

**THE HISTORY OF GATSRAND  
FROM THE SETTLING OF THE TREKKER COMMUNITY  
CIRCA 1839 UNTIL THE PROCLAMATION OF  
CARLETONVILLE IN 1948**

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CARLETONVILLE IN 1948

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## **SUMMARY**

Gatsrand (as a series of ridges) is not only a well-known geographical feature in the Western Transvaal, but it also features prominently as a definite area in the settlement history of the whites in the Transvaal. In fact, the first farms in this area were registered simultaneously with farms in the neighbouring Mooi River area.

Owing to the inhabitants' agrarian predisposition up to the early years of the twentieth century, agriculture and stock farming formed the basis of the area's economic infrastructure. Initially, the Potchefstroom market was the nearest outlet for products. Later on, products were also sold in Johannesburg, as well as at Randfontein and Krugersdorp. In the process of the development of this enterprise, stock diseases, droughts, poverty and wars continually set the inhabitants back. Prior to the establishment of gold mines (since 1937) in the northern areas of Gatsrand, which enhanced economic development, the area's development was mainly dependent on the subsistence needs of the surrounding towns.

In this respect, the building of roads to places like Krugersdorp, Randfontein, Pretoria and Johannesburg was beneficial to the Gatsrand area, since all these routes passed through said area. Administrative duties were initially performed by a field cornet and later by a justice of the peace, who was subordinate to the magistrate of Potchefstroom. In a similar way, educational matters were dealt with by the Potchefstroom School Board. Until 1948, with the exception of Klipdrift School, there were only primary schools on several farms in the area – schools that had from one to four teachers. With outbreaks of illness, even the medical services in Potchefstroom rendered help in the Gatsrand area. Inhabitants had to travel to Potchefstroom, some of them covering great distances, if they were in need of medical care and facilities. Initially, the nearest centre for worship was also Potchefstroom. The first congregation in the Gatsrand area was founded in 1926 at Fochville, with boundaries that included the major part of this area.

Since 1937, gold mine development provided definite advances in local development. Up to 1948, six towns had been proclaimed, congregations were established, and houses and roads were built to accommodate the growing number of inhabitants. This resulted in the establishment of numerous enterprises. The number of pupils increased and smaller schools had to amalgamate with larger ones.

By 1948, it was apparent that the development in the Gatsrand area would be phenomenal due to the rich discoveries of the then established gold mines.

## **PREFACE**

I would like to extend my appreciation with the following involvements:

- ◆ Our Creator who enabled me to complete this study successfully
- ◆ My husband for his moral support and encouragement
- ◆ My parents, in-laws, relatives, friends and colleagues for their interest
- ◆ Prof. P.F. van der Schyff and Mr P.H.R. Snyman for their guidance
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E.S. van Eeden

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## INTRODUCTION

History at local and regional level is a relatively recent branching of historical science and an area that has seen but little research. <sup>1)</sup>The value thereof for national history is also disregarded only too often, while a study of the comings and goings of man in a historical community provides a more complete view of national history. <sup>2)</sup>

Interest in local history has witnessed an increase during the past quarter of a century. A common practice of especially local authorities in the current spirit of the times is to have publications with the history of towns made available – especially during centenaries. <sup>3)</sup> Graaff-Reinet, Stellenbosch, Paarl, Pietersburg, Klerksdorp and Potchefstroom are but a few examples in this regard. Carletonville, which was proclaimed in 1948, is turning 40 in 1988. The town's local authority has approached the Department of History of the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education to conduct research with regard to the history of this area.

In order to relate to the history of Carletonville from 1948 onwards, it was decided to first deal with the pre-history of the area from 1839 to 1948 by means of this dissertation. The history of the town can hardly be done justice if the preceding history of the district or region should be left out of account.

The field of study of the dissertation has been extended with regard to a number of aspects in each section to a more comprehensive territorial context. Aspects such as the history of the pioneers, the administration of justice and military development, as well as communication and politics could not be separated from the district context, while the economy, education, church and managerial development, as well as health and welfare, are to a large extent related to the history of Potchefstroom.

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<sup>1)</sup> A.G. Oberholster, "Streekgeskiedenis en die historikus", *Contree* 6, Julie 1979, p. 29.

<sup>2)</sup> P.L. Scholtz, *Streekgeskiedenis – 'n fassinierende mikrokosmos*, p. 7

<sup>3)</sup> A.G. Oberholster, "Redaksioneel", *Contree* 7, Januarie 1980, p. 3.

In the main, all of these aspects contribute to present the then ward of Gatsrand, in which the current Carletonville is located, in a broader regional historical perspective.

Very little research has been done in the past regarding the history of Gatsrand. However, a few popular publications (commemorative volumes) have actually been made available. Research regarding part of the geology, geography and economy of the area has been published in a number of manuscripts and magazine articles. In this study of the prehistory of the present-day Carletonville municipal area, the previously mentioned ward Gatsrand, as well as a small section of the ward Boven-Moorivier, was selected as the areas to be researched.

The area that included the then ward Gatsrand was located east of Potchefstroom and covered more land farther to the east – as far as the districts of Witwatersrand and Heidelberg. To the north, the ward Boven-Moorivier formed the border. Farms in this ward included in the field of study of which a large section currently forms part of the Carletonville municipal area, include Stinkhoutboom, Blaauwbank, Wilverdiend, Goudvlakte-East, Goudvlakte-West and Wonderfontein. The southern border of ward Gatsrand ran close to the current Parys and thence farther to the south-east as far as the Vereeniging district. In the dissertation, reference is made to this demarcated field of study as *Gatsrand* – as opposed to *ward Gatsrand* when issues in ward context are under discussion.

The history of Fochville, which was proclaimed in 1920 and was located in the ward Gatsrand, is touched upon only in as much as it had an influence on the development of the rest of the ward. Research covering the development of Fochville justifies a separate study. As mining activities were commenced in the area, there was more emphasis on the development of the northern parts of the area under discussion – currently part of the Carletonville municipal area.

For the rest, the ward consisted of farms only up to and including 1936. It appears from deeds that the numbers of farms were often changed – especially at a later stage when parts of the area were assigned to other districts. In the dissertation, reference is made all the time to the original farm number allocated.

On account of the widespread geographical veld and extended time span, the research applies mainly to the white population group. Even though attention is paid indirectly to the comings and goings of blacks, it should not be regarded as being comprehensive at all. It is quite clear that a broad field of study is yet lying fallow in this regard. In addition to the lengthy time span and the geographical scope of the terrain, research became complicated owing to the history of the area that became interwoven with that of the district of Potchefstroom.

Primary research had to be conducted predominantly in the Transvaal Archives Depot (TAD). Documents relating to ward Gatsrand prior to 1900 were located in particular in the archives of the magistrate of Potchefstroom and of the state secretary. However, data regarding the first three decades subsequent to the settling of Trekkers (since 1839) are rare, and for information the researcher had to rely mainly on published archivalia (public records) and secondary sources.

Sources covering the period 1900 to 1948 were found especially in private collections, church archives in the Transvaal, as well as in archivalia in the Central Archive Depot (CAD), the TAD and the Education Museum.

Use was furthermore made of documents in the possession of the Carletonville Municipality and the Losberg Dutch Reformed congregation. The government gazettes of the ZAR and the Union of South Africa as well as local newspapers together with oral testimonies and recollections (as found in the Carletonville archive collection of the PU for CHE, which is currently being compiled and is referenced to in the text as Carletonville – PU for CHE) largely contributed to fill in gaps with regard to particular themes and periods.<sup>4)</sup> Use was made mainly of secondary sources to put Gatsrand in provincial and national perspective.

\* \* \* \* \*

The geological formation of Gatsrand would become the most important consideration for the rapid development that occurred especially in the thirties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely when gold was discovered in that area.

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<sup>4)</sup> For the sake of uniformity and owing to divergent arrangement systems regarding especially primary sources and manuscript material, the term "reference" (abbreviated "ref.") is used throughout instead of the term "volume".

The area is generally characterised by a wide, flat valley surrounded by a granite reef to the northern side and the low granite hills of the Gatsrand to the south, with higher parallel hills of Pretoria quartzite farther to the south. In this dolomitic valley, we find the Wonderfontein Spruit. This is the main drainage route of the area that flows towards the Mooi River in the west.<sup>5)</sup>

The savannah type of vegetation is interrupted by the presence of shrubs that occur in sparse fashion.<sup>6)</sup> A prominent feature of the topography is the occurrence of sinkholes. Sinkholes occurred naturally in that area prior to the beginning of mining activities. Subterranean (underground) caves were formed by the solving of dolomitic rocks by groundwater. This gave rise to the sudden or gradual subsidence of ground layers.<sup>7)</sup> Mining activities accelerated this process.

The fact that ward Gatsrand formed part of the district of Potchefstroom in the period covered at the time of this study, made it impossible to secure a comprehensive census regarding the number of bywoners (white tenant farmers who laboured in return for the right to cultivate an area of land) of the Gatsrand. From statistical data of the subsequent magisterial district Oberholzer (established in August 1953 and including a section of Gatsrand), population data of the town Carletonville, as made available in 1946, can be given. At the time, there were 143 whites, 678 blacks and two coloureds living in the town, while the total white population in the district of Oberholzer was 1 504, that of the blacks 4 826, of the coloureds 128 and of the Asians 37.<sup>8)</sup>

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<sup>5)</sup> R.A. Pelletier, "Contributions to the geology of the Far West Rand", *Transactions of the Geological Society of South Africa* XL, 26 July 1937, p. 128.

<sup>6)</sup> A.M. Heyns, *'n Geografiese ondersoek na die landboukleinhoewes in die gebied Randfontein-Welverdiend*, p. 2.

<sup>7)</sup> A. Nieuwoudt, *Die beplanning van die ontwikkelende verspreide stad in die gebied Carletonville, Fochville en Westonaria*, pp. 59 and 61.

<sup>8)</sup> Republiek van Suid-Afrika, *BURO VIR STATISTIEK: Stedelike en plattelandse bevolking van Suid-Afrika, 1904-1960: Verslag nr. 02-02-01*, pp. 91, 95, 99, 104 and 182.



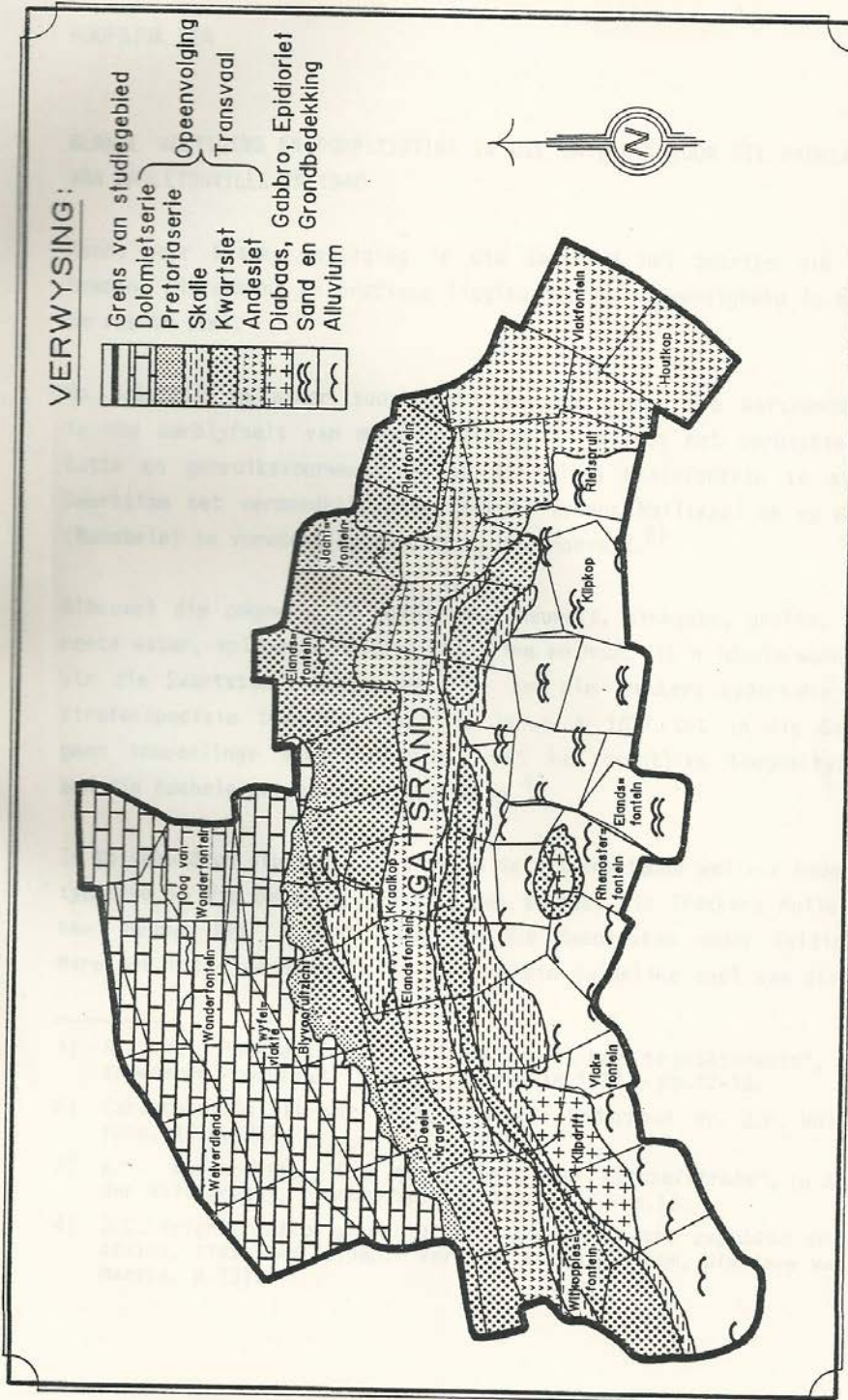
AN AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF CARLETONVILLE AND ENVIRONS CIRCA 1950

Painted Photograph: Dr J.F. Wolmarans (Carletonville)



MAP 1 LOCATION OF GATSRAND

Source: F.J. Potgieter, Die vestiging van die Blanke in Transvaal, 1837-1886, met spesiale verwysing na die verhouding tussen die mens en die omgewing [The settling of whites in the Transvaal, 1837-1886, with special reference to the relationship between man and the environment]



KAART 2 'n VEREENVOUDIGDE KAART VAN DIE GEOLOGIE VAN DIE GATSRAND

BRONNE: R.A. PELLETIER, "Contributions to the geology of the Far West Rand" Geographical Society S.A. XL, 26.7.1937, plaat VII.  
 GEOLOGIESE REEKS, 1:25000, kaart 2626, Wes-Rand.

MAP 2 SIMPLIFIED MAP OF THE GEOGRAPHY OF GATSRAND