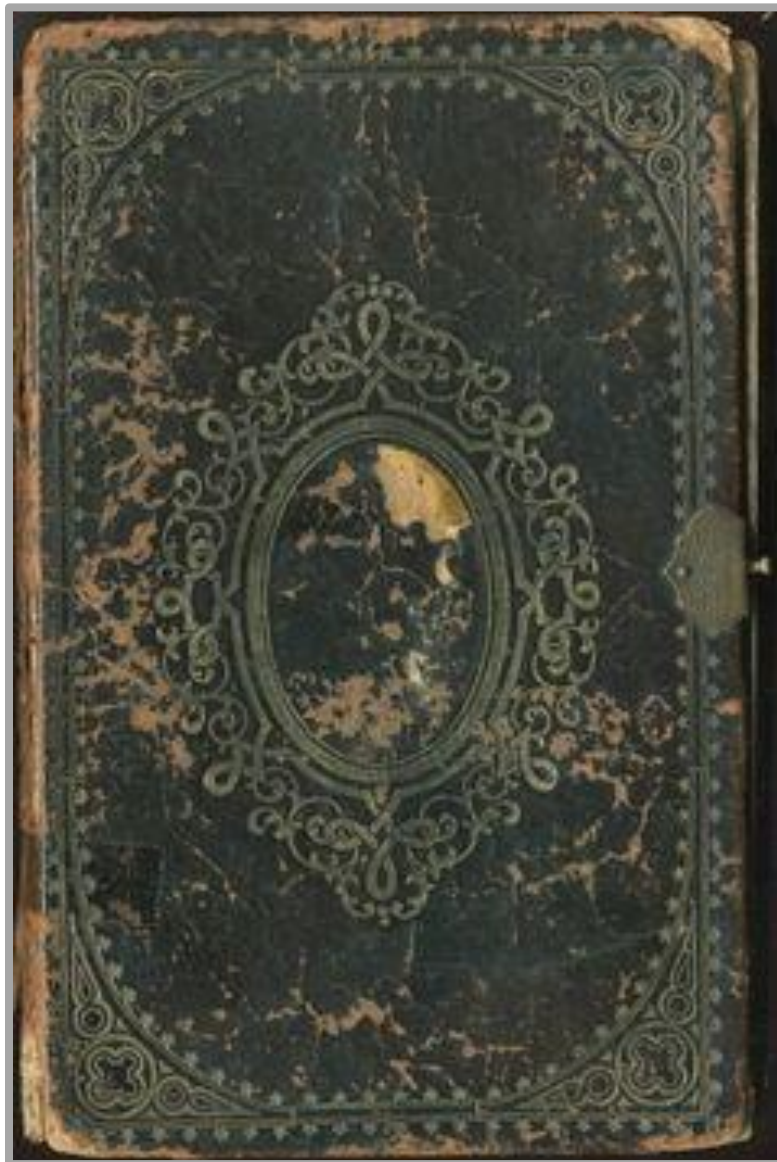




Book Review

THE NATAL WHO'S WHO - AN ILLUSTRATED
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH BOOK OF NATALIANS

Jack Dunsmoor | OK2BG | April 18th 2017

‘Biography is the most universally pleasant,
universally profitable of all reading.’ - Carlyle



- ✓ I think, this header/sub-title on the book's title page is a quote from Thomas Carlyle, a Scottish philosopher, satirical writer, essayist, historian & teacher (1795-1881).
- ✓ The quote is completely appropriate to this book, in my opinion, which I found fortunately, by accident, in my quest to locate some biographical collections about notable men, in an effort to substantiate my new website/book-blog, designed to promote potential role models for kids at-risk & any puzzled young adults, who by their own disregard lose sight of their goals & oftentimes forget the remindful message that they should always take care of themselves, first & foremost.
- ✓ This 1906 book called *The Natal Who's Who* is just over 200 pages in length with nearly 1,500 guys listed together with a professional photo & a 'short, but sweet' bio, in the range of about 100 words each.

- ✓ The book reads like an interactive, yet textual video game, of sorts, with specific personal stats; such as, full name, birth date & place, marital status, work title & address, together with a few hobbies.
- ✓ The most interesting thing I found & immediately questioned aloud to anyone within earshot after reading more than a few of these 'short but sweet' bio's was why did they label themselves as either married, unmarried, a bachelor, or sometimes nothing at all with regard to their proposed marital status. Perhaps, that was the norm or plan, to find a life-partner. But then I wondered how were they recruited for this particular publication? Altogether, it seemed somewhat odd with a subtle sexual connotation & I questioned if the guys themselves had deliberately chosen to display their own marital label, like a dating service, of sorts, since their work and/or home address was also published. So, in theory, anyone could have written a letter-of-intent to any one of these guys, in effect, to ask them out on a date.
- ✓ What's also obvious is that all of these guys are ethnically white, with the exception of a few guys I noticed who might be from India, which was another of England's operational colonies, at the time. However, no black men from Africa are included in this obviously segregated publication. A sign of the times, no doubt!



BERNARD PAUL COWLEY, 1883-1922

- ✓ Still, I found this book appealing on some alternative, emotional level & spent more than a few hours getting to know some of these guys, like potential friends, as if they lived somewhere around my small town, or in a larger time-zone nearby, figuratively & literally.

- ✓ I found 24 guys labeled as 'Unmarried' which struck some kind of funny bone or angry bone, as if something might be honorably wrong with that default designator. So, I did some further research & found one or two of them had eventually married after publication of the book, in 1906. For example, Bernard Paul Cowley (on page 50) was indicated as married on another website, to Bessie Cockerell & together they had 4 children, before Bernard died on March 9th 1922 in Durban, South Africa, at the young age of only 39. What a sad story, that ended too soon!



CHARLES WILLIAM FRANCIS HARRISON

C.W. Harrison, 1874-?

- ✓ Still, this book should prove to be beneficial for genealogy detectives & family history buffs, which I am proud to say that I am often one or both of those hobby/job titles. While, losing myself for several hours & habitually many days later, after I put on my detective hat & became surreptitiously involved in a fact-check for information about a few more of these guys, who I thought might be related to my family, or about some other areas of corporal interest, since some were born in Scotland, and/or one guy was a published author & I later found 2 of his books published which I also want to read at some point, *Natal: An Illustrated Official Railway Guide & Handbook of General Information* by Charles William Francis Harrison, in 1903. And the stylish 1905 (illustrated) book, *Durban – Port Natal*

& *Railway Connections* compiled by Charles William Francis Harrison.

- ✓ Apparently, Charles William Francis Harrison (on page 85) also published in 1903 *The Sphere: An Illustrated Newspaper for the Home* which appears to be a magazine with photographic advertisements aimed at the household or consumer market, an altogether early foray into magazine publishing. Charles was certainly an entrepreneur & slightly ahead of his time, by my observations.
- ✓ However, he had taken ill as a result of his industrious endeavors, as his bio painfully indicates: 'Owing to break-down in health, was obliged to take protracted leave and long sea voyages during 1905. Visited the Antipodes, Philippines, China, Japan, and Canada. Returned to Natal Jan., 1906...'
- ✓ I immediately pondered who prescribed such a rigorous & lengthy recuperation & what kind of health insurance would have allowed for such a fantastic journey. Or, maybe his Father had loaned him the money until his book residuals were eventually deposited, in his bank account. Either way, what a great way to convalesce!

- ✓ I was also amused by another line in Charles' bio that indicated some kind of short-circuit, side-bar to his career plans, with the camouflaged line that read: 'Originally intended for Legal Profession, circumstances decided a Railway career.' Or in other words, 'life happened, while you were making other plans', huh, Charles? At any rate, it seemed to work out well, overall. Charles was born at Grantham, Lincolnshire (England) in 1874 & would have been 32 in 1906, at the time of *The Natal Who's Who*...book publication.

- ✓ The bio of Charles William Francis Harrison aka C.W. Harrison did not indicate whether Charles was either married (indicated by the letter, 'm'), or unmarried (indicated by the word, 'Unmarried', or the word, 'Bachelor'), or simply not married, presumably, when no descriptors of any kind were used, to indicate a person's marital status. There were 2 dozen guys with the word, 'Unmarried' & nearly 4 dozen guys with the word, 'Bachelor' & some portion of the rest had only the letter, 'm' & maybe the mention of the wife's name & some number of children, while a seemingly equal balance of guys had no other indication of any kind with regard to their current station of marriage, or implied refusal thereof to participate in such a matrimonial alias. Curious, I say! Still, they gave their address, together with their best-dressed photo & as they say, 'let the chips fall where they may' after that fateful day of publication, in 1906.



THOMAS RICHARD SULIN, 1879-1912

- ✓ Otherwise, the saddest story I found, actually only half the story, since I know how it ended, but I don't know why, Thomas Richard Sulin apparently, '...died by his own hand at Lord's Cricket Ground, Durban, on July 30th (in 1912).' I discovered that sad epitaph on a website list of deaths, for 1912. Thomas was only 32-years-young & just 6 years earlier was posted prominently in *The Natal Who's Who*, in 1906.
- ✓ According to his bio (on page 191), Thomas Richard Sulin was born '20th Nov., 1879' in Maritzburg, which is a popular abbreviation for Pietermaritzburg, the capital & 2nd largest city in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, not terribly far from Durban (about 62 kilometers or 42 miles), south toward the coast of the Indian Ocean.

- ✓ Thomas evidently worked at Harvey, Greenacre & Co., as any correspondence was requested to be sent, 'and care of' HGC, which for all intents & purposes & as a result of my fastidious research discovered elsewhere, as 'Drapers, Outfitters, General Importers' which seems to be a department store. However, the other address (23, Canterbury Grove, Berea, Durban), as indicated in Thomas' bio, as Add., appears to be an apartment complex (less than a mile from the beach) & very well may have been where Thomas had lived at some point previous to 1906. Also, Lord's Cricket Ground (demolished in 1922), may or may not be known now as Kalahari Stadium, Kingsmead, nearby The Old Fort, which appears to be within walking distance from Thomas' apartment on Canterbury Grove.

- ✓ I can't imagine Thomas' distress on that fateful morning walk on Tuesday, July 30th 1912, to a place where he obviously felt most at-home, however contrary on that day, in order to end his life, perchance hanging from a tree, or trembling with a gun?!

- ✓ I was subsequently saddened by Thomas' suicide, in 1912 & I wanted to find more evidence that could help resolve not only my distant stress, but maybe facilitate in some way to solve the riddle of Thomas' dilemma, after 105 years, indeed! And to help young people of all demographics & time-frames understand those

historical reasons why, to effectively apply some same empathy to a contemporary scenario.

- ✓ July 30th 1912 was a Tuesday & so I wondered if Thomas had gone to work the day before, on that Monday & perhaps had an altercation with his boss or a co-worker. As there are a few other guys listed in the book, who also worked at Harvey, Greenacre & Company & would maybe have either known him at work, or certainly heard about Thomas' suicide via the grape-vine at work, at some point later that week.
- ✓ Thomas listed his hobby, as 'Dogs', still we don't know if he had one as a pet, maybe left at home alone on that Tuesday, in July, 1912.
- ✓ What seemed to me to be the most striking thing about Thomas' profile in *The Natal* book was his overall involvement in sports & the indication of some apparent popularity, as noted: 'For five consecutive years (1896 to 1900) represented Durban in Junior Intertown Cricket. For two years represented Durban in Junior Intertown Football.' And at one tournament, his team had won the Horsley Cup. Also: 'For the last five years has played for the Senior Zingari C.C. (Cricket Club), but has not played regularly at football recently on account of his knee being put out on the football field.' An injury which might have ended his sports career &

also might have contributed to his general depression 'waxing & waning' over the next 6 years, till the winter of 1912, so deliberately in July.



Cricket player photo posted on www.geocities.ws

- ✓ There was also a big event at Lord's Cricket Ground on July 15th – 17th 1912 (just two weeks prior), namely The Triangular Tournament between Australia & South Africa, still I didn't see Sulin listed as a player, while Australia had won by 10 wickets.
- ✓ I also found no mention of Sulin, as a player, in the 2009 book by Goolam H. Vahed, *Empire & Cricket: The South African Experience, 1884-1914*.
- ✓ Another item of interest not mentioned in his bio was that Thomas had no indication of any prior military service, as many of the guys in *The Natal* book had their regiments & dates of service listed with regard to the most recent Boer War, specifically the Second Boer

War aka the South African War, fought from October/1899 to May/1902, when Thomas was 19-years-old to 22-years-old & which had ended just 4 years before, *The Natal* book was published, in 1906.

- ✓ However, the South African Defence Act (Act 13 of 1912) was initiated on July 1st 1912 & made provision for a Union Defense Force that would be composed of a Permanent Force of career soldiers & other temporary conscripts. Also, the new law obligated all white males between 17 and 60 years of age (both sons & their fathers) to serve in the military (although not strictly enforced, as there were a large number of volunteers & half of the white males aged 17 to 25 had already been drafted by lots). Thomas was 32 on July 1st 1912. Still, he may not have wanted to signup & serve, for any number of personal reasons.
- ✓ Another notable tragedy earlier that same year was the sinking of the Titanic on April 15th 1912, just 15 weeks to the day, on Monday & the day before Thomas committed suicide. Yet, I didn't see anybody on the passenger list with the surname, Sulin. Still, the sinking of the Titanic was undoubtedly a traumatic experience for everybody worldwide, in my estimation, much the same as the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York City, on Sept 11th 2001.

- ✓ Apartheid was also becoming a more contentious struggle & on January 8th 1912 The African National Congress political party, aka ANC was founded, primarily in response to the oppression of blacks in South Africa.
- ✓ As a result of my preliminary research, I feel like I know Thomas Richard Sulin a bit better now, but I would like a more complete & restorative ending to his story. If I could just find out why he died & then share that causal information with somebody else who might be in-need, for whatever various precautionary reasons, it might help somehow, I'm sure of it!
- ✓ So, until then, I've suddenly & surprisingly written a letter to the National Archives & Records Service of South Africa requesting a copy of some indicated correspondence in Thomas' file, suspiciously dated 1912. Maybe there's a clue, until I can find an historical newspaper article with regard to Thomas' tragic death on Tuesday, July 30th 1912.
- ✓ I've become seriously intrigued by Thomas' sad story in this most interesting book, *The Natal Who's Who: An Illustrated Biographical Sketch Book of Natalians*, published in 1906; with more than 1,000 stories of interest, to be sure, if you're willing to proudly wear & self-assuredly sport the prized genealogy detective badge of honor!

- ✓ The book is highly recommended, as a thought-provoking collection of a previously real, yet now virtual past-life history of sorts, something like a 'good-length' or 'googly' cricket-term & likewise salubrious quote from the contemporary video vlogger, Andrew Neighbors, who always reminds us to Never Stop Learning!
- ✓ So, I will certainly post a request for a hard-copy edition of this book on both my Birthday & Christmas wish-lists, as a worthwhile addition, aka edition to my home library, perhaps placed more perceptibly on my coffee table; without a doubt, for a splendid, lazy, all-day Sunday & sundry activity aka contemplative reflection with a nice hot cup of black tea; white with 2 sugars, please & thank-you!
- ✓ Review by Jack Dunsmoor, author of the book *OK2BG*

