

Outing to Hope Farm April 2024

by Margaret Snodgrass

The Lower Albany Historical Society's first outing of the year was to Hope Farm. Our visit took place on Thursday 18 April, a lovely sunny autumn day. Hope Farm is situated west of Port Alfred about 7km from the Civic Centre.

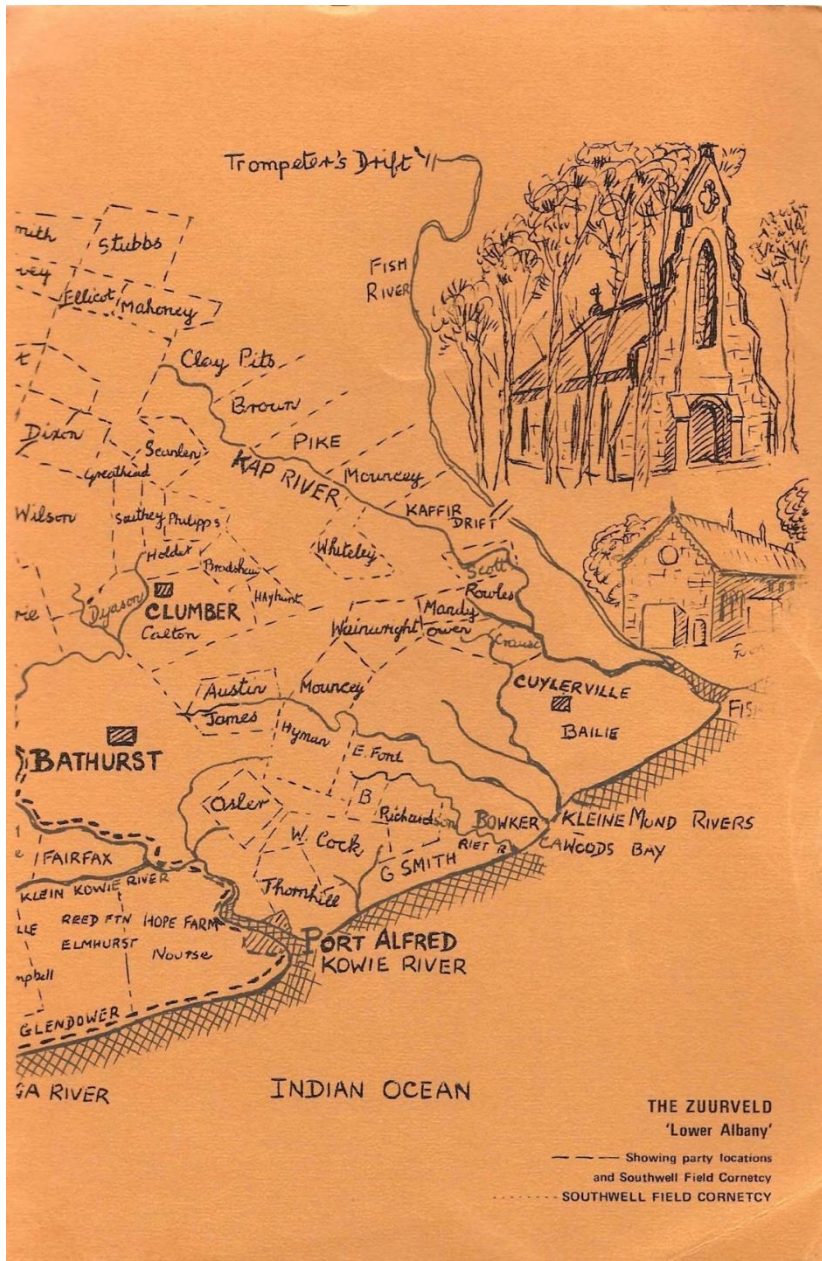


Figure 1: Map showing position of Hope Farm.
(Endpaper, Stirk, Doris)

The history of Hope Farm is closely linked to the early development of the Kowie, through Henry Nourse, William Cock and Benjamin Keeton.

Darian Keeton, a commercial beef farmer and the current owner of Hope Farm, represents the fifth generation of Keetons who have farmed on Hope Farm. Darian gave us a brief history of the farm while LAHS members enjoyed their picnic tea in his garden.

Henry Nourse was a wealthy English merchant and shipowner who thought that perhaps the Cape had great trade possibilities. In 1806, he sent out a ship with supplies to the Cape and appointed his brother-in-law, Kenneth Duncan to oversee his interests of Nourse, Christian and Company in Cape Town.

Unfortunately, Kenneth Duncan died in 1815 after a fall from his horse. His death led to legal complications under the Roman-Dutch system.

Therefore, in 1820, Henry Nourse was forced to come out to the Cape to look after his business interests in person. He was not an 1820 settler but did support the idea of a British immigration scheme to the Cape Colony, as it would aid his business interests [Butler, Guy pp 45-46].



Figure 2: Henry Nourse

Nourse's business ventures brought him to the Kowie and together with Benjamin Moodie, he wanted to establish a meat curing factory on the west bank of the Kowie River.

Benjamin Moodie's brother, Lieutenant Donald Moodie, was appointed by Acting Governor Sir Rufane Donkin, to make observations at the Kowie River mouth for navigational possibilities.

Nourse's business interests also led him to obtain property there. In November 1821, he was granted 1884 morgen (1, 613.7 hectares). This was Hope Farm. The rent was 75 shillings per annum. The farm extended parallel to the sea where Forest Downs is today and inland on both sides of the road to Port Elizabeth and the Southwell roads up to the Kowie River, where it had river frontage only. Henry Nourse acquired additional properties between 1831 and 1833, 'Sea Point' and 'River View' which adjoined Hope Farm.

He also acquired the Port Frances Customs House and some land as well as the harbour Master's building and the land of the Residency, besides building plots in Bathurst and Grahamstown [Stirk, Doris, p 64].

In 1823, according to A S Basson, he ordered a house to be built on the farm. Lewcock in his book on *Early Nineteenth Century Architecture in South Africa*, suggests it was a Francis Hope who built the farmhouse and so gave the farm its name. Henry Nourse bred Saxon merinos at Hope Farm and in October 1833, 500 lbs of wool was produced.

Nourse died in Grahamstown on 16 December 1834. His son, Henry Junior, tried to sell the farm at the end of October 1835 and again in May 1836, but it was not sold until 12 October 1843, when William Cock acquired both the land and cottage. William Cock advertised for people to invest capital in the farm and develop it. Over the years various crops were tried, including flax, linseed, Scottish oats, barley and hemp. According to Doris Stirk, William Cock built the house on Hope Farm in 1843. There is uncertainty as to whether William Cock altered the original cottage built by Nourse, or whether he built it from scratch. *'The dwelling on Hope Farm became a double-storeyed version of Cock's Richmond House which he had built in 1840 including the "Gothic Revival" crenellations, in the same style and floor plan.'* [Gordon, p 129]

There was a Burgher post on the farm during the Frontier War of 1851, with thirty Mfengu to protect the Kowie pass and environs. A number of cattle were taken by the Xhosa [Basson, A S].

Numerous tenants were on Hope Farm at various times, involved in fencing and cultivating the land. David Hannay and his brother William had sheep and grew oats, barley, flax and hemp. Ralph Manley, John Roach and Edward Thompson plus various masons, shoemakers and builders were there over the years. In 1856, James McQuilken leased a portion of Hope Farm and Nathaniel Cock, son of William Cock was also on a portion of the farm. Other occupants or owners were Heinrich Spring, William Wesson, Gravett and John Smith.

The Keetons came to own Hope Farm through William Keeton, the eldest son of Benjamin Keeton, who came out to the Cape Colony in 1820 at the age of 19. William's eldest son, George Keeton, lived at Hope Farm before he farmed Theopolis. In 1910, Becher Keeton owned the farm. After William Keeton died Becher Keeton took on his father's insolvent estate and let his brother Ben Herbert Keeton have Hope Farm for a nominal fee. He helped his brothers establish themselves on Lombard's Post. Ben H Keeton died at the age of 70 in 1942.



The Keetons still live in the farmhouse onto which William Cock added crenellations in the 1840s – but these have long since gone. Today the house has a pitched roof and a verandah.

Figure 3: Ben Keeton (standing behind); seated Louisa Caroline Keeton, nee Hodgkinson; seated, right, is an Atherstone, probably Dr Walter Atherstone (circa turn of the century)

Figure 4: LAHS members in front of the house on 18 April 2024. The historic footprint is still there. (Photo: Sue Gordon)



Darian Keeton is very interested in the history of Hope Farm and the family history of the Keetons. His family research has taken him to Southwell, Nottinghamshire, the home of Benjamin Keeton, 1820 settler. LAHS members divided into smaller groups to go into the farmhouse to view the family art treasures as well as Darian's other interesting collections and artefacts.

Darian's first cousin, Kathy Keeton, a well-known New York businesswoman, had the portraits below restored at great expense. *"The paintings were originally at Lombards Post but in very poor shape and on the verge of disintegration...taken by Kathy Keeton to be restored at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York at a cost of US64 000 dollars."* (Darian Keeton)



Figure 5: Darian Keeton with the portraits of his 1820 Settler great-great grandparents: Benjamin Keeton (1800-1877) and Hannah (Ford, widow) Keeton (1790-1866). (Photo: Claire Keeton)

References

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***I like the dreams of the future better than the
history of the past.***

Thomas Jefferson

