

Jonkvrouw Augusta Uitenhage De Mist: Diary of a Journey to the Cape of Good Hope and the Interior of Africa in 1802 and 1803

By Rod Hooper-Box



Augusta (1784-1832 – portrait left) wrote a charming and impressive diary, which begins:

'The peace of Amiens had made an end to a long war. England had returned the Cape of Good Hope to the Batavian Republic, and my father [Jacob de Mist 1749-1823] was honoured with the task of making transfer of it in the name of the Gemeenebest, and to go and install the new Governor.' [Jan Janssens 1762-1838].

She was referring to the French Revolutionary Wars (1792-1802) which were a series of conflicts that arose from fears in Europe that the French Revolution would spread. They pitted France against Prussia, Austria, Russia, Spain and Great Britain. In 1794 France occupied the Seven Provinces of the Dutch Republic, the mother country of the Dutch East India Company, transforming it into the Batavian Republic. Dutch Prince William of Orange fled to England, requested Britain to occupy the Cape Colony to safeguard it from the French. Happy to oblige, the British took the Cape in August 1795.

The "Peace of Amiens" was preceded by treaty negotiations beginning in February 1801 and signed in March 1802, by Charles Cornwallis ('the man who lost America' by surrendering at Yorktown in 1781), and by Napoleon's brother Joseph - creating a semblance of peace that was to last a mere fourteen months. The general British

view was that too much had been conceded for too little - giving up most of her recent conquests, while the Dutch regained their lost colonies, including the Cape.

Augusta continued, 'I had reached the age of eighteen years and was the only one of his daughters still unmarried. The thought of separating myself from my father while he was exposed to the dangers of so long as well as hazardous a voyage, made me despair. However, it was not without difficulty that he consented to my oft-times repeated and heart-felt wish to accompany him and share the dangers of the journey that lay in store for him.

On the 8th of July, 1802, we bordered (sic) a sloop... contrary winds held us in the roadstead until the 5th of August...a multitude of vessels [one of thirty], their sails gilded by the dying ray of the sun in the calm, clear sea, set themselves in motion to carry the product of industry and the hopes of the merchants to the farthest corners of the earth.

One can hear her justified pride in nation. A calm of several days, followed by a storm caused them to shelter in Plijmouth's (sic) harbour; then they were invited to visit Lord Barrington's castle:

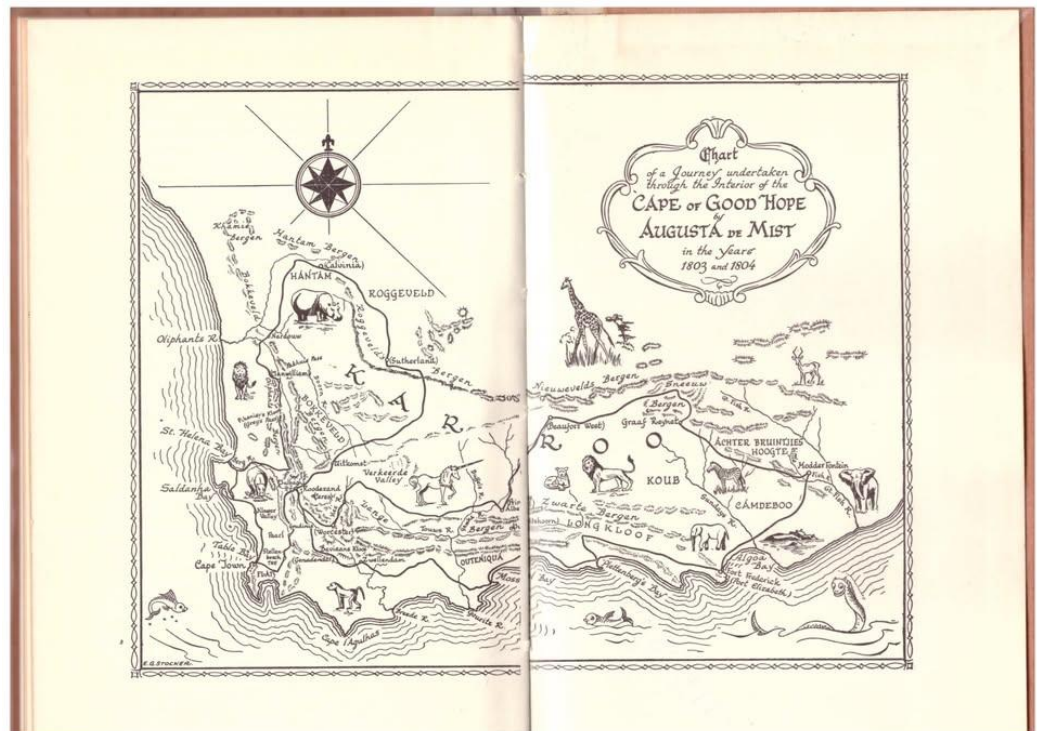
'Never before had I seen so magnificent a residence. The cordiality with which we were received, however, was even greater than the pomp.

Onwards via Tenerife: *'Our days slipped by with unimaginable speed, and frequently they ended with a ball. We danced on the ship's deck without a thought to disturb our pleasure, that we were separated from the depths - oftentimes unfathomable to man - by but a few planks. Happy carefreeness! You are the gay quality of youth and lack of experience!*

Slowly to the Cape Verde Islands *'...a long calm, which we would have exchanged willingly for any storm, increased the boring monotony of our days....A few days later a terrifying thunderstorm arose and the passengers were compelled to go to the hold or their cabins. There is perhaps no other phenomenon in nature which makes man so very much aware of his helplessness as well as his worth...Meanwhile this storm had been fateful for the crew, seven sailors at the masthead shortening sails lost their hold, the three who fell into the sea were drowned. Attempts to save them were unavailing. Oh they threw out their arms at us, we heard their plaintive cries...*

then soon disappeared forever. This sad incident cast a sombre mantle over our whole voyage...

On the morning of the third of December we were roused early by the officers and invited on deck, from where I could see the table mountain as a light cloud on the horizon. The



transfer of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, the installation of the new officials of the Batavian Republic and the organisation of the bench, and other important matters, fully occupied the attention of my revered father. The Governor for his part, desiring to become acquainted with the interior of the Colony which was henceforth to be entrusted to his care, and at the same time to curb the frequent ravages of the Kaffirs, decided to undertake a journey to the frontier of his territory.'

Janssens, imbued with humanitarian notions of 'The Noble Savage' and Rousseau's 'Discourse on Inequality', had taken over a Colony still simmering after the Third Frontier War. This had seen all Dutch Settlers abandon the Zuurveld - attacks had spread as far as Plettenberg Bay. Within a month he met with Khoi (Hottentot) leader Klaas Stuurman at Fort Frederick, and persuaded him to settle on land on the Gamtoos. He then met with Gqunukhwebe Chief Chungwa and minor Xhosa chiefs near the Sundays River [the sign 'Congo's Kraal' can still be seen when driving]. Speaking 'in the kindest and most friendly manner' he tried to persuade them to return over the Fish River. They declined, stating they feared Ngqika, from whom they had fled into the Colony. Janssens then met Ngqika just south of where Fort Beaufort was subsequently built. Relationships were established, but no real progress was made. Nevertheless, the Boers began returning to the Zuurveld.

'In the meanwhile, my father, convinced of the great importance of learning to know the state of the interior, made the decision to undertake the difficult journey through the burning wildernesses of Africa...Preparations were made to provide for forty persons for a six month journey, Thousands of things were necessary, not only to feed and house this party (there are of course, as everyone knows, no hospices in this sandy wilderness), but also to protect them from hordes of savages and from ferocious beasts.

Among those who accompanied my father was de Heer Lichtenstein who through his knowledge and talent, his eagerness to oblige and his humane care of the sick, laid the greatest claim to our respect and received our trust.

This high regard was returned, as Lichtenstein (Medical Doctor, later Professor, 1780 - 1857) wrote in his description of the journey, *"This instance of true filial love, so delightful under every point of view, inspired her with fortitude to despise the dangers of the sea, and the inconveniences attending a long voyage, to leave her sisters and her friends, and readily to renounce the joys of a life of ease and social comfort, perhaps for many years. Many young women of nineteen, accustomed to live in the finest circles of their own country, would have been staggered in the filial duty at the prospect of the interruption of these joys; but not so our traveller. Even the consolations she found in the lively scenes of the Cape Town, which atoned to her for some measure for what she had abandoned, were equally given up to remain by the side of her father in the sultry deserts of the interior of Africa".*

'One of my friends, Miss Verschveld, who readily agreed to accompany me, comprised with my maid and myself the only female company. Some officials, our servants, and a detachment of dragoons as well as a number of Hottentots and slaves charged with the care of the herds and five wagons, each drawn by twelve to sixteen oxen, further went to make up our small caravan.'

The route taken (**see map p66**) was first northwards through the settled Zwartland, dotted with great estates; to Saldanha Bay, then easterly to the banks of the Oliphants River; over the mountains. Having gained the Roggeveld escarpment they turned southward through sparsely populated areas, past present day Sutherland...reaching Tulbagh by November 21st 1803. On to the Moravian mission settlement at Baviaans Kloof, which Janssens later renamed Genadendal...onto the

great wagonroad to Swellendam, and the forests of Outeniqualand...to Algoa Bay and on to the Frontier. Halting at the fork of the Great and Lesser Fish Rivers south of present day Somerset East (leaving Augusta there while her father visited Ngqika). The return journey was via the Camdeboo to Graaff-Reinet - approaching which Augusta fell ill, was carried on a bed in a wagon, until recovering as they entered the Koueb, the barren expanse towards Beaufort West... down the Hex River valley, to Paarl, and on to Cape Town.

The diary is 42 pages long, in small print - what follows is a selection of quotes, in sequence, with minimal comment.

'We set out early on the 9th of October, 1803, on horseback (sidesaddle)...the scorching heat and the innumerable flies that attacked us from all sides and almost devoured us in spite of our gauze veils, did not serve to cheer us.

At the house of one of the richest and most prominent colonists we were not a little surprised one evening when, upon a given sign, a band of musicians began to play. These were slaves, at whose talent we were even more amazed, since their only music-teacher was nature, and they understood nothing of the rules of music. I knew various families in the Cape, all of whose slaves could understand music.

Near the mouth of the Berg River - Never have I regretted more the fact that I cannot draw, than at the picturesque sight of our caravan crossing the river. The drivers held the reins of the swimming horses; the oxen follow, all also swimming, the wagons are held afloat by several empty barrels lashed to their sides, and in this fashion are dragged to the opposite side by ropes...

It was here also that we saw for the first time a Bushman woman. Her frightening ugliness, her wild appearance and her nauseating filthiness left us with a bad impression of this tribe...

25th October...we came to a pretty valley where we chased a large troop of apes before us. On this mountain we still found some families of wild Hottentots, formerly inhabitants of this part of Africa. Gross laziness is the mainspring of their character; only the most dire necessity will induce them to hire themselves to the colonists, and

even when famished a real Hottentot will rather tighten his belt with a leather thong than work. [Obviously Augusta had read this, or perhaps Lichtenstein told her this - from his previous readings].



Early in the journey:
View of Pkenierskloof,
after Saldanha Bay, in
an easterly direction
to the slopes of the
Oliphants Mountains.
Note Augusta
(sidesaddle) and in
second row, just
behind her, is her
friend from Cape Town
- Lichtenstein wrote,

'We now ascended the mountain. The terrible rocks which arose all about us, the bottomless precipices on whose brink we were travelling, the wild scenery which completely surrounded us, all this filled us with awe and fear...As we travelled on, it appeared as if we were contemplating the remains of a devastated earth. Rocks reaching to the heavens and piled high upon one another and appearing to block our path alternated with precipices whose depths made us dizzy. We saw nothing here but the picture of destruction and death.

The wild uncharitable area through which we now travelled, consisting mostly of bare rocks and infertile flats, is inhabited only by poisonous snakes whose venom the Bushmen use to tip their arrows...Many limestone rocks showed imprints of fish and this gave rise to various discussions about the alterations that had occurred in this part of the earth.

On the 8th of November we halted at a colonist's...a band of Bushmen and some slaves had broken into this house a short while previously, and wreaked havoc amongst the relatives of our host's daughter, a pretty young woman. The slaves had murdered her husband, her father-in-law, her sister-in-law and also other

relatives....the details of this foul murder were rendered even more poignant to us by the fact that it had taken place in the very room where we now found ourselves, and where we spent the night.

The slope of the mountain is so steep and also so irregular, that we had to brake all the wheels of our vehicles... I had the misfortune to fall with my horse and injure myself.

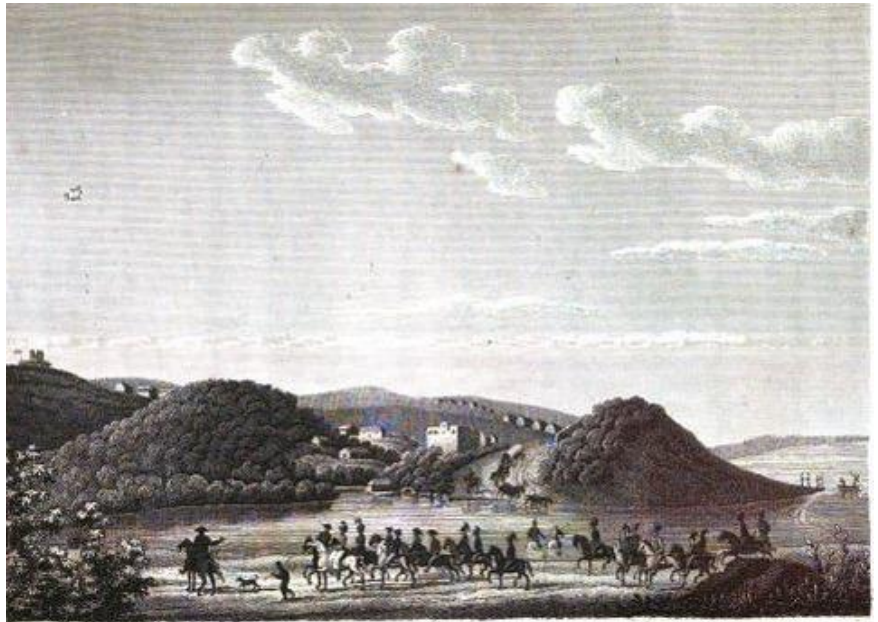
On the 15th of November we left the last farmhouse behind us, and entered the sandy desert. The heat was unbearable and it had changed the earth to copper; not a single plant or blade of grass appeared to our eyes the entire day...Toward evening we found a small quantity of brackish water...we set up camp here, and since it was my birthday, my father had the kindness to invite the gentlemen of our party to his tent, and entertain the rest of the men.

We continued the journey by night to avoid the heat of the day...so exhausted with fatigue and drunk with sleep, that I had scarcely the power to keep myself on my horse...

Baviaanskloof has a population of more than a thousand Hottentots. It consists of about two hundred houses built in a style fitted to the climate...all the inhabitants had gathered in two rows before the church and further along the road to greet us, the menfolk on the one side, the women on the other. At the head we found five Moravian Brothers with their wives.. they received us to the accompaniment of the singing of religious songs. Never had music sounded so melodious to me, or so striking. i was touched with respect for these virtuous people.

Below: the De Mist cavalcade at Algoa Bay with Fort
Frederick in the background. (Lorimer. 1971)

We kept the mountain chain which extends to Cape Aguitas (sic) on our right...One of the most important places we trekked through was Zwellendam (sic), the capital of the district of the same name. We stopped there, and were surprised at the culture and knowledge that marked all the members of den Heer Faure's family... Resuming



our journey, we made the acquaintance of two colonists. one of them, Mr. Lombard, belonged to the stout-hearted band who penetrated deep into the heart of Kaffirland upon receiving tidings of the shipwreck and stranding of an English ship, the Grosvenior (sic)... Amongst the many important things he told us about the Kaffirs and other savage nations whom we still had to visit, was his assurance that the unicorn was not fictitious, however hard it was to find....my father promised a large waggon, with a team of oxen as a reward to anyone who brought the skin of the animal as well as a well-preserved horn to the cape.

We had climbed numerous hillocks when we saw a strongly flowing river with thickly-wooded banks in a valley beneath us...we forded the river. I shivered with fear lest I might be swept away with my horse by the swiftness and power of the current...a high rise lay before us. our poor oxen strained all their efforts to pull the wagon over great clumps of rocks that obstructed the road. I could bear their suffering no longer, left the wagon and followed our way on foot. We reached our resting-place at midnight...we found this house full of colonists whose homes had been destroyed by the Kaffirs and who had taken refuge in the hospitable home of our host.

The road we had to take the next day was open to large wagons...we progressed further, the road became more level and sandy. The uniformity of these flats was frequently broken by the presence of numerous herds of gazelles and ostriches. Eventually we saw on the far horizon the shimmering sea; a sight that afforded us the liveliest joy...we doubled our pace... on the brink of Mossel Bay we followed a virtually untrodden path; deep ravines, turbulent streams, and pointed rocks each moment hindered our progress and constituted almost insurmountable difficulties for us. Deep

streams and roaring currents poured their spurning waves far out to sea with terrific force, and we were sometimes obliged to wait for hours for the precise moment when the ebb made crossings possible. Further on we found forests of several days' travel where the intertwined branches and broad-leafed shrub which frequently filled the intervening spaces, intercept all the rays of the sun...while the thickly-interlaced lianes intertwined around the tree-trunks impeded our passage. The road which we followed was only the work of elephants...thus we struggled for many days against all kinds of difficulties in the road, while we were exposed in addition to the burning rays of the sun and to downpours that resembled cloudbursts.

The nights we spent mostly under one or other tree or some overhanging rock without removing our clothes and using our saddles as pillows. From time to time we saw the ruins of colonists' homes which had been destroyed by the Kaffirs during their last invasion of the Colony....Beyond the Bay of Plettenberg the country became yet more wild, but at the same time more picturesque. Trees reached to the heavens, lashed together by garlands or creepers of lianes, sufficiently strong to act as swings for the apes...parrots of all species and size, whose screeches echoed through the forest, shared their solitude with the elephants and the other natural inhabitants. One found the latter in numerous troops.

On the 31st of December ...at midnight the discharge of all guns and repeated cheers, magnified a thousand times by recurring echoes, announced the birth of the new year...after a few more days of travelling, the land became more flat, and frequently we had a view of the sea.

On the 6th of January, 1804, we reached the military post of Algoa Bay. The Commandant, Captain Alberti, (1768-1811) our revered friend, came to meet us and conducted us to the house he inhabited, where we found in addition to a hearty welcome, all the comforts of life without which we had done for so long.

At this point I have left out a lengthy and very positive, description of the Xhosa - it cannot have been Augusta's original work; it is clearly based on other publications.

Delegates were deputed to invite their chiefs and particularly their King, Gaika [Ngqika], to an interview with my father, and in which they were to agree over the measures which could serve to prevent the damage resulting from the constant raids

of these undisciplined hordes on the colonists, and to establish a better relationship with. them. We left Algoa Bay on the 13th of January, Captain Alberti escorted us out with a detachment of his troops. Our party was still more augmented by various families of colonists who were seizing the opportunity of returning to their homes which they had abandoned during the invasions...As we neared the border of Kaffirland we saw the tracks of elephants, rhinoceri and wild buffaloes all over. The bush was filled with lions, leopards (sic) and other ferocious animals, whose roaring disturbed us during the night; while our approach put whole herds of gazelle and antelope took flight in the valleys. Many Kaffirs with their wives and children visited us in our camp, either attracted by curiosity or by the hope of presents. Among the young girls, there were those who besides possessing pleasing features, displayed a great liveliness and grace....nothing charmed them more than the buttons on our riding-habits.

When our envoys had returned we learned that King Gaika was unable to comply with the invitation to come to our camp personally, because of a tribal feud in which he was involved with some of his rebellious subjects. But he preyed [sic] that, if my father was prepared to travel farther for another day or two, he would meet him elsewhere at a prearranged point. The meeting with this chief was regarded to be too important not to make use of the occasion...it was decided to leave behind the wagons and travel with only the most essential equipment; and as the presence of three women could only be a great handicap on this journey, I was obliged to acquiesce to remaining where I was; despite my persistence and my promise to endure with courage the privations and face the dangers which I would perhaps have had to share with my father. It was all in vain. I could not get permission...Almost choking my tears, I followed their departure as far as my sad eyes could see.

The blackest visions, the most awful thoughts, made themselves master of my soul. Now I imagined my beloved father swimming in his own blood, mangled and devoured by wild animals; then again I saw him, overcome by fatigue and dying of thirst. After many days of fearful anxiety, shouts of joy rang out through our camp, I ran to meet my dear father who was so worn out by hunger, thirst and fatigue, that he could scarcely hold himself on the horse.

Starting out on their return to Cape Town, I felt a cold shiver in all my limbs, a high fever accompanied by delirium overtook me, and I remained unconscious for several days. As a sick-room I had one of our large wagons in which they laid a bed for me. The anxiety of my father cannot be described...eventually after three anxious weeks I regained my health, thanks to the goodness of god, thanks to the constant care of our physician...and the unfailing care of my female companions. During this time we travelled through the district of Graaf Reynet, such was my illness and weakness not allowing me to see anything that occurred.....the nearer we became to de Kaapstad, the better cultivated and more thickly inhabited the land became...we entered it on the 23rd of March. [167 days after having set out].

Since his mission was now ended, we desired to return to Europe as quickly as possible as the war between France and England had once again broken out afresh, however we had to wait a favourable opportunity, and this came only at the beginning of 1805.

On the 6th of February they left on an American ship, reached New York after a voyage of 56 days - The welcome we received here at the hands of merchants and other persons with whom my father was connected in some way...will always evoke a lively sense of gratitude in my memory, and I shall ever count our sojourn in that city as one of the happiest times of my life.

They were in America for about three months before re-embarking on a small ship – The start of our voyage augured a successful passage; but on the eighth day after losing sight of the land the heavens darkened with clouds, a terrible wind swelled the waves, and a mighty storm accompanied by frightening thunder threw our vessel with so much force on its side...the water forced its way in everywhere. I clung onto my father imagining only that our last hour had come. We remained for three days and three nights in this dreadful condition. Finally, on the 8th of July, we arrived in the roadstead at Texel, after a passage of six weeks.

Our absence had lasted three years, and we had been obliged to endure many hardships and great anxieties; but we had sometimes also experienced joys at whose delight the severest hardships are forgotten.'

NOTE 1. Jan Willem Janssens (1762-1838) married in 1786, had 2 daughters and 2 sons, widowed 1801, remarried 1822. Aged nine he entered the Dutch army as a cadet; rose through the ranks and by 1793, at the start of French Revolutionary Wars, was a Colonel. After the Dutch surrendered to France in 1795, becoming the Batavian Republic - a satellite state - he served mainly as an administrator within the new Batavian army, until his appointment to the Cape in late 1802. Capitulated after the Battle of Blaauwburg in January 1806; was transported to the Netherlands by the British. Appointed Secretary-General of the Department of War; held a series of high-ranking administration posts until he was appointed Governor-General of Java - previously known as the Dutch East Indies - arrived there 15 May 1811; 30 July a powerful British invasion force landed, forcing his surrender on 18 September. He was imprisoned in Britain until November 1812. During March 1814 he led a division of French soldiers to fight under Marshal Ney, Resigned from the French army in April when Napoleon abdicated and was banished to Elba. Appointed Commissary-General of the Dutch United Department of War; and in 1828 promoted to the highest rank existing in the Netherlands army. Died a decorated soldier and statesman.

NOTE 2. Jacob Abraham Uitenhage¹ de Mist (1749-1823) son of a clergyman, he studied law, practised from 1768 to 1789, then entered political life. Married three times, his first wife Amalia Strubberg van Cleve died a month after giving birth to Augusta. He held many high appointments including President of the National Assembly of the Batavian Republic. The task of drawing up a plan for administration of the Cape was entrusted to him; the document he prepared gave such satisfaction that he was sent out to the Cape with Janssens. They reached Cape Town on 23 December 1802, took residence in the Castle of Good Hope; soon moved to live at Stellenberg - the most beautiful of the Cape Dutch houses remaining in Cape Town. After leaving the Colony he held a further twelve high-level political positions in Holland.

NOTE 3. Martin Heinrich Carl Lichtenstein (1780-1857) a German, son of a school principal, took an early interest in natural history and geography. Qualified as a doctor in 1802. Then decided to travel and was employed by Janssens as a tutor for his 13 year old son; and as personal physician to Governor-elect Janssens. He

¹ From Pettman, South African Place Names: "Uitenhage, in earliest days the farm of an adventurous colonist named Scheepers, received its name from Governor Jan Willem Janssens in honour of the able Commissary de Mist, whose Barony in Holland was so named."

prepared himself by reading the accounts of travellers including Kolbe, Sparrman, Thunberg, Le Vaillant and Barrow. Travelled widely around Southern Africa; in 1811 his *'Travels in Southern Africa in the Years 1803, 1804, and 1806'* was published in German; translated and published in English in 1812. As a result he was appointed Professor of Zoology at the University of Berlin; and in 1813 Director of the Berlin Zoological Museum. In 1815 he married Victoria Hotho, daughter of a wealthy Berlin industrialist, which enabled him to travel widely in Europe; they eventually had three children. In 1829 he was elected a Foreign Member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences. He was also appointed Privy Councillor in Berlin; and was responsible for the creation of Berlin's Zoological Gardens in 1841. He died from a stroke at sea while aboard a steamer.

NOTE 4. Alberti, Johan Christoph Ludwig (1768-1811) a German, entered the service of the Republic of the Netherlands at age 16. As a Lieutenant in the Waldeck Regiment he accompanied Janssens to the Cape; was sent to Fort Frederick - the garrison was to serve the dual purpose of checking Xhosa invaders and Hottentot marauders who had combined in the war of 1799-1802. He accompanied Janssens to the meeting near the Sundays River, and on to the meeting with Ngqika. Later likewise accompanied de Mist to the meeting with Ngqika; then escorted the cavalcade to Graaff-Reinet. In 1804 he was named as Provisional Landdrost of Graaff-Reinet. He then chose the site of Uitenhage, and became Landdrost there. Overall he spent three years establishing what he termed 'good-neighbourly relationships' with the Xhosa. In 1806, after handing over Fort Frederick to Colonel Cuyler he was taken as a prisoner-of-war to Cape Town, where the British offered him a post, Declining, he returned to Holland where he was promoted to Captain. Then became Aide-de-camp to General Janssens, who had been appointed Director-General for war under Louis Napoleon. When Janssens retired in 1808, Alberti became a Major with the 3rd Regiment of Chasseurs and fought in Spain during the Peninsular War, before returning to Holland in charge of a Division. In 1810 Napoleon appointed Janssens Governor-General of the Dutch possessions in the East. On his recommendation Alberti was promoted to Adjutant Commander, and accompanied Janssens as his Aide-de-camp in Java. During a skirmish leading up to the surrender of Batavia, Alberti was hit by three musket balls. British officers showed him great kindness while he was being nursed; but after a slow recovery, he died of a fever, 12th June 1811.

Alberti left the first substantial and first-hand ethnographic account of the Xhosa, whom he called 'The Kaffirs of the South Coast of Africa', having spent three years of his life on the Frontier, which he described as the most enjoyable of his life.

NOTE 5. Chevalier Howen (1774-1848) also known as Otto Baron de Howen. Married Augusta in 1809. He was born in Kurland, Latvia. Served as an Officer in the Russian artillery. Then sailed to the Cape as Aide-de-camp to Janssens; accompanying him on his journey to the meetings near the Sundays, and at Kat River. Thereafter he fought in the service of Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, King of Holland, as a Lieutenant-General in Spain between 1811 and 1814. An accomplished artist, he drew the sketches for the Alberti Prints.

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Above: Stellenberg, Kenilworth, one of Cape Town's most beautiful gardens. 'From her diary we know Augusta loved to dance, she loved music and singing. We also know she visited numerous friends in Cape Town; one good friend even accompanied her on that very lengthy and demanding journey. There's a strong likelihood that while she was "mistress" of the house there would have been numerous social occasions held there - not only formal entertainment for government officials. One can imagine candlelight, laughter, dancing - perhaps a "little Constantia" and happy days there. She certainly felt 'at home' with the Dutch front gable. Perhaps that is where she and Otto Howen fell in

Rod Hooper-Box - 1960 discovered the Frontier Wars at Fort Beaufort museum; 1962-65 Rhodes University, including History major under Professor Maxwell (one-time President of LAHS). Corporate Human Resources career, followed by Strategy consulting. Authority on