



K. SCHOEMAN (ed.). *The early days of the Orange Free State: Charles Warden; W.D. Savage; Martha Jane Kirk*. Human & Rousseau: Cape Town and Pretoria, 1989. 111 pp. R29,95 (exclusive). Illus.

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This collection of reminiscences from the pioneering days in the history of the Orange Free State is the tenth publication in the series *Vrijstatia* under the auspices of the prolific Karel Schoeman. In publishing memoirs, diaries, recollections and sketches of this nature from the history of the republican days, Schoeman has certainly rendered the history of the Orange

Free State an invaluable service. Not only has forgotten and mislaid documentation (e.g. the J.G. Fraser Basotho diary) been unearthed, but an exciting window has been opened into the life and experiences of ordinary people (e.g. Sophie Levisieur and Martha Kirk) during those distant days.

The early days of the Orange Free State comprises three recollections: those of Charles Frederick Warden, William Douglas Savage and Martha Jane Kirk. Warden's recollections cover the years 1846 to 1855. He was the son of Major H.D. Warden, British resident at Bloemfontein during the Orange River Sovereignty years. His reminiscences were first published in 1899 by the *Harrismith News* after a talk to the Harrismith Literary Society. A copy of this text is kept in the Africana section of the library of the University of the OFS. Warden's recollections were recorded about 44 years after the events he described took place. He was ten years old when he lived through the first events depicted in these memoirs. It is therefore obvious that the memoirs should be treated with caution, and all the more so since he admitted to having relied on secondary sources such as those by G.M. Theal.

The recollections of Savage, soldier, secretary, bookkeeper and town clerk of Bloemfontein (1884-1885), deal with the years between 1853 and 1858. His 'Reminiscences of early days' was first published in *De Express* (1885) and in this case almost 30 years have therefore passed before pen was put to paper. Savage's memory seems to have left him in the lurch at times (e.g. he identifies De la Rey and Quigley as the two men executed after the Boomplaats incident, while it was actually Thomas Dreyer and Quigley). His recollections should therefore also be treated circumspectly.

The final contribution is made by the memoirs of Kirk, wife of a trader and *smous*, who spent most of their days trading among Basotho and whites in Basutoland and the eastern Free State. Kirk's memoirs are the most comprehensive of the three and cover the years 1848 to 1884. They were recorded when she was over 80 years old and consequently contain, like those of the others, accounts of a dubious nature (compare, for example, the section on Brand and the diamond fields related on p. 85).

Although none of the memoirs is distinguished as being particularly noteworthy, they nevertheless contain some interesting anecdotes about everyday life during those times. It is evident that the publication is intended rather for general consumption than for the specialist. Sometimes notes illuminate important events, places and people, while in other instances, people and places mentioned in the text are not identified. The editor has also decided to edit the original text in an attempt to lure the general public into reading history without having to wade through 'dreary stuff.' But this has limited the scientific value of the publication since it is not always clear whether one is dealing with the edited or unedited versions.

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