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[Translated]

THE OUTCASTS
Charlie Els

Introduction: My Search for my Lost Step-aunt

A cousin of mine once claimed that my Els grandmother had been married to a Van der Merwe before she got married my Els grandfather and that she had had a daughter (possibly two) with this Van der Merwe. None of our relatives had any knowledge of this, which led me to searching for this lost daughter of my grandmother and step-aunt of mine. My findings proved to be a revelation. There was indeed such a daughter but she was not so much lost and forgotten as she was rejected and concealed. The reason for this was that she suffered from leprosy, a disease that was abhorred at the time and preferably concealed when it occurred in a family.

In the library of the Northern Transvaal Branch of the Genealogical Society of South Africa (GSSA) I obtained records of the Pretoria Leprosy Institute at Westfort that made an important contribution to my research. At the same time it revealed further "lost" people in other genealogical registers; again people who were not so much lost but who were concealed because they were lepers.

The Discarded Child

My grandparents, Johannes Marthinus Els and Catharina Elizabeth Els (born Uys) had five children: my father, Nicolaas Jacobus Els and his three brothers, my uncles, Johannes Gerhardus Els, Johannes Marthinus Els and Barend Christiaan Els, and a daughter, my only aunt (as we understood) on paternal side, Catharina Elizabeth Els.

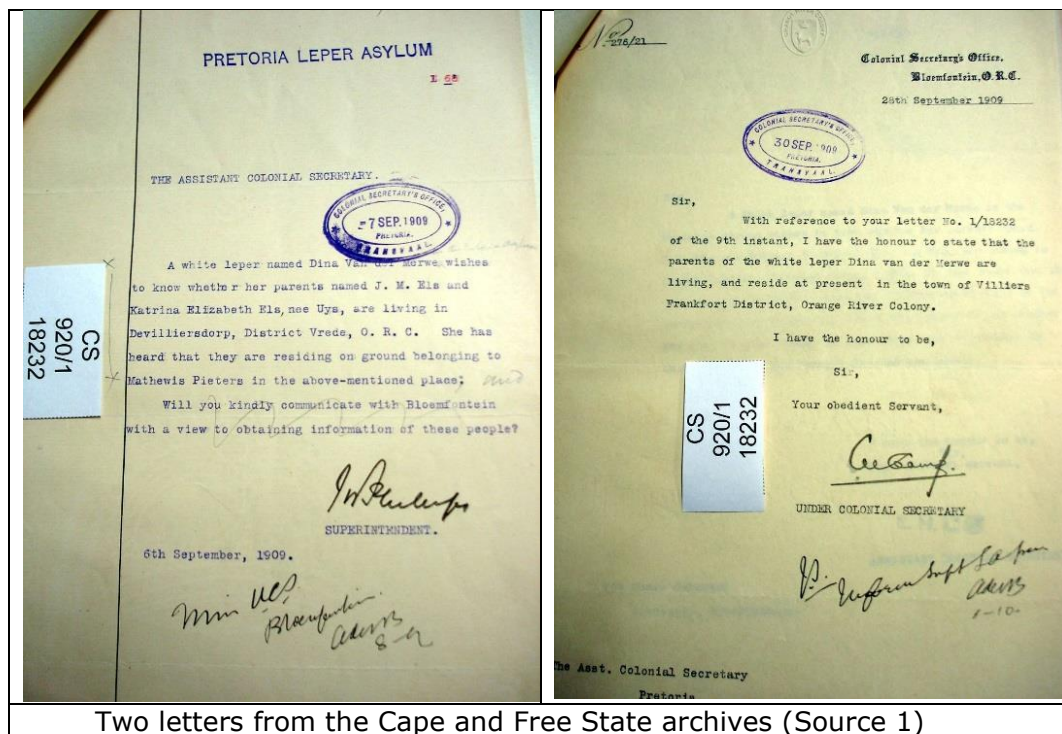
My cousin, the above-mentioned aunt's daughter, said that her mother had told her that my grandmother was married twice; before she married my grandfather, she had been married to a Van der Merwe with whom she had two daughters. Both daughters died young; the eldest apparently just before she was to marry and the other one as a child.

It made sense because in our family the "naming pattern" was duly maintained in naming the children: my father was named after his paternal grandfather, the second son was named after his maternal grandfather, the third son after my grandfather himself and the fourth son after my grandfather's eldest brother. It was thus strange

that my aunt was named after her mother, as if she were the third daughter and not the first and only one as we understood it.

I turned to Janet Melville for help, a well-known researcher and author of the Van der Merwe book. She confirmed that my grandmother, Catharina Elizabeth Els (born Uys), had indeed first been married to one Andries Petrus Stephanus van der Merwe.

My great-grandmother, my grandmother's mother, was Dina Magrietha Pieterse, so my grandmother's eldest daughter with her first husband should have been Dina Magrietha van der Merwe, according to the naming pattern. I searched on NAAIRS for an estate or other file for Dina Magrietha van der Merwe. There was no estate file for such a person but there were two other files with documents that revealed a tragic story:



Two letters from the Cape and Free State archives (Source 1)

The first was a letter dated 9 September 1909 from the Assistant Colonial Secretary of the Transvaal to the Colonial Secretary, Orange River Colony. It was a query from the Superintendent of the Pretoria Leprosy Institute ("Pretoria Leper Asylum") that read as follows:

"A White leper named Dina van der Merwe in the Pretoria Asylum wishes to know whether her parents named J. M. Els and Katrina Elizabeth Els, nee Uys, are living in Devilliersdorp, District Vrede, O.R.C. She has heard that they are residing on ground belonging to Mathewis Pieters in the above-mentioned place; and I have the honour to ask whether you will be good enough to cause enquiries to be made in this connection and furnish me with the result" (TAB CS 920 REF. 18232 LEPER, DINA VAN DER MERWE. 1909 – 1914).

On 28 September 1909 the Under Colonial Secretary of the Orange River Colony replied as follows:

"With reference to your letter No. 1/16232 of the 9th instant, I have the honour to state that the parents of the white leper Dina van der Merwe are living, and reside at present in the town of Villiers, Frankfort District, Orange River Colony." (VAB CO VOL. NO. 528 REF. 276/21):

This Dina van der Merwe was clearly my grandmother's daughter, because my grandparents were mentioned by name as her parents in the query of the Assistant Colonial Secretary of the Transvaal. She was thus admitted to the "Pretoria Leper Asylum" and my grandparents seemingly had no contact with her, otherwise she would not have inquired about her parents' whereabouts.

My grandfather, Johannes Marthinus Els, died before I was born, so I never knew him, but my grandmother lived with us for a long time on the farm where I grew up in the Vrede district in the Free State. She also died there and was buried in the town when I was 13 years old. I knew her well and talked with her a lot, but she never spoke of her first husband or her eldest daughter, Dina.

According to information available on the British Concentration Camps Database (BCCD) website (Source 2), it appears that during the Anglo Boer War (ABW), while my grandfather was on commando, my grandmother with her three eldest sons, my father and his two eldest brothers and the daughter, "Diena Magaretha van der Merwe" were in the Middelburg (Transvaal) Concentration Camp for 5 months before they were transferred to the Merebank Concentration Camp, south of Durban. (Note: my grandmother's two youngest children, Barend Christiaan and Catharina Elizabeth, were born after the war and were therefore not yet part of the family at that time).

My grandmother was recorded as "Mrs. Johannes Marthinus Els", together with my father, Nicolaas Jacobus, his two brothers, Johannes Gerhardus and Johannes Marthinus and his step-sister "Diena Magaretha van der Merwe". My grandmother was incorrectly referred to as "the mother-adopted" of Dina. My grandfather was her stepfather but she was indeed my grandmother's own child. That's why she was named after my grandmother's mother, Dina Magrietha Pieterse.

My grandmother's age was given as 23. This is incorrect because she was 33. I contacted the webmaster of the BCCD website, Elizabeth van Heynigen, of the Department of Historical Studies, University of Cape Town and provided her with the necessary information and evidence, which she updated. It now reads like this:

My father was five years old when they were taken to the Middelburg concentration camp. Dina was 14, so she was nine years older than my father. As would appear later, she was admitted to the Pretoria Leprosy Institute when she was 20 years old. My father was then 11 years old. So, he had to be able to remember her; one does not forget such an elder sister with whom one lived for 11 years. Yet, like my

grandmother, he never said a word about it or about the step-sister, Dina. She was rejected, concealed and forgotten; a discarded child.

BRITISH CONCENTRATION CAMPS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR 1900-1902		BCCD					
Home	Database	Camps	Contact	Links	FAQ	Reading List	Login
Personal Details							
Name:	Mrs Johannes Marthinus Els						
Other Names:	Catharina Elizabeth						
Maiden name:	Uys						
Date of birth:	1868o131						
Place of birth:	Wakkerstroom						
Born in camp?	No						
Age died:							
Died in camp?	No						
Gender:	female						
Race:	white						
Marital status:	married						
Nationality:	Transvaal						
Registration as head of family:	Yes						
Unique ID:	81338						
Camp History							
Name:	Middelburg RC						
Age arrival:	23						
Age arrival:	in fact she was 33						
Date arrival:	02/05/1901						
Date departure:	14/10/1901						
Destination:	Merebank, Natal						
Tent number:	II 422						
Farm History							
Name:	Morgenzon						
District:	Bethal						
Status of Husband							
Type:	On commando						
Notes:	Johannes Marthinus Els						
Relationships							
Mrs Johannes Marthinus Els (Catharina Elizabeth)							
is the mother of Master Nicolas Jacobus Els							
is the mother of Master Johannes Gerhardus Els							
is the mother of Master Johannes Marthinus Els							
is the mother of Miss Diena Magaretha van der Merwe (Dina Margaretha)							

Excerpt from the BCCD website (Source 2)

According to the BCCD website, the Middelburg Concentration Camp was the largest camp in the Transvaal system, which at one stage housed more than 7 000 inhabitants and was "very badly run". The "Ladies' Committee" that visited the camp said it was considered one of the most unsatisfactory camps they had visited. An intake of more than 3 000 people in May 1901 (including my grandmother and her children) brought in desperately impoverished and debilitated people who hastened the spread of disease in the camp. The First Superintendent of the camp said the new arrivals were in poor condition. He probably did not exaggerate, because Middelburg was known as a district inhabited by impoverished "tenant-farmers" (as were my grandparents). They lived with other farmers and worked for part of the harvest and for the right to keep a few heads of livestock.

Some tried to make a living on the "Mapoch grounds", small pieces of land made available to the poor by the Republican government. Many were from the weakest class of farmers, coming from the poorest and most fever-stricken parts of the Transvaal. Among their countrymen, they were known as "Mapochers".

The new arrivals were often so impoverished that some families had only one blanket. Hundreds of children went without shoes and some girls had only one piece of clothing. In addition, there were many who were ill with malaria. The cold midwinter, lack of clothes and blankets and the failure of the camp authorities to keep the children in tents for a full thirteen days, as was the rule, all contributed to a high number of deaths. While measles broke out among the children, adults were overwhelmed by flu and children recovering from the measles also got the flu afterwards. During September and October 1901 the number of people in the Middelburg camp was gradually reduced. That's when my grandmother and her kin were also moved to Merebank. The Middelburg camp itself was reduced in size and relocated to a new site on the banks of the Olifants River.

The Merebank Camp was established in September 1901, mainly to reduce the numbers in the Transvaal camps and to reduce the high number of deaths that resulted from the camp system. With about 9 000 inhabitants, it was the largest camp in the system. It was located on the subtropical Natal coast, just south of Durban, in a climate very different from the dry Highveld air to which the Boers were accustomed. The humidity, strong winds and summer rain all contributed to discomfort, although the cool sea breeze probably at least helped to somewhat lower the temperature in the summer.

The camp was built on low-lying, swampy ground with sand blowing all over and floors and bedding that were constantly wet. Circumstances were so bad that the Ladies' Committee, after visiting the camp, recommended the Merebank camp be relocated. Nevertheless, the camp remained where it was (Source 2).

The peace treaty, the "Peace of Vereeniging", was signed on 31 May 1902 in Pretoria. My grandmother and her children probably stayed in the Merebank camp until the end of the war.

Shortly after the end of the war, Dina Margaretha van der Merwe contracted leprosy. The appalling and unhygienic conditions in both the Witbank Camp and the Merebank Camp probably contributed to this.

Leprosy

There was a huge stigma attached to leprosy. It was socially unacceptable and something that would rather be hidden and concealed when it occurred in a family. The fact that the Bible prescribed that lepers should be avoided and banished certainly contributed to the stigma:

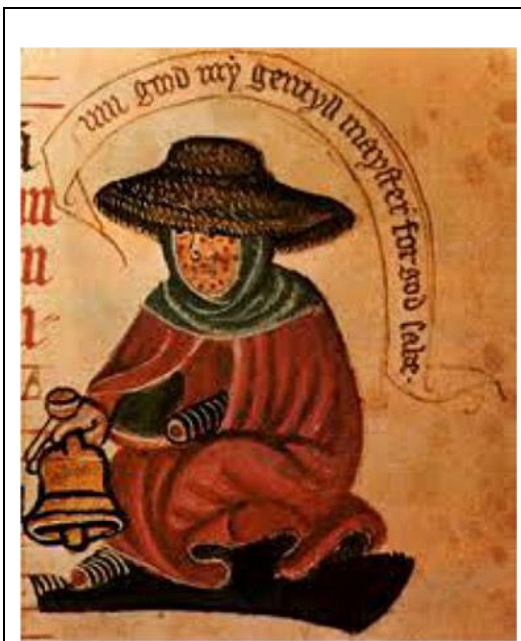
"Anyone with such a defiling disease must wear torn clothes, let their hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of their face and cry out, 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as they have the disease they remain unclean. They must live alone; they must live outside the camp" (Leviticus 13: 45-46).

Leprosy is mentioned more than 40 times in the Bible. Why there is so much talk about leprosy in the Bible is because it was believed that God brought the curse of leprosy upon mankind as punishment for their sins. Leprosy was seen as an example of the crippling influence of sin in a person's life. Lepers were considered both physically and spiritually unclean. They were so despised and abhorred that they were not allowed to live in the community with their own people (Numbers 5:2) (Source 3):

"The word 'Leper' is a metaphor, a symbol of stigma. For many centuries, leprosy was considered a curse of God, often associated with sin. It did not kill, but neither did it seem to end. Instead it lingered for years causing the tissues to degenerate and deforming the body". (Source 4).

At San Lazzaro d 'Arce near Assisi in France, where there were six "Lazar houses" (so named after the biblical Lazarus, who in Jesus's parable was covered with sores (Luke 16: 19-31), lepers were formally given access by a priest. The leper had to stand in the cemetery while the priest declared him dead to the world and added that his suffering in life would lead him to the kingdom of heaven. Because he was "dead", his family was released of the obligation to look after him.

When cemetery dust was sprinkled on the leper's head, the priest would remind him of the rules that applied to lepers: They could not leave the house unless they wore a clear grey cloak and made a noise with a bell or a wooden clapper ("clapper" or "ratchet") to warn other people.



Leper with his bell



Leper with his clapper

They were not allowed to visit fairs, markets, mills and farms or to enter Assisi. They could only beg for food if they wore gloves and used a bowl to receive the alms. They were forbidden to drink directly from fountains, rivers and wells; they could only drink from their own jars. When they talked to healthy people, they had to stand down wind from them (Sources 5 and 6).

The seclusion of lepers continued worldwide until the late twentieth century. In South Africa, the removal of lepers from the community and their isolation was compulsory by law until 1977. They were indeed not hospitalised but detained. The lepers in the institutions were referred to as "inmates" (detainees or prisoners). Just like political prisoners, the lepers were assigned numbers.

There were institutions for lepers on Robben Island, in Bloemfontein and in Pretoria. The "Pretoria Leper Asylum" or "Pretoria Leper Institution" was the Westfort Leper Institution or Hospital (sometimes also referred to as a "Leprosy Asylum"), located north of Lotus Gardens, about eleven kilometers west of Pretoria city center. It opened in 1898.

When the leper institute on Robben Island was closed in 1931, Westfort became the only multiracial facility for the detention of lepers in South Africa.

In an article about the institute on Robben Island entitled "Island of Tears", Faan Pistor writes:

"Anyone who had been diagnosed with any form or degree of leprosy had to be removed to the island. Unfortunately people suffering from obvious skin diseases were often regarded as leprous. Therefore many with skin disorders were hidden by their families for fear of the hell on the island.

Family members of people diagnosed with "leprosy" were not easily given jobs. Fear-stricken people diagnosed with "leprosy" often fled before warrants against them could be executed."

The International Historical Society Robben Island, founded in 2009 by descendants of former patients and staff of the island and other interested parties and stakeholders, states the following:

"At the time, however, Robben Island was not just a colony for 'lepers'. The cruel reality is that the island has become a convenient dumping ground for the former colonial government at the southern tip of Africa for all those who it considered undesirable.

Therefore, also the mentally handicapped, deaf people, epilepsy sufferers, severely debilitated elderly, people with Down syndrome, people who had concussion, bipolar disorder, Alzheimer's disease or a stroke or were severely traumatized or autistic, as well as sufferers of other conditions that were declared "mental illness" by the colonial authority, were snatched away from their loved ones and from society and, against

their will, summarily unloaded on Robben Island where they were oppressed, humiliated and forgotten and eventually buried in unmarked graves.” (Source 7).

About the Leper Institute at Westfort it is written:

“The fence, guard towers and prison comparisons were symbolic of more than just the treatment of patients at Westfort. They highlight one of the themes that has run through the history of leprosy treatment and control - isolation and segregation. The physical construction of institutions such as Westfort seems to reinforce this. Westfort was built on the outskirts of town and was surrounded by a 12-foot barbed-wire fence.”

The lepers were isolated, the place was strictly guarded and visits by family were limited:

“Those living with leprosy in South Africa were strictly segregated from the outside world. They lived, ate, worked and very often died and were buried within the confines of the institution.”

“Two guards were posted at the entrance and visits from family members were restricted to once every two weeks, with patients forced to sit behind a glass screen in a prison-like atmosphere when they received visitors.” (Source 8).

Just like on Robben Island, psychiatric patients were also held in Westfort. The man who assassinated South African Prime Minister, Dr. H. F. Verwoerd, in Parliament in 1966, Dimitri Tsafendas, who was diagnosed as schizophrenic, was at one stage also a patient in Westfort.



Illustration 1: Housing complex at Fort West in Pretoria West (Author, 2012).

Dilapidated buildings on the Westfort site (source 9).

The place is known today as Westfort, named after one of Pretoria's old forts, namely Fort Daspoortrand, also known as Fort West, which was erected on the site.

Following the worldwide advancement in the treatment of the centuries-old repulsive disease, the facility was closed in 1997. The hospital and associated buildings on the site eventually became very dilapidated, occupied by squatters (many of whom are White). (Source 10).

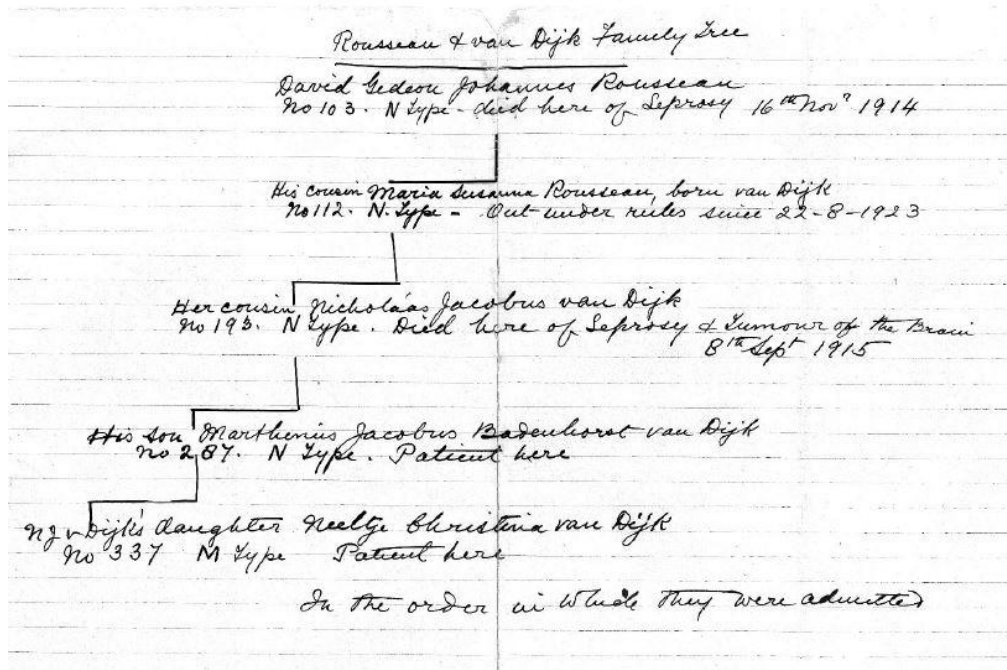
The Tshwane Municipality now intends to develop a mixed housing project there to house these residents and residents of other informal settlements (Source 11).

Today we know that leprosy is a bacterial infection (caused by the microbe *Mycobacterium leprae*) that can be effectively cured with antibiotics. The organisms that cause the disease die with today's treatment within a few days after the first administration of medication.

It is also not as highly contagious as previously believed. It is transmitted only through prolonged and intimate contact. It is no longer necessary, as in earlier years, to isolate a leper. As a result, there are no longer leprosy institutions.

Dina and other Family Members at the Pretoria Leprosy Institute

With the help of librarian, Lynne du Toit, I obtained documents from the library of the Northern Transvaal Branch of the Genealogical Society of South Africa (GSSA) that deals with the family trees of several patients at the Pretoria Leprosy Institute.



Miss Whiteman's "Rousseau and van Dijk Family Tree"

These are reports and hand-drawn family trees of these patients, compiled in 1927 by a then matron of the Institute's hospital, Miss. A. M. Whiteman (Source 12). Below is an example of one of Miss Whiteman's hand-drawn family trees, namely her "Rousseau and van Dijk Family Tree". There are another 18 such family trees she has drawn for the other families that I mention towards the end of this.

The purpose of Miss Whiteman's inquiry was to try to determine whether leprosy was hereditary. This is not the case; as already mentioned, leprosy is an infection. It is transmitted through physical contact between people, consequently it did occur and spread in families as family members infected each other, but it is not genetically transmitted.

The patients in the Institute were treated with all sorts of drugs that apparently did not contribute to healing and likely did more harm than good: Camphor, Resorcin, Chaulmoogra Oil, Collobisses Chaulmoogra injections, Gynocardic acid pills, Nastin injections, Sodium hydnocarpate-injections, etc.

From the library documents it appeared that Dina Margaretha van der Merwe was admitted to the Pretoria Leprosy Institute on 13 September 1907. She was Patient no. 94. She was born on 22 May 1887 in Wakkerstroom and was therefore just over 20 years old when she was admitted. In the report on her, Miss Whiteman writes:

"She became a leper in 1904 and was recorded ill 3 years before admission" and further: "she was not a bad case on arrival, nor for some years after; but became worse in 1914, and was very bad from then until her death on 25,7,15."

Her one uncle, her father's elder brother, Jacobus Johannes Rudolph van der Merwe (c.1857 - 16.2.1914) was also a patient in the institution. He was Patient no 55, admitted on 13 August 1903. Two of his children, Aletta Elizabeth van der Merwe (12.1893 - 16.11.1913) and Johannes Francois van der Merwe (born 8.1896) (thus a niece and cousin of Dina) were also patients there. The account of Johannes is a revelation in itself:

"He was as patient no. 229 in the Pretoria Leper Institution. He was admitted the first time on 1 May 1918, the second time on 4 May 1920 from Robben Island. He committed serious crime in Pretoria in 1913 and was sent to work as a convict on the Breakwater at Cape Town where he served 2 years and five months. Then he was sent to work for 7 months as a convict on a farm in Caledon District. There he developed leprosy and was sent to Robin Island on 29 November 1916. He was transferred from Robben Island at his own request arriving at the Pretoria Leper Institution on 1 May 1918. He committed a crime there too and was returned to Robin Island again on 2 October 1918. Then he was transferred back to the Pretoria Leper Institution at his request on 4 May 1920. His disease steadily progressed until it was a severe case."

His sister, Aletta Elizabeth van der Merwe, was married in 1911 to Marcus Wynand Willers who was also admitted on October 5, 1920 as Patient No. 262. Their one daughter, Hendrina Andriana Willers, was also leprosy. Marcus Wynand Willers's first wife, Aletta Elizabeth Strydom, was herself a leper.

My grandmother's father, my great-grandfather, Johannes Gerhardus Uys (6.11.1837 - 27.6.1921) (Jan Maans) was also a patient in Westfort. He was admitted to the Pretoria Leprosy Institute on 7 October 1914 at the age of 76 years and 11 months as Patient no 186, from Knellpoort, district Wakkerstroom (now Amersfoort). He died in the institution on 27 June 1921 and was buried in one of the Westfort cemeteries on the site.



One of the cemeteries at Westfort (Source 9)



The tombstone of Johannes Gerhardus Uys (6.11.1837-27.6.1921) at Westfort.

Above is a photo of one of the three cemeteries at Westfort, as well as a photo of my great-grandfather's simple hand-painted tombstone in one of the cemeteries:

My grandmother's younger sister, Susanna Catharina Uys (1.11.1869 - 27.12.1961) was married to George Diederik Bezuidenhout (5.12.1866 - 31.8.1948). Two of their children, George Diederik Bezuidenhout (born 1894) and Magdalena Maria Bezuidenhout (1.1904 - 28.4.1918) were also patients of the Institute. Magdalena was Patient No. 153. About her, among other things, the following was recorded:

"Her cousin, Dina van der Merwe, was her nurse from infancy until she (Dina) was sent to the Asylum. She (Magdalena) became ill in Dec. 1911 and was admitted on 8 September 1912 from Piet Zijn Drift, district Wakkerstroom. She was recorded as "in good condition on arrival; was under treatment for a good while and improved". She lived with Dina van der Merwe "who was then a very severe case. In spite of repeated requests by Dr TS Davies that this child should be put to live with a mild case, the then Superintendent would not have her taken away. She became a very bad modular case like her cousin."

Other Families

The leper patients and their leper relatives about whom Miss Whiteman reports and whose family trees she has compiled and discussed are the following (Source 12):

Dirk Pieter Badenhorst (4.12.1855-7.6.1924), Jacobus Johannes Boshoff (born 1839), Catharina Johanna Brits (born Roslee) (1877-13.2.1923), Christoffel Johannes Els (30.8.1869-16.1.1913), Carel Jacobus Erasmus (3.9.1890-20.6.1917), Hendrik Christoffel Grobler (1865-20.3.1916), Louis Christiaan Kok (1871-19.2.1906), Louwies Cornelius Jacobus van den Berg (1873-11.11.1914), Jacobus Christiaan le Grange (1871-19.5.1925), Gert Jacobus Lewis (-4.6.1911), Sybella Elizabeth Nel (born Roets) (8.1848-1.10.1919), Jan Hendrik Retief (c.1830-1888), David Gideon Johannes Rousseau (-16.11.1914), Nicolaas Jacobus van Dijk (-18.9.1915), Pieter Daniel Roux (12.1847-7.7.1914), Cornelius Daniel Snyman (1856-20.6.1905), Marthinus Agidius Theunissen (2.4.1851-6.1. 1914), Louis Jacobus Theunissen (1861-23.7.1927), Jacobus Johannes van der Merwe (1857-16.2.1914), Jacomina Elizabeth Pretorius (born van Niekerk) (20.1.1853-10.11.1917), Johanna Helena Christina van Tonder (1896-12.3.1926), Jan Hendrik Venter (c.1793-) and Jan Adolph von Brandis (14.12.1864-29.4.1925).

The reports contained interesting and sometimes disturbing information. About Petrus Johannes Boshoff (born 1883) for example, Miss Whiteman writes:

"He was patient no. 35 at the Pretoria Leper Institution, admitted 6 June 1899 from Rietfontein West. He became a leper in 1889. He escaped on 25 August 1909, taking with him a female leper named Ida Retief, no 39 whom he allegedly married. They lived in various places in the Transvaal and Rhodesia until their money was exhausted. Then they returned, asking for re-admission on 2 October 1912. He was discharged on 11 November 1915."

Ida was dismissed in July 1917, subject to rules she had to abide by. They lived on a farm in the Waterberg and had two children. The first died while living in Rhodesia. Also from Patient no. 312, Louis Jacobus Theunissen (28.12.1903-) is written:

"Says he began to lose feeling in hands, arms and legs 2 years before admission. Face became blotchy 8 months before admission. He was in good physical condition on arrival; was pronouncedly a nodular case. He escaped Aug. 23rd 1926; was re-captured in Sept. 1926 and sent at once to Robben Island, where he still is."

About Willem Petrus Louw (10.4.1837-25.1.1913) and his wife, Helena Juanna Jakoba Greeff and their children, Gert Jacobus, Susanna, Maria Helena, Jacobus and Theunis, Miss Whiteman writes:

"All these people were Faith Healers and were in an appalling condition of decayed and offensive flesh; utterly refused all treatment and were such an offense to their neighbours that Dr was requested to move them; for, said the other patients,"they were being made ill by the smell of them. They were accordingly removed with other Faith Healers to a separate building. They all died there except Maria who gave in when her brother and sister had died and allowed herself to be attended to".

As was the case with Dina van der Merwe, the family of other lepers often did not maintain much contact with them. Reports such as the following about Johanna Petronella van Aswegen (formerly married van Rensburg) (1839-10.12.1923), wife of Jan van Aswegen, are common:

"Arrived here 24.9.1901, accompanied by her daughter. Mrs van Aswegen was then a widow. She had been a leper ten years before admission-a severe A type case. She died here 10.12.1923, having been an inmate 22 years 3 months.

Her daughter Johanna was not a leper, and was very soon sent away, and never came to see her mother afterwards. Mrs. Van Aswegen's eldest daughter, a Mrs Boshoff, came very infrequently, and for a number of years not at all."

Patients were sometimes discharged subject to rules they had to follow. What the rules were, is not known. People who were discharged were not always welcome back in the community. About Patient no. 111, Willem Adriaan Boshoff, son of Nicholas Johannes Boshoff (1870-23.3.1919), Miss Whiteman writes:

"He was sent out under Rules 25th June 1926, having improved considerably. On the 1st June 1927 he made a voluntary return. He told some of the patients that people did not want him at his mother's place and that it is not comfortable for him to live outside."

The fact that people died of leprosy or died in the Leper Institute has also often been disguised. About the same Mrs. Van Aswegen above, Miss Whiteman writes:

"She stoutly asserted that her stepbrother, the aforesaid Jacobus Johannes Boshoff, (son of her mother and Jacobus Johannes Boshoff the elder), had died of leprosy, and not of dropsy as his sons asserted. She said they wished to hide the fact. "

I consulted as many existing genealogies as possible, as well as websites, to see if there were any details about the leper patients mentioned above and their family members that Miss Whiteman discusses in her reports. I found the following:

- (1) The people are not mentioned in the registers;
- (2) If they are mentioned, the place of death is not mentioned if it was in the Institute, or an incorrect place, such as his normal place of residence, is indicated. My great-grandfather, Johannes Gerhardus Uys, mentioned above, is an example. According to certain Uys sources he died on Paardenfontein (between Val and Kinross) and according to others on his farm Knelpoort, Wakkerstroom, but this is not true. This was just an attempt to hide the truth;
- (3) If the cause of death is stated, it is often false. According to Miss Whiteman, Sybella Elizabeth Nel was dismissed and died at her home "*apparently in a leprotic attack*" but this is disguised because, according to the Geni website, she died on 1.10.1919 at her home in Germiston of "Spanish Flu".

Carel Jacobus Erasmus (3.9.1890-20.6.1917) died in the Institute but was buried in the family cemetery at his parents' house, the well-known Erasmus Castle in Pretoria. Two of his sisters, Maria Jacoba Katrina and Magdalena Jemima, were also patients of the Institute. One finds nothing about it in existing Erasmus genealogical registers.

Thersia Rossouw does write about it in her dissertation (source 6). She speaks of "*horror stories of leper daughters locked in the tower*" but makes it clear that, according to the Erasmus family, this is untrue. She also says: "*Many Pretorians will also tell in great detail about the white gloves that the poor girls had to wear*" and:

"It was apparently only two daughters of Jochemus Erasmus (who had the Erasmus Castle built in 1903) who had a mild form of leprosy." However, the form was "not contagious and the distinguished family led a normal life."

"It could also have been a fungal disease. These types of skin diseases are often considered leprosy. This view has merit, because according to the Bible's glossary, the term 'leprosy' was commonly used for a variety of skin diseases, some of which were considered incurable."

There are various skin diseases that could possibly be regarded as leprosy in the early twentieth century, such as severe forms of eczema, skin diseases such as Psoriasis and hereditary diseases such as Porphyria and Oudtshoorn Disease that are very common among Afrikaners.

Thersia Rossouw consulted several Erasmus family members, including Mr. J.J.P.E. Pienaar, grandson of Mr. Jochemus Erasmus, who had built the Erasmus Castle. About this she writes:

"Mr. Pienaar has, however, doubts as to whether the daughters did have leprosy. They might have been misdiagnosed. According to Pienaar, the Erasmus daughters generally had bad skins (eczema), which in those days was possibly considered leprosy."

Conclusion

Lepers have been detested and avoided for many centuries because they are considered physically and mentally unclean. They were removed from the normal community and isolated in leper houses or leper institutes/asylums where they were nothing but prisoners. The leper houses were horrible places where the lepers were treated badly. They were often detained with psychiatric ("mentally ill") patients and criminals; so too in Robben Island and Westfort.

The lepers were treated in the Institutes with all sorts of concoctions that did not facilitate healing at all and probably contributed to their illness and death.

Only in the early 19th century was it discovered that leprosy was merely a bacterial infection that could be treated and cured with antibiotics, and the stigma attached to leprosy disappeared.

Records and reports are available on lepers kept at the Westfort Leprosy Institute in Pretoria. This information is stored in the library of the Northern Transvaal branch of the GSSA.

I checked the details of my grandmother's eldest daughter, who was a patient in the Institute and who died and was buried there. I came to the conclusion that she had been abandoned and forgotten in the Institute by my grandparents; a discarded child.

Lepers who were admitted to Westfort were concealed and omitted from records or the fact that they had died and were buried in the Institute and that they died of leprosy was concealed.

Further investigation by interested parties and researchers is necessary to investigate the other families and persons mentioned above, of whom reports and pedigrees from the Institute's records are in my possession. I invite interested parties to contact me, get the information from me and collaborate.

CHARLIE ELS
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