

EAVESDROPPING ON VICTORIAN NATAL: FROM DURBAN TO PIETERMARITZBURG

by CAROL MACCULLUM

Pietermaritzburg: Author, 2024

EAVESDROPPING BEHIND THE FRONTLINES OF THE ANGLO-BOER WAR 1899–1902

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THESE two books might be categorised as historical miscellany, collections of information that appeal to the writer. There is a place for them and in the case of this province in a sense they continue a tradition established by women's institutes in the 1970s that documented the histories of obscure towns and communities.¹ But while individualistic, or even eccentric, they need to be accurate.

An area in which they tend not to fare well is the broader sweep of history; in the case of the first of these books, for instance, the chapters covering Victorianism and Natal in the nineteenth century. The specific provides firmer ground and there is an interesting section on Scottsville, one of Pietermaritzburg's earliest suburbs. This provides a sense of varying land use over the years and clues as to the origins of many street names.

Bravely the author tackles the Colenso controversy of the mid-nineteenth century. The essential theological debate is well described, but the Colensos' political opponents, the Shepstones and various colonial officials, are let off lightly. There also seems to be some confusion between the bishop's two eldest daughters, one of whom was not called Henrietta.

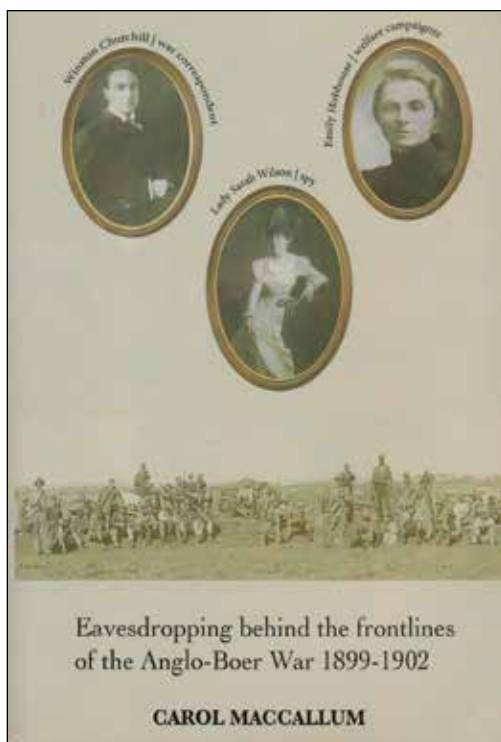
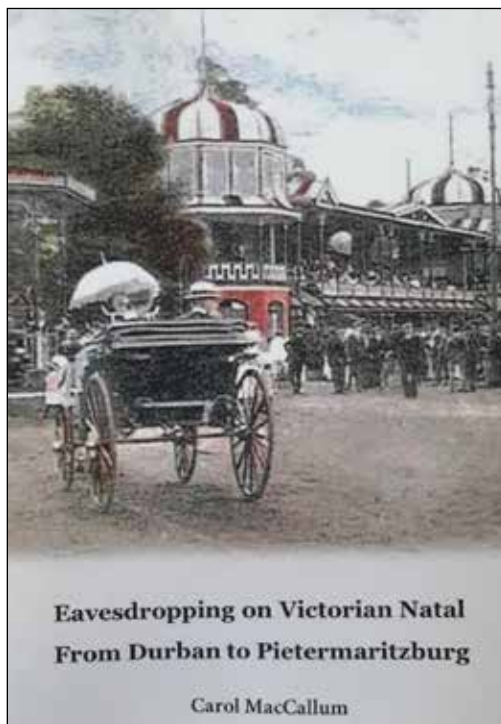
There are two informative sketches of lesser-known but important Pietermaritzburg characters, Joseph Edendale under Johannes Kumalo. The information flow to the besieged town was particularly dependent on the

Baynes and Emma Barter, remembered today for Baynesfield and old-age care respectively. With a chapter headed Durban to Pietermaritzburg, Carol MacCallum gets into the spirit of the women's institutes with brief histories of small towns and settlements like Cato Ridge along the N3. The book concludes as tradition seems to demand with a chapter on ghosts and suicides at the Polo Tavern and Nottingham Road Hotel and Howick Falls.

Unfortunately, this book seems to have escaped a proof-reader's attention; and the photographs are in the main indistinct and undated. Two of them are identical (pages 39 and 83) and it is unclear which caption might be the correct one.

THE ANGLO-BOER War book published earlier is more substantial and coherent, but naturally addresses Natal history only in parts. Admirably, the first two sections deal with females: Lady Sarah Wilson, Mafeking war correspondent; and Johanna Brandt involved in espionage in British-occupied Pretoria.

The siege of Ladysmith is dealt with through the eyes of R.C. Samuelson of the Natal Carbineers who organised scouts from Driefontein, an outlier of the kholwa community of



ability of black informants to slip in and out the area. The other eyewitness is Herbert Watkins-Pitchford, a veterinarian who founded Allerton.

The derailment of the British armoured train at Chieveley on 15 November 1899 would have remained a mere footnote had Winston Churchill not been aboard as a war correspondent. He was captured and taken to Pretoria but made a remarkable escape to Lourenço Marques and travelled back to Durban and then Frere, spending a short while in Pietermaritzburg. This book records him meeting Governor Walter Hely Hutchinson

and Prime Minister William Schreiner. The latter was prime minister of the Cape Colony and is unlikely to have been in Pietermaritzburg.²

Another reference to Pietermaritzburg is found in the section on the Boer concentration camp opened in August 1900 and closed in November 1902 near Signal Hill. The camp employed two British teachers and the diary of one of them, Lily Rose, is quoted at length. But this account owes a great deal to the work of Elizabeth van Heyningen who is given only an obscure reference in the bibliography.³

CHRISTOPHER MERRETT

NOTES

- 1 These can be found in the library of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus.
- 2 The prime minister of Natal was Albert Hime.
- 3 Elizabeth van Heyningen, 'Pietermaritzburg concentration camp' *Natalia* 40 (2010): 62–76.