

Boekbesprekings/Book Reviews

Donald P. Mc Cracken and Patricia A. Mc Cracken: *Natal: the garden colony: victorian Natal and the royal botanic gardens, Kew.*

This lovely book, produced by the historian Professor Donal Mc Cracken and his journalist wife, Patricia, fills a very important gap in the historiography of KwaZulu/Natal. This is the first scientific volume presenting the botany of Natal in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In particular, it specifically looks at the relationship Natal's Botanists nurtured with Kew Gardens in England and the generous help they received from Kew and therefore the British Empire. The key role of Kew Gardens throughout the British Empire is presented in an informative manner. Also, one gains real insight into the history of Kew Gardens itself. For anyone who loves Kwa Zulu/Natal and enjoys its rich and beautiful flora, this delightful volume is a "must" for their shelves.

The narrative reads easily and is very enjoyable, probably also due to the fact that the text is not too lengthy. What is really helpful is the generous number of graphical botanical paintings, especially those of Marianne North. There are also a number of valuable and fascinating historical photographs of the main protagonists.

The text is tastefully presented and is supported by an excellent select bibliography, full index and other helpful aids. The only detracting feature of the particular book I received, is that the binding is not secure.

What a difference Kew made to Natal. The many wardian cases sent from Kew contained inter alia, breadfruit, Arabian coffee, guava, ginger, litchi, mango, paw-paw, Assam tea, cayenne, queen pineapple and uba sugar cane.

Among the flowers that arrived were Chrysanthemums, Roses, Dahlias, Camellias, Geraniums, Rhododendrons, Magnolias, Azaleas, Cacti, Fuschia and Hibiscus.

Some of the trees introduced were blue gums, black wattle, figs, cedar, cypresses and jacarandas. The list of despatches on pages 83/4 makes for intriguing reading as one identifies not only the beautiful flowers but also the cash crops that had such a beneficial economic effect on the garden province. During the 19th century many dedicated botanists inculcated a love for flora in Kwa Zulu/Natal. In 1874 it was recorded that: "I have known people take trees in open boxes 400-500 miles in ox wagons and no one would do that except for the love of them". (p. 54). The effect of this tree planting was euphorically noted by the same author who noted: "... the brown windblown sunburnt hell of fifteen years ago and the green cool damp sweet shade of the present" (p. 55).

Natal had also provided Kew with a reciprocal service and botanically played a remarkable leading role within the British Empire. An interesting effect on Kew is illustrated by this quotation found on p. 64 "... the foreman of the arboretum, William Dallimore, was nicknamed De Wet by the apprentices because they never knew when he was going to sneak up on them."

The authors conclude that "the Natal-Kew link had not only served to present to the British public a positive aspect of a troublesome colony, but it had also inspired Natalians to take a pride in their garden colony."

In conclusion, I believe that this volume clearly illustrates the pivotal role that Donal Mc Cracken enjoys as Natal's most eminent botanical historian. The total impact of this enthralling volume is that it is indeed a labour of love.

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Mariam Basner: *Am I an African? The Political Memoirs of H.M. Basner.* Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg, 1993. ISBN 1868-142108. prys: R68.40

Hierdie is 'n verhelderende boek oor die aard van politieke aktiwiteit buite die Blanke Suid-Afrikaanse parlementêre politiek tussen 1930 en 1947. Die skrywer, Miriam Basner, was 'n sosiale antropoloog, wat as sekretaresse vir H.M. Basner opgetree het terwyl hy senator was tussen 1943 en 1947. Die hele werk is egter nie deur Miriam Basner self geskryf nie. H.M. Basner het self 'n autobiografie begin skryf voordat hy in 1977 oorlede is. Navorsers van die Universiteit van die Witwatersrand het ook in die 1970's Basner in Brittanje besoek en onderhoude met hom gevoer. Tom Lodge het uiteindelik in 1992 die manuskrip finaal afgerond vir publikasie.

Dit is die fasinerende lewensverhaal van Hermann Meyer Basner (Hermann is verander na Hyman kort na die Eerste Wêreldoorlog uit vrees vir reaksie by die skool teen sy "Duitse" naam). Basner is in 1905 in Latvië gebore en het in 1912 na Suid-Afrika geïmmigreer saam met sy ouers. Sy hele lewe is gekenmerk deur sy besorgdheid oor die lot van Swartmense in Suid-Afrika. Basner was 'n kommunisties geïntereerde anti-kapitalis wat homself 'n Marxis genoem het. Hy het probeer om die Swartmense wat deur die opkomende kapitalistiese transformasie van die platteland onderdruk is, se belange te verdedig. Basner het sy fokus gerig op die mobilisasie van Swartmense tot politieke aktiwiteit, veral politieke aktiwiteit buite die amptelik geïnstitusionele Swart politiek om. Hierdie boek gee juis aandag aan hoe Basner Swartmense op die platteland gemobiliseer het sodat hulle uiteindelik hulle stem laat hoor het. Basner se optrede in die landelike gebiede word beskou as die grondslag van sistematiese organisasie ook in die stedelike gebiede onder verarmde Swartes. Basner het homself bekwaam as prokureur, maar het in sy poging om Swartmense te help en hulle regte te verdedig, arm gesterf. Hy is ook van die prokureursrol geskraap, omdat hy nie volledige opgawes van sy optredes vir kliënte (hoofsaaklik Swartmense) kon verskaf nie.

Hierdie boek beskryf haarfyn hoedat Basner die paternalisme van die liberalisme soos vergestalt in die Joint Council Movement, die Institute of Race Relations en persone soos John David Rheinnallt Jones, verafsku het. Basner het Swartmense gewaarsku teen valse profete en die liberale ideologie het vir hom beleidsrigtings van segregasie onderskryf en nie dit fundamenteel teengestaan nie. Hierdie boek skets Basner se lewenslange stryd teen armoede en verontregting. Dit vertel van sy lewe in ou Johannesburg as laerskool leerling, sy hoërskooldae op Jeppe Hoërskool en sy mislukte studie in die VSA (UCLA Law School). Sy vader se finansiële verknorsing in Suid-Afrika het hom uiteindelik verplig om terug te keer daarheen. Terug in Johannesburg het hy as leerklerk by 'n prokureursfirma aangesluit en daar in aanraking gekom met Swartmense wat na sy mening, die slagoffers van apartheid was. Dit was in die kriminele howe dat Basner sy