

## SKN 29.2. Fransfontein stories.

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Snippets that make history interesting. Who can add to or correct the text below?

### 1. Chief Cornelius Swartbooï (1840 – 1894)

"Ancestors, Elders, - we are your children! We have come! Please open the way for us to come in. We brought visitors to you, they are also your children". These were the respectful words of elders before we entered the graveyards.



The grave of Chief Cornelius Swartbooï who lived from 1840 to 1894. In his life the Swartbooï's suffered immensely. The home ground of Rehoboth had to be abandoned because of Jonker Afrikaner's violent raids, Cape trader manipulations dominated the region and German colonial occupation and resistance claimed a

near-fatal price. After fleeing Rehoboth the Swartnboois sought peace and pasture beyond the Kunene River in Southern Angola but had to return, eventually settling back in Namibia, here in Fransfontein.

At the foot of Cornelius Swartbooi's grave is a stone that commemorates the long line of Swartbooi Chiefs. This recent stone commits to writing the oral history of a long lineage going back ten generations and covering over three hundred years.



Chief Goab /Kanabeb is the earliest Swartbooi Chief's name engraved on the memorial stone above. There are no dates after his name, nor are there dates for the three Chiefs after him. The reign of six subsequent rulers, from 1746 – 1905, is recorded. On average, the latter six ruled for 18 years each. If we attribute 18 year reigns to each of the four chiefs for whom we have no dates, and go back from the earliest date entry (1746), then this family history takes us back to around 1680. In the vast and ever expanding family tree surrounding Hinrich and Zara Schmelen, these are (to date) the earliest recorded names of any ancestors.

[Chief Goab /Kanabeb would have lived in the time immediately after Jan van Riebeeck established Dutch rule at the Cape. It was his successors, Simon van der Stel, and after him, his son Willem Adrian van der Stel, whose insatiable desire for land forced the Khoi and San to vacate their land. The van der Stel's corrupt dealings were noted by the Dutch burghers of the day, but far more harshly, the Khoikhoi and San felt their injustices. The start of colonial land occupation, ripple by ripple from Cape Town outward, forced successive generations of Khoi and San people to vacate the Southern Cape and move, mostly, northwards. The effect of these successive migrations was felt, in Southern and Middle Namibia for at least two centuries. It is likely that Chief Goab /Kanabeb and his people had knowledge of or may have been affected by the developments north.]



## 2. Sarah Rebekka Sabatta (born Kleinschmidt) (1904 – 1977)

The Uirab/Sabata families, our hosts in Fransfontein, are from the Swartboois. A forefather of theirs married Rebecca Kleinschmidt, the granddaughter of Ludwig Kleinschmidt, the 7<sup>th</sup> child of the missionary couple Franz-Heinrich and Hanna Kleinschmidt (Hanna being the middle daughter of the Schmелens).



Magdalena Ramses was the second daughter of Ludwig Kleinschmidt junior.

### **3. Heidi Koerber-Reisig was reminded of the Nama lullaby's her grandmother sang to her in Cologne, Germany.**



Pictured above are Dr Rainer Heller and Heidi Koerber-Reisig with husband Christoph, under the tree that embraced us in Fransfontein. This was Heidi's first visit to Africa. She remembers how her granny, in their apartment in Cologne, sang lullabies at night to her and her siblings. What impressed itself on the young child was that granny sang in an unknown language punctuated by 'click' sounds. Her much-loved grandmother Mathilde (Tilly) was part Khoi, and what stuck with Heidi were these Khoi ditties. Here, in Fransfontein she was reminded of her infancy because her distant relations, surrounding her here, spoke in the language in which her granny sang to her.

Grandma Tilly (Mathilde) came to Germany in 1913, not expecting that her racial origin would haunt her life eventually here too. She grew up Otjimbingue and Karibib, Namibia. In 1911, she wanted to marry a visiting German trader. The magistrate, (the country was still under German rule), told the couple that a new colonial policy disallowed a 'dark-skinned' persons from marrying a white-skinned German. On appeal in Windhoek, the ruling was over-turned, albeit on appallingly racial grounds. The couple were told that she might not be 'pure' white, but that she conducted herself like whites.

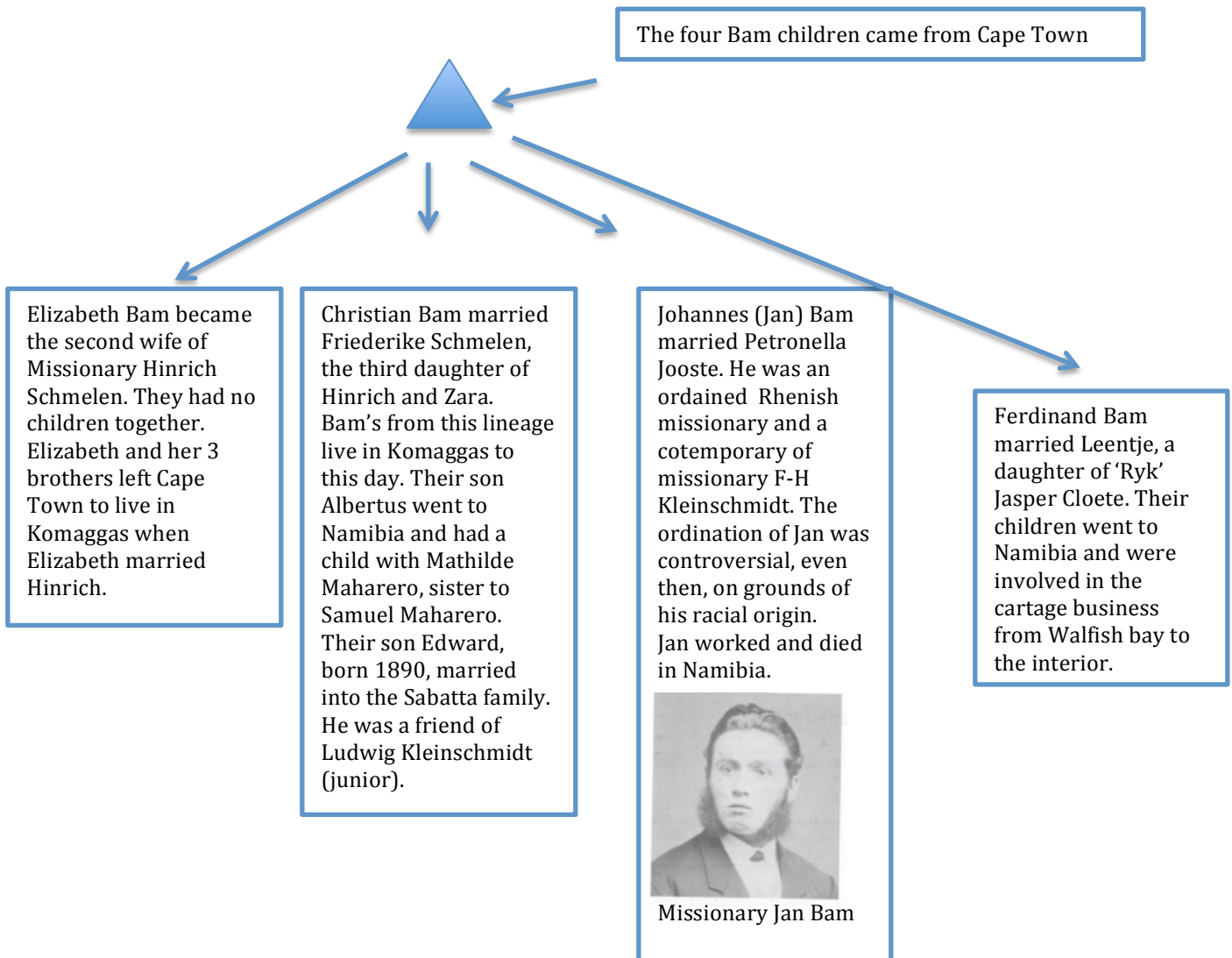
The couple left for Germany. In the family annals, it is recorded that Ewald, her husband, was killed in Warsaw during the first days of WWI. This was not so. Some relatives knew that he committed suicide, apparently connected to pressure from his family, that another woman had been chosen for him. The rise of social Darwinism and ethnic thinking might have been the reason why the 'dark-skinned' Mathilde was to be pushed aside. A child was on the way. Mathilde married again after WWI. Heidi (and Rainer – picture above) hale from the second marriage of Mathilde.

### **4. The connection to the Bam and Bamm family.**

Next door to the Fransfontein farming village lies Bampos, farmland associated with the Bam family. Their ancestry goes back, in part to Friederike Schmelen, 3<sup>rd</sup> daughter of Hinrich and Zara Schmelen. Friederike married Christian Bam, who with his sister and two other brothers had come from Cape Town to Komaggas. Elizabeth became the second wife of Hinrich Schmelen after Zara died. They had no children. But Christian's

brothers, Johannes (Jan) Bam and Ferdinand Bam and their children *trekked* north to live in Namibia, as did the son of Christian and Friederike Bam.

The connection to the Bam family is as follows:



Jan (Johannes) Bam became the only ordained Rhenish missionary of that time who was African born. He married Petronella Jooste, a 'white' woman. The Rhenish Mission sent him to Rooibank, at the Kuiseb delta where he served a small but flourishing Nama community involved in the cartage business from the harbour to the interior. His posting to Rooibank (near Walfish Bay) simultaneously served the mission society's need to improve communication and logistics with the Rhenish superiors at the Cape. The gateway via the harbour reduced the travel time for a written letter or provisions to be reduced by several months. The back and forth journey by ox wagon took up to a year. By ship via Walfish Bay, the journey was reduced to several weeks or less, pending favourable winds. Jan and Petronella's son Jan junior, also worked for the Rhenish mission. He, his wife and an infant son lie buried in the missionary graveyard in Bethany.

When Jonker Afrikaner, based in Windhoek, expanded his rule and influence in Central Namibia during the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several Bam's were engaged in the construction of the Baai Weg, the mountain pass that opened a formal trade route from the interior to the harbour of Walfish Bay. Other Bam's had



lucrative contracts to move commodities along the Baai Weg. Trade was brisk, as the Cape desired cattle and those who had the cattle, acquired a wide array of modern commodities.

Christian and Friederike Bam's son Albertus had two children with Herero Chief Samuel Maharero's sister Mathilde. The first son was Eduard, born in 1890. He married a Sabata daughter from Fransfontein. In his youth, he was made to serve as a 'Bambuse'<sup>1</sup> to a German soldier. The second son was Mikka.



Descendants of Christian and Friederike (born

Schmelen). Is this correct?

One Johannes Bam, was shot and killed by the German soldiers during a/the rebellion. Who has more on this?

<sup>1</sup> High-ranking German officers of the 'Schutztruppe' had a personal servant to look after their every need. In South West Africa they became to be known as *Bambusen*. As a rule they were young men who carried out messenger services, kept the living quarters tidy and looked after the horses. See Wulf Otte, *Weiss und Schwarz – Black and White, photo's from Namibia 1896 – 1901*. Published by Uwe Krebs, Wendeburg 2007. [www.verlag-uwe-krebs.de](http://www.verlag-uwe-krebs.de)

Traditional Councilor, Titus Bam, hosted us, the visitors, at Bampos and announced us to the ancestors before entering the graveyard. Here he is seen in the middle with blue shirt and hat, behind the grave of a Christian Bam.



## 5. German war graves in Fransfontein.





The Fransfontein cemetery, like cemeteries anywhere, reveal much history, brought to light by Charles Otto Uirab whose font of knowledge kept us asking for more. The above photo is of three German colonial soldiers.

The soldiers were killed during local resistance to colonial occupation prior to the 1904 rebellion. From 1894 onwards, discontent had simmered amongst the Swartbooi's when the German authorities intervened in the succession to Chief Cornelius Swartbooi (see story above). Initially the Germans appeared to have considerable influence over Chief David Swartbooi, but Otto pointed us to the meeting when he told his people he would have no further truck with those who sought to influence him against his people. "Resistance to German control ebbed and flowed throughout 1897, and at the end of that year a large group led by Chief David Swartbooi left for the veld where they, together with disaffected Topnaar under Jan Uichamab and a small group of western Herero under *omuhona* Kambatta, carried out raids on settler's cattle"<sup>2</sup>.

The ensuing *rinderpest*, a disease that caused massive death of livestock, further complicated the situation throughout the country. Cattle, the principal form of tender, died on a scale previously unknown.

The conflict ended badly for the Swartboois. The colonial administration gave considerable Swartbooi land to a colonial company, the *Kaoko Land- und Eisenbahn Gesellschaft*. Tragically, during the campaign against colonial rule, Samuel Maharero and Hendrik Witbooi each provided 100 men to support the Germans. German intentions had not yet been fully understood, something that provided room for German divide and rule policies. By March 1898, the Swartboois were defeated. One hundred and fifty of their men and 400 women and children were imprisoned in Windhoek. After their release, they were forced to stay in the Capital, presumably to address the increasing need for cheap labour.

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*The above text is an array of snippets and requires further exploration. I recorded them here, to avoid stories being lost. I encourage those who can fill in the gaps and can connect the dots to help me do so.*

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<sup>2</sup> Marion Wallace and John Kinahan (2011), *A History of Namibia* (Jacana), p 145-6.