

# SCHMELEN KLEINSCHMIDT FOUNDATION 7

24 February 2010

Dear friends and relations,

On the road back from Swakopmund to Cape Town last week I stopped at Bethanien and Komaggas once again. Over the past 15 months I have been to Swakopmund on five occasions, every time because the health of my mother continues to decline. In this period she broke her right wrist and when the plaster came off she fell again and broke her left arm at the shoulder. Although she is cheerful her quality of life has suffered immensely over the past year. She stays in the frail care home at night, a facility operated by the old age home where she has stayed for the past 26 years. In the day she is back at her home attended to by a carer because her movement is severely limited. She has to be taken around by wheel chair or in her home moves about with the help of a Zimmer-frame. On 14 April she will be 94. My brother Immo and family will be visiting her on that occasion.

At Komaggas I was invited to address the Komaggas Church Council of Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa and then share lunch with its 30 odd members. Next to me sat a man (Johan Cloete) who told me he played the part of Hinrich Schmelen in the school play, written and produced in Komaggas in the 1970's, a subtle but pertinent protest at the time against the separation of people according to colour and race as the apartheid regime demanded. He and the other men around me are all unemployed having been retrenched by the de Beers diamond group in recent times. Anger and bitterness is rife as they were dispossessed of the land on which the diamonds have been mined. A land claim is being prepared but the obstacles to get restitution or compensation for the 90 years of mining here must be rated as slim. The powerful have all the tools, even justice on their side. Right now the mine tells them to be patient and wait till the market picks up again and then de Beers might once more employ them – at somewhat menial level only.

On the Church Council Dominee Jetro Cloete and one elder are the only persons left who are employed and the dominee's salary depends entirely on collections at church on Sundays. Revenues have declined from R24,000 per month to as low as R6,000 a month in recent times. This employs a secretary, a treasurer, a warden and the minister himself, and has to cover all service bills and building maintenance. The church council met for an entire Saturday, amongst others to discuss whether they can afford food parcels (twice a month) for the poorest across the village or for members of their congregation only. Income, for most people is derived from goats people keep on the commonage (meent) (but prices are subjected to a monopoly buyer in Springbok) and the social grants from the state (R1080 [about Euro103 or \$139] for pensioners and R250 for children under the age of 18). Social grants were increased to these figures during the recent budget announcement by the Minister of Finance.

In my presentation to the Council I suggested that a conference and celebration take place in Komaggas in 2011 or 2014 to coincide either with the 200th anniversary of Schmelen's arrival in Namaqualand (indeed his arrival from Europe to which he never returned) or the 200th anniversary of the marriage between Hinrich and Zara, somewhere along the Gariep river just north of Komaggas. The idea of such an event met with their full and enthusiastic approval and they passed a resolution in which they extend support for the planned event and will appoint a 'mission heritage committee' to make local arrangements and to include both congregations who hail from the Rhenish mission (the vast majority of the community in Komaggas). They thought it entirely possible to find accommodation with local families for anything from 50 to 100 outside visitors to the event. They also recorded their support for the formal creation of the Schmelen Kleinschmidt Foundation as a welcome vehicle that, amongst others,

considers the restoration of the historic buildings and terrain (graveyard etc) in this area.

A conference and celebration could include the following: A set of formal lectures that encompass missionary as well as colonial history and how it impacted on the people of Namaqualand. There are several academics who have expressed an interest. Locals will equally be asked to speak, amongst others to tell the fascinating story of Chief Karusab and his people who lived here before the mission was established. Other ideas might be: the re-enactment of the play that was performed here over 30 years ago, a visit to the commonage where traditional animal husbandry is still managed collectively to this day and combining this with a visit to the site where Schmelen's first church, Bethel, was situated (this might be a days outing including a meal with people at one of the vee buiteposte (animal outposts). Remnants of the ox-wagon pass down Spectakel Pass could also be seen. It would also include a conducted walk to the historic buildings, the graveyard where Schmelen and other leaders lie buried, the grave of Chief Karusab, the springs where the chiefs people lived in the valley above Komaggas, etc. Other ideas included a celebratory event where visitors and the local community could meet, indeed where distant relations would meet for the first time – one or two of citizens of Komaggas are over 100 years old. Ds. Cloete and his Calvinist Church counterpart could tell the tale of of the community came to be divided but how the schism is being healed under their leadership. All these are suggestions and much more thought and planning has to go into it.

Local people are keen to see Ursula Trueper give a lecture here. They have also mentioned the name of Nigel Penn, Professor at UCT who wrote the excellent recent book on the west coast with the title 'The forgotten frontier', Calvin van Wyk who grew up here (he is involved as a heritage official in Cape Town) and is possibly the most knowledgeable person on the missionary families and on heritage matters about this area, and Henk Smit, the lawyer from the Legal Resources Centre who deals with the land claims case referred to above.

The old church.

I have previously written about and circulated pictures of the old Komaggas church dating back to the Rhenish era. It was built with dried mud bricks, and rain and weather has necessitated constant repairs over the years. None-the-less the churches tower collapsed some years ago and last year the doors and windows had to be bricked up to stabilize the structure but also to prevent injury if people entered. Health officials are now being sent to inspect the structure and it is feared they might recommend the church be flattened if the heritage authorities and congregation don't have a plan to restore it.

This may invoke interest and feelings with relatives, but equally with the community of Komaggas and communities and congregations beyond. People here speak of this church and the pastors house as the place where the Namaqua language was first codified into an initial grammar and consequently where part of the bible was translated into Namaqua. They no longer speak Namaqua (there are exceptions) other than using some words, idioms and imagery because of the thrust of the colonial era. Afrikaans is now the lingua franca but there is a revival to rediscover what they lost – and the few dilapidated buildings in Komaggas are symbolic of the culture that has been obliterated virtually in its entirety. Even the new order in South Africa pays scant attention to this heritage and its language. The people here embrace Hinrich Schmelen as one of theirs', someone who stands out amongst the missionaries for having learnt and used (albeit haltingly) their language without imposing Dutch or English, who 'lived his life according to local conventions without imposing western notions of dress and custom, who never went on furlough back to England or Germany, who married one amongst them and lies buried amongst them. Missionary Kleinschmidt meets this bill on

nearly similar terms but, they point out, then come missionaries who imposed colonial values, authority and much more. I was made aware of a distinction I had not understood before.

It would be a shame if we, the outsiders who have shown an interest in this past and its wider social and political context stood by and are unable to preserve a small but tangible piece of history, personal connections aside. I have agreed with Ds. Jetro Cloete that we will find a qualified person in Cape Town who can visit Komaggas to make a proposal about what might be done to save or preserve some of what is under threat here. I have someone in mind and initial donations to the SKF account will hopefully cover such undertaking such that we would know what restoration costs. This project has to be the prime task now, above that of the graveyard.

Bethanien.

I also spent a morning in Bethanien, first with Pastor Beukes and then with Chief David Frederick who had been ill – the woe's of old age, it seems. We discussed two matters:

1. He was recently contacted by the President of Namibia, President Hifikepunye Pohamba, who told him the following: The German Government had decided that all skeletons or skulls that had been taken to Germany during the colonial era, to universities or to museums, would be returned, including those of his grand uncle, Cornelius Frederick, and others of his people. His grandfather died of exposure and disease on the notorious over-crowded prison island known as Shark Island. Chief Frederick expressed his surprise that there was no further delay or prevarication of this matter by the German authorities. He is now tasked with having the bones (or skulls) interred and commemorative stones placed both at Shark Island and in Bethanien. Apparently most of the skulls are not identified by name other than that of his grand uncle whose name is written across his forehead, he told me. He intends to invite me to the ceremonies when they take place.

2. I have previously made mention of his writing up of the history of his people. I had also briefly interviewed him on this and now told him how I found there to be an interesting way to verify dates and places (which in the oral tradition are lacking) by going through German records and publications that refer to these events from their perspective. He would welcome systematic and professional help if there is anyone whose interest could be directed toward this.

Kassebruch – birthplace of Hinrich Schmelen.

Ursula Trueper recently wrote to me about her first ever visit to Kassebruch, “the place of birth of our joint forebear Hinrich Schmelen. It is still a village ... I spoke to the village historian and the publisher of the local magazine ‘Staleke’. I told them about the plans for a Schmelen-Kleinschmidt-Foundation and they are interested in joining us. Maybe one could consider promoting a village partnership between Kassebruch and Komaggas or Bethanien. We contemplated, in connection with the 200th anniversary of Schmelen setting foot at the Cape, to publish a special edition of ‘Staleke’ for September 2011”, she wrote.

A Schmelen Kleinschmidt Bam foundation?

Kenneth Makatees is a local television producer. He also hails from Komaggas and it turns out, we are related. (See previous newsletter). The story is fascinating and opens up a new chapter for the family tree – one that is as interesting and intriguing. As it turns out Kenneth's mother stays in the Welwitshia old age home in Swakopmund.

Here is the connection: The Schmelens had 3 daughters and the third one, Friederika (born 1819 - ?) who married Christiaan Bam (? - 1853). Christiaan was a missionary also, and brother to Hinrichs second wife, Maria Elizabeth Bam (1809 - 1848). It is interesting to note that becoming a brother and missionary on equal terms was not yet burdened with race and prejudice. The Bam hail from Cape Town with possible West Griqua connections.

Kenneth's great great mother was Friederika. She married the brother of missionary Weich's second wife. The connection is of interest because missionary Weich succeeded Hinrich Schmelens at Komaggas. The Komaggas graveyard has three Weich family buried here. It would seem the Weich family followed the same path the Kleinschmidts followed: the branch that was 'coloured' and the branch that considered themselves to be 'white'. It is through this branch of the family that surnames such as van Reenen, Smith, Makatees and Weich arise. Kenneth is pursuing contact with Weich off-spring. Calvin van Wyk added in an email to me:

"Some of the Weich descendants are living near Springbok. One is a missionary who worked among the San. He is Ds. Ferdi Weich. Then there are some Van Niekerks of the Voor-Boesmanland who are also descendants. Mrs Jossie van den Heever, née Bassingwaight (earliest trader family who settled in Namibia), she lives in Springbok knows them well, as well as Dr Gert Kotze, ex-principal of Namakwaland Hoërskool."

Kenneth and I have planned to visit the Tulbagh area in early March, having some new leads from Ursula Trueper about the whereabouts of Zara's grave.

From a South African (and Namibian) perspective the Bam family connection is as relevant as the Kleinschmidt connection. Several of the Bam's worked for the Rhenish Church and indeed with Kleinschmidt and Hahn.

Any suggestions, additions and corrections to the above text (family names, dates) are most welcome.

Correction.

In my previous newsletter I made mention of missionary Peter as the one who delivered his people to the German colonial authority during the 1904 - 1908 uprising. It has been pointed out to me that this must have been missionary Friedrich Heinrichs who was in Bethanien from 1892 until 1906/7. Missionary Peters only came to Bethanien in 1908.

Hope you find all of this of interest.

Best wishes,

Horst.