

# BOEKBESPREKINGS

K.W. SMITH. *From frontier to midlands: a history of the Graaff-Reinet district, 1786—1910*. Institute of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University; occasional paper number twenty. Grahamstown, 1976. R6,00.

A slightly abridged version of a thesis submitted in 1975 to the Rhodes University for the Ph.D. degree, this comprehensive work on Graaff-Reinet and district is certainly a valuable contribution to the study of local history; it is an excellent example of an academic study which covers a long period of one of the Eastern Cape's oldest and most important districts.

The book is divided into two main parts. Part I, comprising six chapters, outlines the process of White settlement in the Graaff-Reinet area and gives a general picture of the main springs of political, social and economic life in the district. Part II consists of nine chapters, and deals with the most significant areas of contact between the different groups in the town and district.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, development of stock farming made dispersal into the interior inevitable and led to the expansion of the Colony. In the introductory chapter this migration of White colonists and the ultimate founding of a drosdy at Graaff-Reinet are discussed. The next two chapters give a vivid description of life in this frontier society until 1837, when the Colesberg district was created to the north of Graaff-Reinet. This marked the beginning of the changes that were to transform the frontier to a midland society.

The period between the Great Trek and the opening up of the diamond-fields was, with some exceptions, a time of considerable prosperity, and Graaff-Reinet became the leading district in the midlands. Chapters four, five and six deal with the golden age of this district (1837—1861), the era of political rise and economic decline (1861—1899), and the outbreak and aftermath of the Anglo-Boer War (1899—1910). These chapters describe among other things the development of the wool industry, farming in general, transport, educational and religious activities, and the impact of the war on the inhabitants.

Municipal government came to the town in 1845, to be followed by representative government in 1854 and the creation of Divisional Councils a year later. The first three chapters of Part II are grouped under the title "The municipal barque", and deal with matters such as the establishment of a municipal board, the water scheme and problems involved, the collapse and re-institution of municipal government and municipal representation.

Graaff-Reinet played a leading rôle in the formation of White attitudes to colour. In this frontier district White and Black frontiersmen first made meaningful contact and set the pattern for trading, employment and conflict. It was here that White South Africans first grappled with the problem of securing themselves against Black competitors by advocating separation while, at the same time, relying increasingly on Black labour (*vide* p.359). Chapters nine ("Farm labour") and ten ("Black and White in town") give an account of these relationships between Whites on the one hand, and Hottentots, Bushmen and Xhosa on the other.

The last four chapters deal with political relationships and include *inter alia* political grouping and divisions, parliamentary representation, and the influence which the Afrikaner Bond, the Jameson Raid, the Anglo-Boer War and the unification of South Africa had on the history of the Graaff-Reinet district.

In order to achieve a balance and avoid giving the impression that the events in this vast district took place in isolation with no reference to the wider community of which Graaff-Reinet was just a part, the author has attempted to relate local events to the general situation obtaining at the Cape (p.XVII). This study is based on original documentary records, together with valuable sources like local newspapers, and records of the municipal board and the town council. The source list and exhaustive index at the end will prove useful to the researcher as well as to the reader of local history. Some seven maps and several nineteenth century photographs of Graaff-Reinet are included in the book, which is available from the Institute of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.

Although the author has succeeded in arranging the bulky information, stretching over a period of more than a century, into a meaningful synthesis, he has neglected certain aspects of the history of Graaff-Reinet, e.g. cultural organisations and their activities, the enforcement of law and order, the development of communication, and trade relations. In addition, perhaps too little attention has been paid to matters such as farming, education (especially in the district) and the various religious denominations.

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