

FARMHOUSES OF OLD NATAL

edited by JACQUELINE KALLEY; photographs by HUGH BLAND

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THIS edited volume is a timely collection of individual stories of 38 old ‘Natal’ homes (and I use Natal as the period in which they were constructed), presented in an engaging and colloquial light. It is not meant as an academic volume; rather Kalley sees the purpose of her work as highlighting the state of repair of many of these structures, and while she acknowledges this, she notes that ‘The loss of each building whether residential or not, reflects on us all’.

The volume opens with an introduction, and has a simple map in order to geographically locate the different areas. While this could have been dealt with more specifically with district maps locating the homesteads prefacing the different regional sections, the inclusion of a map is appreciated. Beginning with Pietermaritzburg as centre of the area concerned, the chapters radiate outwards. With a strong, and unsurprising focus on the Dargle (given the proliferation of really old homes in the area), each section has between two and five examples of old properties. The publication closes with a bibliography, a subscription list documenting the contributors to the project, and a name index before a final list of photographic credits.

Highly illustrated, it contains stories of properties both existing (and expected) as well as those which have been long demolished, such as Forest Cliff in Byrne. Importantly, as editor, Jackie Kalley extends the study much further than previous such authors

(here I am thinking of Brian Kearney’s work *Chimneys in the Mist* and Noo Dorning’s later work, *Chimneys in the clouds*, both of which Kalley includes in her introduction). She also notes that this is a narrative of properties, and not intended as a nostalgic journey through time. Importantly, she acknowledges the contribution of the stories of the property owners in compiling the individual family histories that form each section. Kalley includes homesteads as far afield as Greytown, Estcourt, Mooi River and the Southern Drakensberg, allowing for a sub-regional presentation of historic homesteads. Further, she includes homesteads in Pietermaritzburg itself, particularly The Cedars and Sans Souci.

The many photographs themselves are presented in a clear layout, with a mixture of old photographs, smaller images and then others taking two full pages. A mixture of internal and external images as well as portraits add to the evoking of a personalisation of the separate family histories. In addition, Kalley has included some paintings of the houses adding a further richness to their individual stories. They are, with the exception of the old photographs, in full colour and of good quality, and contain a mixture of landscape, buildings, views and details. This broad capturing of the visual aspects means that the book can act as a resource for historians, architects, renovators and the generally interested.

This volume is many things: it is a highly illustrated documentation of

a number of old, remote and generally inaccessible properties in the early decades of the twenty-first century, in many cases 150 years after the original houses were constructed. It is a series of personal histories as told by descendants, and assembled by the editor in a manner that is not highly laudatory; it does not emphasise the endeavours and challenges experienced by their ancestors as many colonial era histories tend to do. This narrative stance allows it to stand alone as a contribution to local histories and architectural heritage (such as those by Kearney and Dorn-

ing), documenting substantial homesteads, their condition, and situation at a particular point in time. Because Kalley has cast the net out wider, this has also resulted in capturing histories of farm properties that date to the later years of the nineteenth century, yet have missed being included in a comparative fashion. Finally, as one interested in architecture, heritage and old buildings, I am proud to include Jacqueline Kalley's *Farmhouses of Old Natal* on my coffee table.

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