

Notes and Queries

POLITICS ON A NATAL OBSERVATION CAR

A note for those who can still wax nostalgic for the days when it was on the luxury cars of international expresses, in an aroma of teak and leather, that the negotiations and intrigues of political history played themselves out. Did such closet drama ever occur in Natal? For 'international', here, read the 1909 train service from Johannesburg to Durban – between two independent states, after all – and for 'luxury car' read Mr Hendrie's latest observation coach, especially built for the 'corridor' mail train, the pride and joy of the Natal Government Railways. For 'political intrigue' read the build-up to the South African Convention of 1909, on whose decision rested the fate of Southern Africa. The drama turns on three characters assembled in the observation car: Louis Botha, prime minister of the Transvaal, J.C. Smuts, his right hand man, and their colleague from the field of war, the old republican General de la Rey. These – the three chief delegates of the Transvaal – were the ones who would make or break the forthcoming conference.

After travelling through eastern Transvaal through the night, the delegates spent most of the next day in the congenial pursuit of observing Natal through the windows of the observation car. This being a Natal train, the luxury car, the balcony coaches and the locomotive itself would have been designed by that talented Scotsman, Mr D.A. Hendrie, the colony's Chief Mechanical Engineer.

It was after leaving Ladysmith that Botha realised – from the leather luxury of the observation car – that the train was now curving through the old battle-haunts that had made him famous. To get the point of this tale, you must understand that both Smuts and Botha had had to work long hours to get General de la Rey to give his assent to the scheme for union, and to gain his prestige for the Transvaal delegation. Now, as the train wound through Natal, Botha's mood became more that of the historian rather than the sensitive politician. All sorts of war reminiscences came crowding back, and he expanded at length on the tactics he had used so successfully. They passed station names that had carved themselves into history. The train squeezed along the narrow defile next to the Tugela River at Pieters, crossed the river at Colenso, and fetched far-off glimpses of Spioen Kop. De la Rey sat sullenly in the corner, listening to Botha unbuttoning himself on his old triumphs, which the Natal line was now bringing back so vividly. Suddenly, with an icy change of tone, De la Rey turned on Botha (an 'upstart' general, after all, twenty years his junior) and started coldly and logically to analyse various mistakes in his campaign. On and on he went, dismembering each manoeuvre, and sarcastically making comparisons with his own style of command.

The atmosphere in the observation car grew more and more tense – Botha was fast reaching the point of explosion. Was the Transvaal delegation going to fragment ig-

nominoisly before it reached Durban? (If the Transvalers were not unified, there was certainly no hope of a Union of South Africa.) Smuts, sitting with some papers that he was working at, realised that the observation car was getting very hot (politically) and tried again and again to lead the conversation elsewhere. But back came de la Rey to the attack, and the upholstered coach, gliding through old battlefields, began to resemble a battlefield itself.

At last, Smuts told a joke – something that ‘slim’ Jannie was never very good at – a poor joke, but which allowed him to laugh long and uproariously at his own weak humour, until the others had no option but to join in. The atmosphere gradually changed. By the time they reached Durban, the three Transvaal leaders could face the photographers on the platform, all smiles. The tension had been smoothed and the future of South Africa consolidated!

One of the effects of the Union of South Africa was to give Natal’s talented railwayman, Mr D.A. Hendrie, a final glorious decade in locomotive design as the country’s first Chief Mechanical Engineer. One can travel behind some of his steam offspring of those years even at the present day. I was lucky enough to chat with Hendrie’s son in his last years, in the 1970s, and he had stories of accompanying his father on inspection trips through the Union of South Africa. For example: remember that Hendrie senior was to be controversial at this time for designing passenger coaches with balconies at their ends. Well, Hendrie junior remembered how once, on leaving Bloemfontein for Johannesburg, he and his father were summoned to the end of their coach to have a long chat with the warm and jovial Premier of all South Africa, Louis Botha himself. Leaning on the railings of adjacent balconies, the three continued their merry conversation long after the train had started. There was no better place for a smoke and a chat!

But I am sure the conversation was on more mundane things than saving the Union of South Africa!

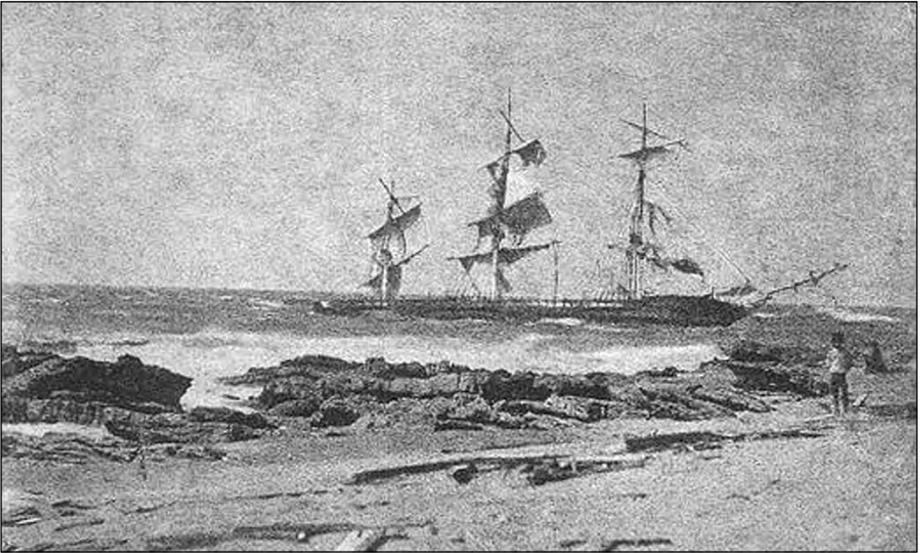
W.H. BIZLEY

PHOTOGRAPH OF THE WRECKED *MINERVA*

In the Local History Museum in Durban there is a photograph purporting to be the stranded *Minerva*. It was presented in about 1925 by Mr H.P. Waller of Ixopo, who found it among his late parents’ papers. On the back is written, ‘22. *Wreck of the Minerva, July 1850*’.

Durban’s Bluff rocks were the scene of the *Minerva*’s end on the night of 4–5 July 1850. At 987 tons she was the largest of J.C. Byrne & Co.’s emigrant ships, carrying 287 passengers. She was an old ‘East Indiaman’, i.e. a ship used by the English East India Co. for merchandise and passengers on the Indian route, and also, if necessary, as a warship (she had gunports on her lower deck).

The ship anchored on 3 July north-west of the Bluff. Another of the Byrne ships, the brig *Conquering Hero*, had preceded her by a few days, and was also in the outer roadstead, further north, and about 600 feet nearer land. At 4.30 p.m. on 4 July the Byrne ship *Henrietta* arrived, and anchored about 600 yards nearer the Bluff than the *Minerva*, but about the same distance from the breakers. The *Henrietta*’s captain later calculated that he must have been about a mile and a half from the Bar.



The Defiance photograph in the Local History Museum, Durban. This is a sepia copy 21,2 cm x 16 cm.

During the 4th the wind was blowing a 'moderate' gale east or north-east, and became 'squally' between 8 and 10 p.m. There was a strong swell from seaward and the *Minerva* pitched heavily. She parted her anchor at about 11.30 p.m. The other anchor (starboard) was put down, which stayed her for about a minute, but then she continued being driven fast broadside on to the swell. In her involuntary progress she passed within 40 yards of the stern of the *Henrietta*.

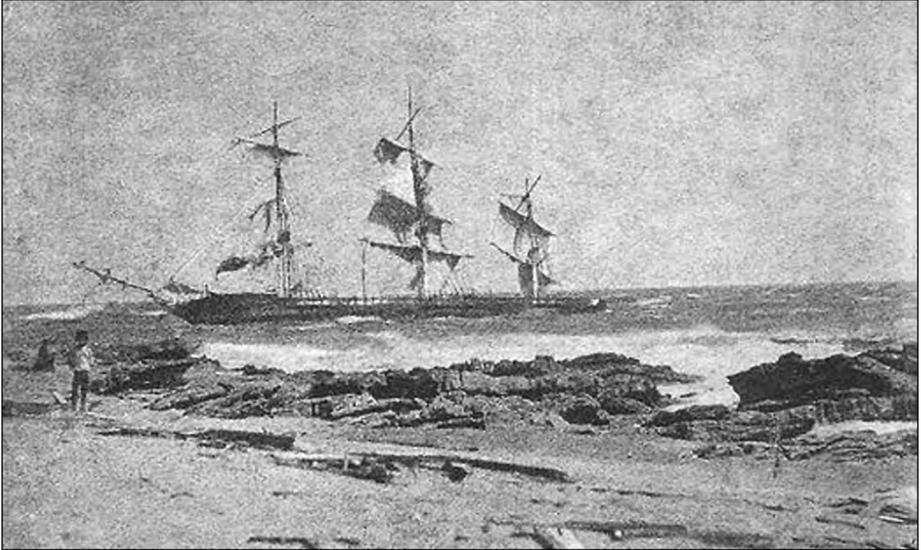
The captain, James Moir, being anxious she would get too close to the Bar (he later estimated they were about two ship-lengths away), had her headsails set, and slipped both anchor cables. By this time they were about a quarter of a mile from the Bluff. The headsails took the wrong way, the wind having veered to north-north-east, and she canted with her head to shore. She was given more sail in an attempt to turn her round completely, but there was not enough space for this, and the strong tide forced her on to the Bluff reef. She was stove in at the stern, her rudder being forced up on to the gun deck. The captain then ordered the headsails down, and the activation of the pumps. The latter made no headway. Then the topsails were hoisted to prevent the vessel falling broadside into deep water.

At first light next morning (5 July) the evacuation of passengers began, and went on until 4 p.m. The last two boatloads were upset as the current was strengthening, but all managed to get to shore. (The only casualty was one of the *Henrietta* crew, when their lifeboat was overturned in trying to reach the *Minerva*.) At 4.20 p. m. the captain received a note from the Port Captain ordering everyone off the ship as she would prob-



The reversed writing as it appears at the top of the Local History Museum's Defiance photograph. The word 'Sepia' is legible.

ably break up during the night. The sailors left immediately, the officers following five minutes later. According to the correspondence of J.S. Moreland (Byrne's immigration agent on the spot) the *Minerva* had started to break up by 1 a.m. on the morning of the 6th, the beach being strewn with fragments of ship and contents.



The Defiance photograph turned round.



The Minerva photograph in the Local History Museum, Durban.

At the subsequent enquiry Moir attributed the wreck to one of the flukes of the port anchor giving way. In their report the commissioners, the Collector of Customs (W.S. Field), the Port Captain (W.D. Bell) and the Immigration Agent (George Macleroy) stated that the ship's officers' testimony as to the amount of cable played out differed, and they came to the conclusion that had the ship had sufficient cable on deck to 'veer' out for the two anchors (hauling same on deck from the lockers being a lengthy process), the vessel would probably have been saved.

To return to the photograph. Some have always had their doubts that it was of the *Minerva* because:

1. It seems to be too early for a photographer to have been in Natal. Furthermore, had someone photographed the wreck, this would have been a noteworthy event for the press (the *Natal Witness* and the *Natal Independent* then being the only newspapers) to have added to their reports of the wreck.

The first indication found in the press of the presence of a photographer in the Colony dates to May 1851, when a Mr Waller announced in the *Witness* that he would remain in Pietermaritzburg for a few days to take daguerrotype portraits.* Another itinerant and transient photographer, a Mr O'Brien, arrived on the coasting vessel, *Gitana* in June 1856, and in December advertised that he was available at Mr J.O. Wirsing's premises in Durban and would execute portraits. The resident photographers who advertised their services in the 1850s were W.H. Burgess (Durban, October 1857), James Lloyd (Durban, July 1858), and Pietermaritzburg men, Edward Collier, October 1858), William Frank Ellis (July 1859) and John Hodson (September 1859). From this it appears that, in Natal, it was only in the late 1850s that the photographic profession 'took off'.

George Russell, in his *History of old Durban*, mentions a 'photographic artist', James Pulleyn, who was working in Durban c. 1857. It is Pulleyn who is tentatively accredited with taking the *Minerva* photo, both by the Local History Museum and by Dr A.D. Bensusan in his 1969 article entitled, 'The wreck of the *Minerva*, Durban, 1850', in *Africana notes and news*. However, Pulleyn arrived in Natal only in September 1850.

2. The *Minerva* broke up during the night of the 5–6 July, so a photograph would have had to have been taken during daylight on the 5th. The Local History Museum photograph does show a number of people on the shore, but there is no sign of the frenetic activity saving passengers would have entailed.
3. The photograph shows a ship with a number of sails on the masts, whereas, the *Minerva's* captain specifically mentions the headsails being taken down, and the hoisting of the topsails to keep the vessel upright**.

Also in the Local History Museum is a sepia photograph of the *Defiance* (1 001 tons), an iron ship, which was wrecked just north of the Umzimkulu river mouth on 6 October 1871. She had left Bombay on 31 August, and was bound for Liverpool. The image is

*Presumably he is the William Waller, for whom a letter was lying unclaimed at the Durban Post Office in Mar. 1852, and the William Waller, photographer in Bathurst (1862) and Grahamstown (1878).

**John Sanderson is the only person known to have drawn the wreck at the time. His sketch used as an illustration in Bensusan's article shows two of the three masts with topsails only. Sanderson made

very similar to the *Minerva* photograph, except that the ship is facing down the coast instead of up. However, at the top of the picture is some writing which is back-to-front – one of the words that can be deciphered is ‘sepia’, so presumably it was a note scribbled by the photographer. When this photograph is reversed, it is, to all intents and purposes, the 1850 photograph of the *Minerva*, perhaps taken at a slightly later time, as the sails appear more torn.

Assistance in preparing this piece is gratefully acknowledged to Capt. I.W. Edwards of Somerset West (former Durban Port Captain), and Professor J. L. McCracken of

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN NATAL CELEBRATES

In 2002 the Catholic Church celebrated the arrival of the first missionaries. On 15 March 1852 a group of French-speaking Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, led by Bishop Francois Allard, arrived on the cutter *Gem*. There were about 60 Catholics living along the coastal belt and about three times that number in the Pietermaritzburg area, including Irish soldiers at Fort Napier. Allard’s vicariate encompassed the eastern side of South Africa from the Kei River to Inhambane and from the Indian Ocean to longitude 22° east. From this huge vicariate three archbishoprics and twenty six vicariates were eventually carved.

The 150th anniversary was celebrated in May by the OMI Congregation in Natal and in August by the Archdiocese of Durban led by Wilfred, Cardinal Napier.

Visit of the Oblate Superior-General and his Council

In May 2002 the Superior-General of the OMI and his council travelled from Rome to meet the Provincials of all the OMI missionary countries in Africa. After holding a series of meetings at Hartebeespoort, they travelled to Durban.

On the morning of 25 May 2002 the party visited St Joseph’s Theological Institute at Cedara, where they met and lunched with staff and students. Then they set out for Pietermaritzburg for a celebration at the original chapel in Loop Street, which was opened in December 1852. It was here that the Prince Imperial lay in state in June 1879. It has now been completely restored, renamed Allard Chapel and a section of it has been turned into a museum. Portraits of the pioneer bishops and priests have been etched into the glass partition which separates the chapel from the museum.

The historic building was blessed and officially opened by the Superior-General, Father Wilhelm Steckling OMI. This was followed by tea and then a Mass of thanksgiving which was said in a huge marquee. Father Stuart Bate OMI was the preacher and the choir of St Joseph’s led the singing. On their way back to Durban the official party visited Ntshongweni where the annual pilgrimage was in full swing. They were amazed and impressed by the large and enthusiastic crowd which was present at the all-night service.

The following day, Sunday 26 May, Mass was said at Emmanuel Cathedral, with two sketches of the wreck, both on 5 July – one of the ship alone (the one in the Bensusan article) and one showing the vessel at a distance, with the Bluff, and boats plying between ship and shore. According to Bensusan the ship in the two drawings is similar. The problem with Sanderson’s sketches is that he pictures the *Minerva* as a barque, not a ship, according to maritime authorities consulted by Bensusan. The solution suggested in the article is that he drew the outlines on the spot, and filled in the details later.

Cardinal Napier presiding and Archbishop Denis Hurley as preacher. In the evening the ladies of St Anne's Parish, Sydenham, arranged a display of floral art around the arrival of the first missionaries and the youth presented a musical entitled 'The Witness'. The final celebration took place on Monday 27 May, the feast day of Bishop St Eugene de Mazenod, founder of the OMI congregation, and also of Blessed Joseph Gerard, pioneer missionary of Lesotho, who was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1998. This was held at St Anne's Church and was attended by all Natal's OMI priests, many religious superiors, and laity. It was followed by lunch which brought the Superior-General's visit to an end.

A short illustrated history of the Natal vicariate from 1852 to the present, written by Joy Brain, was published by the OMI to mark the 150th anniversary.

Archdiocesan Celebrations

In August 2002 the Archdiocese of Durban organised their celebration to coincide with the plenary session of the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference held at Mariannhill. A Jubilee Mass of thanksgiving was said at the Durban Exhibition Hall on August 25 and during the ceremony Jabulani Nxumalo OMI was ordained Auxiliary Bishop of Durban. Bishop Nxumalo is well known in Pietermaritzburg, where he served as parish priest of St Mary's for several years before being elected as Provincial of the OMI in Natal; after this he was called to Rome and appointed OMI counsellor for Africa.

All the seventy-five parishes of the Archdiocese of Durban participated in the ceremony by producing a 75-metre 'Walk of Thanksgiving' built up from their parish banners embroidered or appliqued in bright colours. The occasion was a very happy one and brought the sesquicentennial jubilee celebrations to a close. We are now sitting back to await the two-hundredth anniversary!

THE FUTURE OF THE NATAL SOCIETY'S SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

As the Msunduzi Municipality is considering taking over the library activities of the Natal Society and running them as a municipal library, the Natal Society Council has decided that the special collections it has built up over the years would be better administered, and have more chance of survival and use, if they were given on permanent loan to the University of Natal. These collections have therefore been relocated to the Alan Paton Centre at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg.

There are four main collections. The Africana and rare book collection contains books and pamphlets published in South Africa prior to the passing of the first Legal Deposit Act in 1916, and books about South Africa published prior to about 1900. It includes some of the books given to the Natal Society by Henry Cloete and Robert Moffat Jnr at the time of its foundation in 1851, a substantial collection of works by and about Bishop Colenso, especially his theological controversy, and a fairly complete collection of works dealing with Natal.

Secondly there is the O'Brien Collection. This was the private library of Senator W.J. O'Brien, a city councillor, mayor, member of Parliament and senator for Pietermaritzburg for many years. He was a staunch supporter of the Natal Society, and after his death at the age of 99 his daughters gave his library to the Society, together with an endowment. It is a fine example of a Victorian/Edwardian gentleman's library, catholic

in scope but particularly rich in English and French history and literature. Being an Irishman, O'Brien had also much on Irish history and culture. The endowment has been used to develop his library as a collection of Victorian life and thought.

The third collection is that of Professor Alan Hattersley, the 'father' of Natal history. It contains mainly historical works.

Fourthly there is the Photograph Collection. Thanks mainly to the enthusiasm of Miss Sue Judd, the Natal Society has a fine collection of photographs of early Pietermaritzburg and Natal, including some spectacular photographs of the City Hall burning down in 1898.

These collections are probably too 'Eurocentric' to be considered politically correct in the present climate of South Africa. If, however, they can be kept intact until political passions have died down and 'Eurocentricity' is not longer regarded as a disease, they will form an invaluable source of information on life and thought in Victorian Natal.

DAVID BUCKLEY

THE WITNESS AT WILLOWTON

The first edition of *The Natal Witness* (a four-page spread) was handed out free of charge by its editor, David Dale Buchanan, from the window of his cottage on Erf 27 Church Street to such passers-by as would take it on the afternoon of Friday 27 February 1846. In 1863 the paper moved to 244 Longmarket Street, a site it was to occupy uninterrupted until September 2002. Situated over the road from the colonial parliament (and since 1994, the provincial parliament) it was at the heart of things.

In 1876 the paper began to be printed on the first steam press in Natal. It was reported that "the engine is nominally of four horsepower, but can work to nearly three times that strength. It drives three printing presses, viz., a double-royal 'Belle Sauvage', a demi-folio 'Bremner' and a foolscap platten. Besides that, it works a very powerful cutting machine and a circular saw and even then half of its strength is to spare."

A century later, however, steam technology was thoroughly outmoded. It was clear that if the *Witness* wished to stay abreast of the times, what its historian described as 'a quantum leap in the technology of production' had to be taken. It was accordingly decided to install a new Albert press, one of the first rotary-litho presses in the country at the time and also to relocate the printing of the paper to the new Willowton industrial area to the east of the city. The Royal Show supplement of 1981 was the first product of the new equipment.

Twenty years later, however, the Albert was dated and in February 2002 it, in turn, was superseded by the KBA Comet web offset press, reputedly the most technologically-sophisticated on the African continent. Koenig and Bauer, its makers, is the oldest press manufacturer in the world, established, unbelievably, in 1817, two years after the battle of Waterloo!

With the acquisition of 50% of the *Witness* shares by the Naspers group in August 2001, the paper had the financial muscle not only to make such an investment, but also to proceed to a second phase of the project, namely to move the entire editorial operation to Willowton. The last edition produced from Longmarket Street appeared on Saturday September 14 2002. That of the following Monday came from the new premises, the absence of any break in production representing little short of an organisational miracle.

The new *Witness* at Willowton represents a total investment approaching R60 million. What the move says about the decline of the inner city, however, is another story. Circulation of the paper is deemed unlikely to increase much. Growth potential now lies in the press and already contracts to print other publications, most notably the Zulu-language bi-weekly *Ilanga*, have been secured.

JACK FROST

THE TATHAM ART GALLERY NATIONAL PORTRAIT COMPETITION: KING CETSHWAYO

The Tatham Art Gallery's collection was begun in 1903. To celebrate this event the Gallery hosted a national portrait competition to paint a portrait of the Zulu monarch, King Cetshwayo in traditional dress. The intention was to address an obvious historical imbalance; not to hide any aspect of the history of the province, but to acquire a companion for the portrait of Queen Victoria – an equally impressive portrait of one of the Zulu kings. King Cetshwayo was deemed to be the most appropriate subject.

The criteria were that a work in oil or acrylic paints, showing highly competent painting skills, should be an accurate physical likeness of King Cetshwayo and an accurate rendition of his traditional attire and any artefacts included in the painting. It should be a full length portrait of the King, standing or seated in a suitable setting, and giving an indication of his personality and dignity as a Zulu king. The majority of the selection panel were in favour of a portrayal of King Cetshwayo which communicated his likeness and stature without any fussiness of ceremonial dress or setting.

The competition was open to South African artists resident for most of the year in South Africa. Over a hundred entries were finally received, and all of these were exhibited in the gallery during February and March 2003. The selection panel consisted of the Gallery's Acquisitions Committee (Mr Brendan Bell, Director of the Tatham Art Gallery, Mr Malcolm Christian, master printer at the Caversham Centre for Artists and Writers, Ms Juliette Leeb du Toit of the Centre for Visual Art at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg, Mrs Valerie Maggs, an art teacher, and Mr Suren Naidoo, a school teacher and vice-chair of the Tatham Art Gallery Board of Trustees.) This committee was supplemented by a number of invited panellists: Dr Godshero Donda, a school principal, Dr Reginald Khumalo of Radio Ukhozi, Prof Jabulani Maphalala of Emandulo Consulting, Mr Sibongiseni Mkhize, the director of the Voortrekker Museum, and Prof Siza Ndlovu, Managing Director of the Playhouse Company.

Through an exhaustive selection procedure the entries were sifted to a group of fourteen, from which five finalists were chosen by consensus. Further discussion led to consensus on the elimination of two further paintings. The eventual winner was chosen by a clear majority vote. The winner was Helene Train from Cape Town, whose winning entry is the cover illustration of this number of *Natalia*.

In addition to the prize of R100 000, Ms Train wins a commission to paint a massive two-and-a-half metre by one-and-a-half metre portrait to hang in the main stairwell of the Gallery beside the portrait of Queen Victoria by the Edwardian painter Charles van Havermaet. Her portrait of former president Nelson Mandela hung in Tuinhuis while he was in office. She is also currently working on a portrait of Nobel Laureate Sir James Black for the University of Edinburgh.

MORAY COMRIE