

BOEKBESPREKINGS BOOK REVIEWS

N. HELME. *Irene*. With line drawings by Carola Brotherton and Julia van der Byl. Irene, 1976. R9,00.

Local history constitutes a colourful mosaic of the life and ambition of people in a particular area, of their dreams, successes and failures, and is to a large degree the foundation of national history. As such, the story of Irene may be regarded as an interesting and vital link in South African history in general.

The names of pioneers such as the Voortrekker Daniel Elardus Erasmus, Alois Hugo Nellmapius, influential Transvaal personality and confidant of Pres. Kruger, Johannes Albertus van der Byl, descendant of one of the first Cape Free burghers, and Gen. J.C. Smuts, the well-known militarist and politician, are closely interwoven in the early history of this picturesque Transvaal town.

The first chapter, "The beginnings", gives a description of the position of Irene as well as a review of the settlement of the first White inhabitants in this area. Towards the middle of the previous century the Erasmus family established themselves on the farm Doornkloof in the central part of the Southern Transvaal. Two-thirds (approximately 1 125 ha) of the farm was bought by Nellmapius in 1889 and renamed Irene Estates — in honour of his two-year-old daughter.

During "The middle years" (Chapter 2), the untiring zeal of J.A. van der Byl, the new owner of Irene Estates, led to the establishment of the town Irene in 1902. Six years later Gen. Smuts came into possession of the remaining one-third of the original farm Doornkloof, and until his death in 1950 most of his time was spent there. The rural atmosphere and peaceful way of life of the town were cruelly disturbed during the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899—1902): Irene and her people could not escape the consequences of this armed struggle and two concentration camps for Boer women and children were erected within the town boundaries in 1900.

After the war there was a revival of socio-economic development in the town and numerous commercial enterprises, religious denominations, sports clubs and other institutions such as the Animal Husbandry and Dairy Research Institute and Irene Film Laboratories expanded or were established. In addition to this, Chapter Three ("Modern times") also sketches the cultural life of the community and throws light on the rôle which well-known personalities such as Sir Arnold Theiler, the founder of Onderstepoort, Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, author of 'Jock of the Bushveld' and Stuart Cloete played in the history of Irene.

This publication is an example of excellent workmanship and is copiously illustrated with photographs and sketches of Irene in older days as well as in modern times. It also contains a number of interesting appendices (e.g. on local management and the origin of street names) and an index which includes references to the illustrations. As the author says, he has tried to create a realistic image of the "vibrant inner core" of Irene, "where the physical and the spiritual combine to create an almost overwhelming impression of colour and shade, sparkle and maturity, and remind us of our increasing need for the enduring values of truth and tranquillity, beauty and humility in a rapidly-changing world" (p.119). Helme has unquestionably succeeded in this aim.

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C.G. HENNING. *Graaff-Reinet: a cultural history 1786—1886*. T.V. Bulpin: Cape Town, 1975. R32,00.

This account of the first century of Graaff-Reinet's history is an abridged and revised version of a thesis presented by Dr Henning in 1971 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. At a time when the

study of local and regional history is, relatively speaking, still in its infancy, this beautifully published history is a real asset. Lavishly illustrated with historical and modern photographs, maps, drawings, documents and even advertisements of that period, it is a publication every book-lover will handle with pleasure and own with pride.

The first chapter deals with events before 1786; these culminated in the establishment of the district and village of Graaff-Reinet on 13 December 1785 when M.H.O. Woeke was appointed the first landdrost. It goes on to describe the political and racial conflicts and the life style of the Graaff-Reinet farmers for the period 1786—1806. In the next two chapters, which together with Chapter One form Part One of this history, the author deals with the Stockenström administration of Graaff-Reinet during the Second British Occupation of the Cape (1806—1827) and with the events immediately before and after the Great Trek (1828—1854). These events naturally had a great influence, demographically and culturally, on the district, since the Dutch farmers left it and their places were taken by newcomers, mostly of British and German extraction.

Part Two consists of six chapters dealing with the administration of Graaff-Reinet. They emphasise the commercial and cultural expansion, the development of local government, the establishment of the Dutch Reformed Church and a number of other religious denominations, and deal with charitable, benevolent and welfare organisations. Educational institutions like private and public schools and the Graaff-Reinet college are discussed, as is the introduction of such public amenities as a library, the botanical gardens and the hospital. Part Two concludes with a chapter on public administration.

Probably the most valuable section of this history is Part Three, which deals with the Arts. It has chapters on literature (1830—1886), architecture (1786—1972), theatre, music and cultural activities (1854—1886), and also on sport and social activities (1854—1886). The chapter on the literature of the years 1830—1886 is interesting in a special way: it is more of a demonstration than a description of the literature of this time and includes many examples of local English, Dutch and Early Afrikaans poetry. In the chapter on architecture the author has exceeded the limits of the period indicated on the title page of this history and thus gives himself the opportunity of revealing almost 200 years of community development in Graaff-Reinet.

In a final chapter he attempts to evaluate the cultural history of Graaff-Reinet from 1786—1886 in relation to its economic and artistic development. Three phases in the local history are identified: in the first (1786—1850) all the emphasis was on the building of an infra-structure for a civilised society, i.e. an effective administration, economic development, and religious and educational institutions; the second (1850—1879) was dominated by unprecedented economic expansion, and a clear relationship and parallel growth were established between economics and art; in the third (1879—1886) culture and art were now considered essential for a civilized community, irrespective of the economic situation.

The reader interested in details will welcome the twenty-four appendices which contain lists of officials and militarists, shareholders in local companies, shops, hotels, brandy distillers and some 360 families resident in Graaff-Reinet in 1856.

Although not exhaustive, the Index greatly assists the researcher who does not want to read this entire history but merely requires information on a specific subject. Apart from the usual references to people and places, there are references (set in bold type) to important subjects.

The book, however, lacks a comprehensive Source List. The chapter by chapter Bibliography is not always complete or accurate. In the first chapter there are, for instance, references to books by H. Lichtenstein, P.J. van der Merwe, A. Stockenström and J. Barrow, none of which appear in the Bibliography for this chapter. Then, of course, *Theale* should read *Theal* (p.229), and *Dictionary of South African Biography* is the correct title, not *South African Biographical Dictionary* (p.231). □

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