

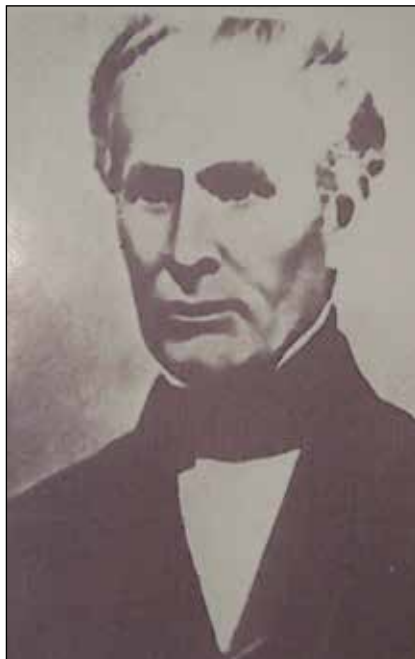
ONCE UPON A TIME IN EDENDALE

by Nosipho Gwala

Introduction

Edendale was founded in 1851 when Christian families of Griqua, Rolong, Sotho, Tlokwa, Hlubi and Swazi origin under the leadership of the missionary Reverend James Allison settled on a farm called Welverdiend. ‘The farm was purchased on a share basis between Allison and 90 members of the convert community when they seceded from the Wesleyan Church in 1850 ... Its name was changed from Welverdiend(d) to the more appropriate mission-inspired Edendale ... The primary goal of the mission was to create a Christian community imbued with “civilised” habits of industry.’¹

This farm was purchased from Afrikaner leader Andries Pretorius, who was awarded the farm for leading the Afrikaners to victory during the battle of Ncome (also known as Blood River). Hence the name Welverdiend, an Afrikaans word that means well-deserved.



Reverend James Allison



Edendale, 1930 (Source: Sheila Meintjes, ‘Edendale 1850–1906’)

At Edendale, the community shared a common connection of Christianity and members managed to build their own church and schools. Edendale was different from other areas in that the settlers had freehold ownership of the land. Over time, the community expanded their farming business and became major suppliers of maize and vegetables to the Pietermaritzburg market. What was notably different with the community of Edendale was their way of life in comparison to other black communities at the time. Allison and his wife, through Christianity, taught the men and women different belief systems and practices and so the community moved away from traditional customs and beliefs.

Polygamy, for example, was not a common practice in this community. 'Its inhabitants were known as *amakholwa* ("Christians" or "believers", sometimes also taken to mean "progressives") or *oNonhlevu* ("first converts", also sometimes taken to mean "chosen" or "difficult" depending on one's point of view)".²

In 1861 title deeds were handed over to the original landowners of Edendale – Jonathan Xaba, Daniel Msimang,

Johannes Kumalo and Dan Molife. Other prominent families in the area were Kambule, Kunene, Hlubi, Mavuso and Dube.³ Over a number of years, the community of Edendale struggled under oppressive native laws and continuously fought for recognition. However, the colonial government refused to give the community exemption due to their trade and farming status. This led to a shortfall in the farming and supply business and people had to seek other ways of making profit, such as letting their property and land to Indian families and traders. Over time, this led to Edendale becoming a multiracial community. However, in later years the implementation of the Group Areas Act saw members of Edendale forcibly removed according to their racial classification.

Information follows on some historical buildings that still exist in Edendale as well as stories of families that used to reside in the area.

Edendale tannery

KwaKgogo, meaning foul odour, was one of the unofficial names given to the tannery by local people due to the extremely bad smell that emanated from the place.



Edendale tannery (tannery photographs courtesy Burkhard Schlosser)



Edendale tannery

The founder of the tannery was Alfred Georg Hoch, the eldest son of German born Johann Gottfried Hoch of Sutherlands tannery at Plessislaer.

Alfred was born in Pietermaritzburg on 9 March 1900 and educated at Hermannsburg as well as Maritzburg College. He acquired an all-round knowledge of the business by working in his father's tannery, after which he decided to make tanning his career. In 1921, he attended the tanning school

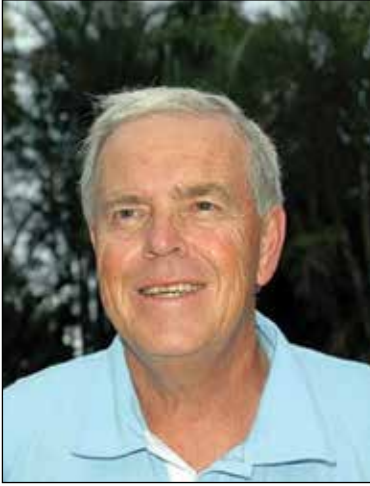
at Freiberg in Saxony as well as a course in leather dyeing at Bayer's in Leverkusen, both in Germany. He gained valuable experience in the four years he spent in Europe where he worked in various factories. On his return to South Africa he decided to launch his own tannery. In July 1930 he was granted a licence for the Edendale tannery and in July 1934 he was joined in his venture by his brother Johann Gottfried (Sonny) Hoch.



Alfred Georg Hoch



Johann Gottfried Hoch



Alfred Georg Hoch



Johann Sonny Gottfried Hoch

The business was a great success, attributed to persistence and hard work. The staff also did their share in building up the business. Due to ill-health, Alfred relinquished control of the tannery in 1978. His two nephews, Paul Hoch

and Burkhard Schlosser, had joined the business in 1961 and 1966 respectively and because of their training they were able to take over the management of the business. Alfred Georg Hoch died on 27 February 1983.



*Lower rear of the
tannery buildings*



*Finishing department
at front left*



The workshop



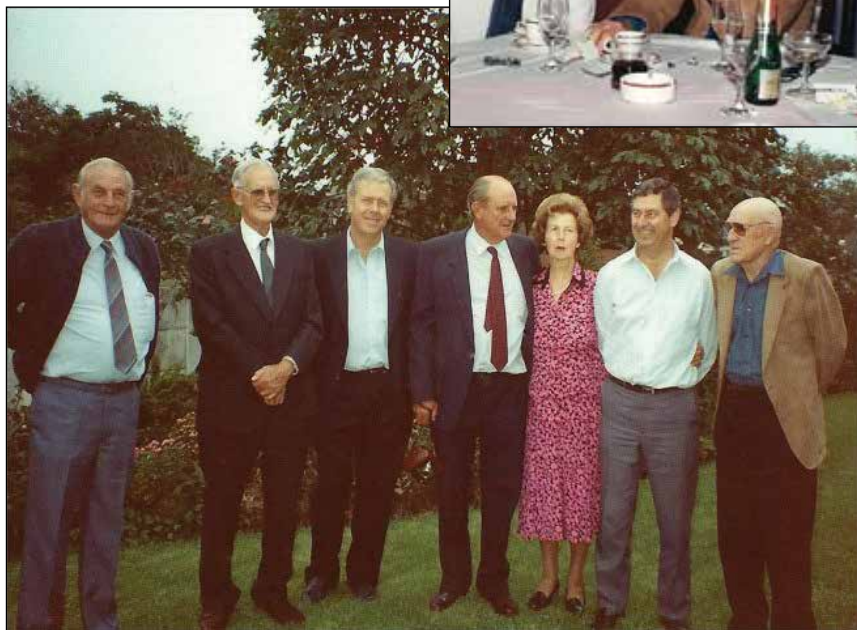
Fritz A. Kothe: general dealer

The remnants of red-brick buildings around the Edendale area are a true reflection of the history of the place. Many have been reused such as the Fritz A. Kothe general dealer buildings. According to Simon Allen, great-nephew of Fritz Kothe, he lived in Edendale with his German mother and father. His sister Corrie Brightman had two children, Sydney and Betty (Simon's mother). Kothe started his small business by saving his monthly pocket money and when he had just enough he, with a small loan from his mother, which his father never got wind of, would buy a few chickens. He sold the eggs and chickens and generated income. After some time, he approached his mother to make up a shortfall to purchase cattle, which his father also never heard about. That was the beginning of his business enterprises



Fritz Kothe

in Edendale and surrounding area. He is believed to have had thirteen stores in and around Edendale and Sweetwaters. He always drove a Mercedes Benz, and was fluent in the Zulu language and well-respected in the community. He had two daughters, Liz and Jeanette, and lived to the age of 92.



Fritz Kothe with friends

KwaKothi, as numerous people in Edendale would refer to Kothe's many stores, has remained a familiar name in the area, with some buildings still bearing his initials. A particular area where buildings are located is now a taxi stop referred to as KwaKothe. People in the area still remember Fritz Kothe: 'Wayemufishane, ethetha futhi esikhuluma IsiZulu njengendoda yomzulu' (He was short, strict and spoke *IsiZulu* like a Zulu man).⁴



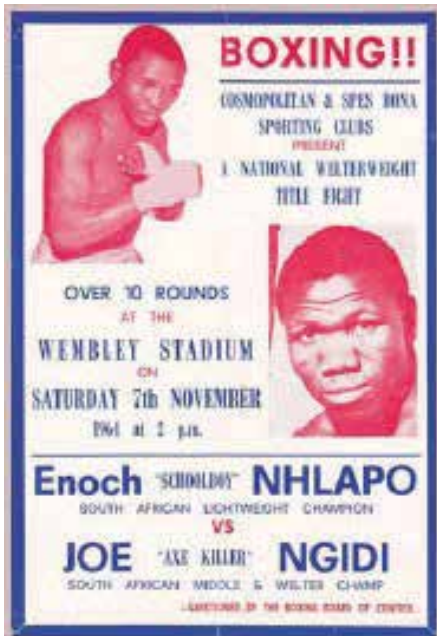
F.A. Kothe general dealer store in Smero area, Edendale



F.A. Kothe general dealer store in Smero area, Edendale

Joe (Axe Killer) Ngidi

Edendale has a number of heroes and heroines in different fields, forgotten and not celebrated such as Joe (Axe Killer) Ngidi. He was born on 19 April 1934 and was an excellent professional boxer with a successful career that lasted over eighteen years. He had a record of 96 fights under his belt and these were with prominent people in the boxing fraternity. He saved most of his earnings and built a double-storey house in Edendale from which he ran a trading store. The house is still standing and run as a trading store. He died at the age of 56 in March 1990. The taxi stop as well as the area around this prominent boxer's house has remained commonly known as KwaJoe.



Boxing match programme: Enoch Nhlapo vs Joe Ngidi

Boxing match programme: Joe Ngidi vs Joas Maoto

Garry's Café

Situated opposite Edendale Hospital, Garry's Café was (and still is) a very popular shop. It was the Maharaj family business, founded by Subalik Baldeo Maharaj commonly known as Garry. Maharaj was born on 2 September 1917 in Boston (Ncwadi) and his parents had come to South Africa from India as indentured labourers. In the 1940s he was employed at Sutherlands tannery in Plessislaer. In 1954, Maharaj was permitted to open the shop, which he called Garry's Café. At the time, his immediate as well as extended family were all living on the property and assisting in the booming business. Together with his wife, Bhagwandye Maharaj, they had ten children – five boys and five girls. Maharaj was a popular figure in the Edendale area as his shop served patrons from the hospital as well as the community at large. Although ownership has changed over the years, the place is still referred to as Garry's. According to Maharaj's youngest daughter, Nadira Moodley, growing up in Edendale was lovely as the community was very close and all the neighbours got along well. The people of Edendale recognised her father as a black man because he was so fluent in the Zulu language. She also clearly remembers Mr Dlamini who stayed with them and worked in the family garden.

During 1982, while Nadira was at college, forced removal was in progress and her father sold the business to the Ngcobo family. She recalls that the forced removal era affected her family immensely. Her father eventually went on to open a business in Church Street, Pietermaritzburg and it was called KwaMbuzi Supermarket.

An interesting aspect of this family's story is that Susheila (Kiki) Maharaj, who was married to Garry Maharaj's brother and who was also living in the house, stayed behind after the forced removal, when the store already had new owners. Her husband continued to manage the store; and Kiki lived there for over 52 years and had a close relationship with the people of Edendale.

Chetty's Motor Transport

Sanjeevi Chetty arrived with his wife as indentured labourers and eventually opened a laundry business in West Street, Pietermaritzburg. The business served a number of schools and departments and was relatively successful.



Gang Chetty

Their only son, Govindsamy, would regularly assist in the family business. According to Govindamy's grandson, Vijay Chetty, the family moved to Edendale around 1935. His grandfather was married to Amravathie and together with seven boys and seven girls, they all lived in a mud house in Edendale.

Vijay's father, Gang Chetty, used to work at Eddels Shoe factory and applied for a permit to operate buses transporting people around the Snathing area. The permit was approved in August 1958 and that is how Chetty's Motor Transport was founded. He started the business with just two buses and after he bought out all the other transport companies in the area, the business

eventually grew into a lucrative transport company with over 80 buses. All fourteen siblings, as well as the rest of the family, worked in the business and it eventually became a very popular bus service. Vijay recalls that they had a number of people from the area working for them; and how his father used to give numerous sponsorships towards sport tournaments and to schools.

The forced removal period was long and painful for the family. They had a lengthy legal battle after being notified

that they could no longer operate their buses in the area and their transport permit was cancelled by the apartheid government. The family ended up reluctantly moving to a house at Mountain Rise. The land on which their house was located is now Nyonithwele High School. Vijay's father was able to operate in the Fredville area in Inchanga and when he sold the business, he was also able to buy Laudium Bus Service, which operated in Pretoria until the 1990s.



A bus from Chetty's Motor Transport



Gang Chetty (left) and friends



Vijay Chetty with some of his siblings



Chetty's Motor Transport buses

Conclusion

Edendale, like many other former mission stations has an intriguing history to be shared, some of which is still evident. From the remnants of buildings to oral information from those who grew up in Edendale, there is a wealth of information available about this area which grew from a mere farm to a bustling Pietermaritzburg township.

Acknowledgements

This project started with a general interest in stories and information shared by the older generation about Edendale as it used to be. The interest grew after encountering sites and families with relevant information about the history of Edendale. The project would not have been a success without the willingness of some individuals to share their stories. I am grateful to the following: Robin Allison, Rudi Hillermann, Burkhard Schlosser, Katja Oostheis, Simon Allen, Nadira Moodley, Richard Moodley, Vijay Chetty, Sandile Gwala and Andre van der Merwe. Also, a word of gratitude is extended to Reggie Moodley for assisting throughout the project.

NOTES

- 1 S.M. Meintjes, 'Edendale 1850–1906: a case study of rural transformation and class formation in an African mission in Natal' (PhD thesis, University of London, 1988): 119–120.
- 2 M. Epprecht, *Welcome to Greater Edendale: Histories of Environment, Health, and Gender in an African City* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), citing Kumalo.
- 3 N. Naidoo, 'Edendale's land legacy dilemma' *Witness* 4 November 2013.
- 4 Sandile Gwala, 2018.