge if you need advice. (I am not a travel agent and I have no staff – just so you know the limits of my capacity here from my home in Cape Town.)

Travel.

For most people it may be most practical if they fly to Cape Town. I could look into arranging a bus that takes those who prefer this, to take them north to Komaggas and back. Such a trip would probably be of seven-day duration, which includes a nights stay in Cape Town before leaving and another night when returning. Others may want to hire cars and make their own plans. Those who have not been to Cape Town before may want to explore this beautiful part of the world.

Over coming months there will be occasion to offer more information both of historic import as well as information as far as arrangements on the ground are concerned.

Request:

Please let me know if you plan to be part of the 3 day celebration in Komaggas on the 20 -22 September 2014. Indicate whether you are:

- a) Definitely attending for the full 3 days,
- b) Not yet sure, but might attend,
- c) Not attending.

Ask any other questions you like and I will try to provide useful answers.

I look forward to your replies.

Yours,

Horst.

PS: This mailing goes to many on my list of 'subscribers' FOR YOUR INFORMATION but I thought you'd be interested.

Dr and Mrs Booy's have kindly made available the photographs reproduced above.