



Andreas Salvator Flemmer

ANDREAS SALVATOR FLEMMER 1850 – 1933

Andreas Salvator Flemmer was the seventh child of Christian August and Betty Flemmer. He was born at Kørsor in Denmark on the 11th February 1850. A healthy baby, he was christened there in the summer months on the 29th June. For some reason he was always known as Silvata, and I have many photos of him in later life with this name on them. There is a family story that as a child on the ship coming out from England, he kept crying one night. When his parents went to investigate they found a fire on the ship that the crew were able to put out. The family story was that as the ship's saviour, he was called Salvator. This is a lovely story but unfortunately not true as the Danish baptism records show that he was in fact christened Andreas Salvator.

The arrival of this baby added to the financial pressure on the family and was one of the reasons why the decision was made to move to Cradock. He was only two when they set sail from London in 1852 and at that age would have been quite a handful on the long voyage out to Port Elizabeth. As a toddler he had to be watched like a hawk, and his mother was fortunate to have the older children to help her keep an eye on him. In February 1853 the landfall of Algoa Bay was finally sighted, and then it was the trip ashore in the surfboats, to be snatched from his mother by a hoard of shouting, gesticulating black people on the beach. The poor little chap got the fright of his young life and cried his head off before being reunited with his mother, safe at last on dry land.

After a pause in Port Elizabeth where the family celebrated his third birthday the wagons were inspanned and the trek to Cradock started. Again he would have to be watched carefully, so easy to be trampled underfoot by the oxen, or to wander off into the bush teeming with wild animals. Once the family reached Cradock and moved into their new home, once the unpacking had been done, life began to return to normal.

I have found little information about his early years, but he grew up with the other Cradock boys, swimming in the Fish River, hunting small animals in the veld around the town, learning to ride and shoot. He went to the Cradock Free School – a misnomer as there never was enough money from the Colonial Government

and parents had to pay fees to keep it going. The standard of teaching was not high, mainly because of a lack of funds but at the time it was the only school available. The only reference I found to his boyhood years was in 1864, when he was 14. Like his brothers he had taken up cricket with as much success as they had. Playing for Cradock Boys against Grahamstown Boys he was run out for a duck in the first innings and bowled Nelson, caught Cawood for a duck in the second!

Salvator was the only child in the family who didn't marry and for this reason it has been more difficult to find out much detail about him. His father died in 1870 when he was 20 and by 1874 he was Deputy Postmaster at Middelburg. Two years later, aged 26 he was a Justice of the Peace and Field Coronet in Middelburg, as was his uncle Töger van Abo. The Flemmers and their relatives by marriage were well represented in the area by this time. His brothers Hans and Marius were JP and attorney respectively in Steynsburg, his brother-in-law Edward Gilfillan JP and attorney in Cradock and there were all the Distins and Naesteds in and around Middelburg and Cradock. One couldn't go very far without bumping into one of them!

It was probably at about this time that this photo was taken of Salvator who is sitting between his brothers Hans Christian and Marius.

In 1877 the 9th Frontier War – the Gaikca Galecka War – broke out in the Eastern Cape and local volunteers formed up to move down towards the front. His oldest brother Christian Ludvig took part in the campaign and it is quite likely that Salvator did as well.



*Flemmer brothers: Hans
Salvator and Marius*

From reading the very brief entries in the diary of his nephew Edward 'Ted' Thornhill Gilfillan of the farm Conway, District Middelburg, we can see that Salvator was in and around Middelburg until at least 1886 when he 'went to the races'. It was this same year that the Witwatersrand gold reef was discovered and the great rush started with Salvator very much part of it. Although it is often thought that the gold rush was mainly prospectors trying to stake their claims and begin digging, there were probably just as many who went to the Reef with no intention of actually getting their hands dirty. This was a huge community starting from scratch on the bare veld – the opportunities were there for suppliers of transport, food, liquor, accommodation and of course for men who could supply the finance to keep the many small claims going.

In court papers in 1892 Salvator is described as ‘*carrying on the business of speculation*’ and he was living at the Rand Club in Johannesburg. It must have been an exciting life with the Reef a bit like the Wild West and fortunes to be made and lost every day. He brought a case to the High Court in Pretoria for the sequestration of one C L Olen of Potchefstroom in the matter of the Gyferfontein Mine. All of the documents are in high Dutch, the official language of the then Transvaal Republic. There were various court cases all involving the buying and selling of mining shares but what is particularly interesting is that in one of these in 1896 his co – liquidator states

“Dat myn co-liquidateur Andreas Salvator Flemmer deze landsreek verlaten heeft voor Zud Amerika van welk feit de Bank geheel bewust moet zyn en totdat hy terug komt en voor een anderen liquidateur is aangesteld in zyn plaats...”

There is a later note to say that he had returned from 8 months in South America, and I wonder what he was doing there. Travel was no simple matter in the 1890’s. Perhaps he was simply enjoying the fruits of his speculating with a holiday or he may have been raising money from potential investors. He also went to Europe at this time and is without doubt the most widely travelled of all of his brothers and sisters.

As we know there was trouble brewing on the Rand and political pressure built up in 1899 until it became obvious that Britain and the Transvaal Republic were heading for conflict. Thousands of *uitlanders* fled Johannesburg by whatever means they could. Salvator was among them and the family story is that like so many others, he lost all of his money in the takeover of the gold industry by the Republic. I have a good description of the frightening, chaotic situation at Cape Town at this terrible time:

At the station hundreds of refugees fleeing from the Rand and the war clambered down almost daily, stiff, sore, from cattle trucks, clutching their few belongings. Frightened women had to fend for themselves and their children in a strange city. Indians, ‘Peruvians’ (as East European Jews were sometimes contemptuously called), not to mention Belgian, French and Russian prostitutes – all had to find homes and work. ‘Sun-reddened, unshaven, flannelshirted, corduroy-trousered’ British working men thronged the offices of the steamship companies and streamed down to the docks to board liners to take them back ‘home’. All these people were the detritus of war. Over twenty five thousand poured into Cape Town when the Transvaal Republic went to war against the British Empire and drove the Uitlanders away.

Although caught up in the general exodus Salvator was fortunate that he didn’t have to go as far as Cape Town. He went back to his family in the Middelburg area and started speculating in livestock. No doubt there was money to be made and he had to find a way of earning an income in the uncertain times that the war created. He always seemed to have a good relationship with his nephew Ted Gilfillan at Conway. I have mentioned before that I came across farm diaries kept by Ted and there are several mentions of ‘Uncle Sal’ over the years.

The war broke out in October 1899 and by February 1900 Ted and Salvator were in business. I quote some diary entries in full as they give an interesting background on business practice at the time and despite the war going on. You will see too that no banks were used.

Monday 12th February 1900

I went to town [Middelburg] this morning with Uncle Salvator to arrange about his going to Naauwpoort for us to see what stock are to be bought cheap. Got an advance of £20 from Mr. Metcalfe [attorney] which I handed over to him.

Thursday 15th

Sent a wire to Uncle Sal saying that he must not buy just now as the situation is too serious

It was too late because the reply came back

Sunday 18th

Got a wire saying that ASF had bought 21 head of cattle for £56. Got news that Cronje had surrendered with 7 000 men

Monday 19th

Wired up £56 to Chas. W. Webber for 21 cattle bought by Uncle Salvator

Thursday 1st March

I got a wire from Uncle Sal saying he had purchased 2025 sheep at 7/6d so I went down this afternoon to arrange the money part

Friday 2nd March

I arranged a six month bill with Garlake [attorney] for £805 and wired it to ASF, Naauwpoort. He wired that sheep were sent off.

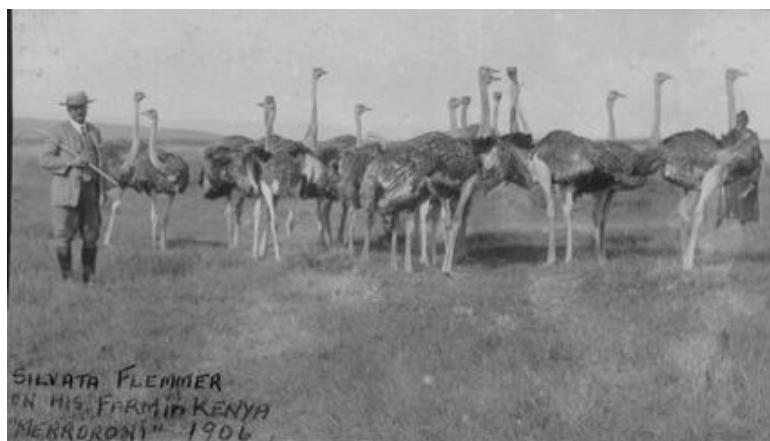
I presume the sheep arrived safely and profitably as there is no further mention of them. Salvator was 50 by this time and would not have taken an active part in the fighting. It seems that he stayed in the area until the war finally ended in May 1902.

Like many other South Africans, English and Dutch speaking, Salvator was sickened by the war and by the actions of the Milner Government. British East Africa was crying out for settlers and by the end of 1902 Salvator had been granted a farm in the Highlands of present day Kenya, near Nakuru. My grandfather said that in 1903 a party of Boers began an overland trek from the Transvaal to Eldoret in Kenya. This is an incredible journey of about 5 000 kilometres, through Mozambique and into present day Tanzania. Roads were virtually non existent and many cattle died from tsetse fly and other insect pests. It is difficult to imagine the hardship that these people endured before they finally arrived at Arusha, then in German East Africa in 1904. They were given land there but on finding out they would have to do military service, they sent delegates on to Nairobi to see the Governor. As no one on the Governor's could speak Dutch, Salvator was sent for and acted as interpreter. The Boers were granted land near Eldoret and on returning to Arusha they trained Somali

donkeys to pull their wagons as not enough oxen had survived. They finally got to Eldoret in 1905.

For his services in this case and for bringing another party of 100 settlers into Kenya Salvator was granted a farm of 100 000 acres near Nakuru, which he called Mereroni. I found it hard to believe that such a vast piece of fertile land could simply be given away, but am assured that it was not uncommon at the time.

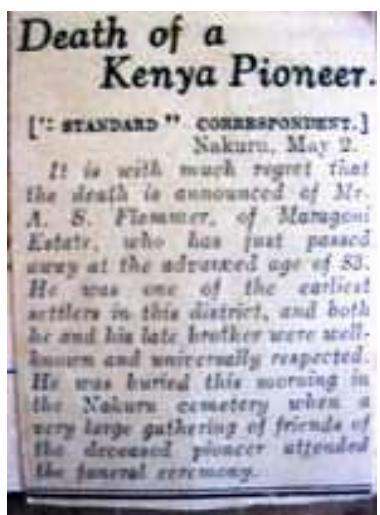
On Mereroni (now the site of Nakuru airport) Salvator set about creating a show farm. I know that among other things he brought his Karoo skills to bear and farmed ostriches, but don't know what else he produced. I am told that he was very successful and that visiting dignitaries were always brought to the farm to see an example of what could be done in the area.



Salvator on his farm Mereroni, near Nakuru

He kept in touch with his South African family and made occasional visits down South over the years. He certainly

became a point of contact for the many Flemmers who visited or moved to Kenya over the years. His brother Marius joined him at some point, and he also helped nephews Harold Flemmer, Christian Naested, and great nephews Lolly and Nick Flemmer – all of whom settled in Kenya.



By all accounts he was a grand old man, whose door was always open to visitors. He died aged 83 on the 3rd May 1933 on his farm and is buried in the grounds of St. Christopher's Anglican Church in Nakuru. Near him is the grave of his brother Marius who died five years before.

I have not found out what happened to Mereroni. A family story, which may well be true, is that Salvator was old and somewhat confused when he died and an unscrupulous overseer somehow secured the valuable farm for his own use. I have not been able to verify this story.

Obituary which appeared in the Nakuru papers