

The Theron Family

By André Theron Morkel

I tell about my mother Catharina Elizabeth Morkel (née Theron) in the Dan and Kitty Morkel story. Here I will focus on the rest of the Theron family, mainly the first Huguenot refugee at the Cape. Apart from the family line I know very little about the family after the stamouer Jacques Therond until we get to my maternal grandfather, Charl David Theron, and even about him I have only little to tell.

Stamouer Jacques Therond (the “d” at the end was soon dropped) was a Huguenot who came from Nîmes, the capital of Lanquedoc in the south of France. (More about the Huguenots in “Our French Connection”). After the Edict of Nantes providing religious freedom was revoked by Louis XIV in 1684, he fled first to Dauphine and then to Switzerland. From there he went to Holland and took the oath of loyalty with the Middelburg (Zeeland) chamber of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). His parents and brothers Moyze (Moses) and Pierre stayed behind in Nîmes. There are many Therons in present day Lanquedoc and neighbouring regions.

Jacques left Goree in the Netherlands on 3 February 1688 on the ship *Oosterland* and arrived at the Cape on 26 April 1688, a journey of almost three months. He was listed as *kompanjiesoldaat* (company soldier – this was a fairly common term used for all kinds of employees of the VOC). He drew a modest pay (according to D.F. Theron, a sum of £9.0s.6d – the original Dutch currency was converted by someone to English pounds, shillings and pence – a fairly meaningless exercise with varying exchange rates) and was given land in the Drakenstein area. He named his farm *Lanquedoc* which was next door to a distant relative, Jacques Imbert.

In 1697 Jacques married Marie Jeanne des Pres (1675 – 1763) daughter of another Huguenot, Hercule de Pres (1645 – 1695). (The name later became du Preez)

Jacques acquired title to *Lanquedoc* on 8 November 1710 (the bureaucratic wheels ground slowly, also in those days). He also rented land from Jacobus de Savoye in the *Wamakersvallei* (lit. wagonmakers valley), now Wellington. In 1713 he resigned as Heemraad for Drakenstein and moved to Het Land van Waveren, present day Tulbagh, where in 1714 he acquired the farm *La Rhone*. He was active in the Tulbagh community, as Heemraad, an elder in the church and protector (*beskermheer*) of the Roodesand pass which connected the valley of the Breede River where Tulbagh was located, with the Colony.

In 1719, twenty years after he arrived at the Cape, Jacques received a letter from his father Jaques in France, as below. Apart from the normal family greetings, it mentions that they kept a low profile in practising their religion and that some galley slaves had been freed. This is the only letter of this kind that I am aware of, reminding us of the finality of separation when our ancestors left Europe for the Cape.

My dear child,

Was I not glad to hear from Mr Fisquet that you are living under the care of our loving Lord (as in Lord Jesus), are married and have a family. Just think what joy it was for me in my old age. My prayer is that our Loving Father will grant me grace to hear directly from you about your well-being. I believe that the Lord will grant me this wish through his grace provided you receive my letter.

Your brother Moyze and his family sends their greetings, they are all well and healthy. He was married after your departure and his wife has two sons and a daughter. Their oldest son, your nephew, is already married and has a little son. Also your uncles Moyze and Pierre Therond with their wives and

children are all well and send warm greetings. The sons of your cousin Moyze wish you and wife and children only the best. I now live with your nephew (your brother's child) Daniel where, according to god's will I am seeing my last days out in acceptance and also to write you this letter. Four of your uncles Moyze and Pierre's daughters are married. Also they send greetings. Your cousin that lives in Calvisson and his whole family greets you. His father, my oldest brother, died about 8 years ago, but his widow is healthy and send greetings.

This, my dear child, is all that I now have to write. I pray our Dear Lord to bless you in everything when you receive this letter. Send your reply to the address of your brother Moyze in the suburb Prescheurs.

About national news – it was announced in Nimes with drums and trumpets that France and Spain are at war – the first time it was done in this way. Nothing is said anymore about our religion. We pray in our homes but are carefully watched that we do not have any gatherings. The original galley slaves have been freed, but two years ago new ones were installed.

*Your loving father.
Jaques Therond.
Nimes Languedoc. 2 April 1719.*

Mr Fisquet in the letter was probably Jean Fisquet of the Cevennes, a corporal employed by the VOC who visited the Cape in 1715. (Note from Jean Le Roux, Paarl). The letter is widely quoted in websites about the Theron family and is widely accepted as valid. The facts mentioned have been checked.. It would originally have been in French and has been translated into Dutch, then Afrikaans and finally as above into English. I give it in Afrikaans in the Appendix.

Jacques and Maria had seven children from 1698 to 1718. My mother's line stems from the fourth child, Pierre (Pieter) Theron 1709 – 1776. Maria wrote pious verses about the names she gave most of her children. On Theron websites the verses are given in Dutch and Afrikaans. They were most likely written in French.

On the occasion of Pierre's birth in 1709 Maria wrote "And now I shall name my son Peter. May he in truth be like Peter (the apostle). Oh Lord bless him on this earth and give him also like Peter heavenly worth." I freely translated from the Afrikaans which reads as:

*"Nou die een syn naam sal ek Petrus laat lees.
Mag hy dan in waarheid 'n Petrus ook wees.
Ag seen hom Here, soos Petrus op aarde,
en gee hom soos Petrus, ook hemelse waarde."*

Pierre (or Pieter) Theron married twice and had ten children. He inherited his father's farm La Rhone in the Tulbagh district and became a wealthy owner of several farms. His grandson, Pieter Carel Theron (1771 – 1841) moved as a teacher to Graaff Reinet on the eastern border area of the colony. Graaff Reinet offered good irrigation farming in a sparsely settled Arizona-like climate. The later descendents farmed in the Graaff Reinet district where my grandfather, Charl David Theron was born in 1869. On our winter vacation visits to the Karoo, my mother used to visit here aging uncles in Graaff Reinet.

My grandfather, Charl David Theron (1869 – 1918) was the tenth child of Pieter Andreas Theron and Magdalena Elizabeth Niewoudt. He married Frida Magadelena Stahl in Cape Town. I have it somewhere in my memory that my grandmother and her sister Charlotte (Auntie Lottie) were German orphans adopted by a Herr Stahl, a Cape Town businessman. Somewhere in their background they had German "von Dyck" ancestors. Charl David was active with pastoral care for the under-

privileged in the church (Dutch Reformed) at various locations such as an orphanage at Langlaagte in Johannesburg and Beaconsfield in Kimberley. My mother was born at Langlaagte in 1899 at the outbreak of the Anglo Boer war and her birth certificate was lost in the hostilities.

By 1909 the family lived in the Paarl where he ministered to the coloured congregation as Eerwaarde Theron. (Eerwaarde was a title used for missionaries and ministers of the coloured churches. They had a lesser status and pay than the ministers of the white church). He died in 1918 in the influenza epidemic which was sweeping the world, and left behind his widow and 6 children ranging from 19 (my mother) to 5 years. His salary was modest when he was alive and the pension for his widow, assuming there was one would have been meager.

My mother and the oldest brother Andreas had further education but the younger children had to find work as soon as they finished school. Part of the earnings of those who worked went to support my grandmother and the siblings still at school. My mother attended a teachers college in Paarl and the oldest son, Andreas Johannes (I knew him as oom Andries, and he was my godfather) went to Stellenbosch University to study education. While at Stellenbosch his roommate was Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd, who later became prime minister of South Africa.

The little I know about my grandfather are small things – he liked to drink water with his meals even though this was commonly thought to be bad as it diluted digestive juices. I rather like this as small evidence that he was willing to buck accepted wisdom. The other story happened when his son, Charl David (I knew him as oom Charles) had to help kill a chicken for the pot. My grandfather held the neck for Charl to wield the axe. The boy could not bear looking at what he had to do and, when he chopped sliced off part of his father's thumb. Sadly these trivial stories are the few anecdotes I know of a man whose life's work was dedicated to helping the poor and disadvantaged for very little material reward.

After my mother married, my grandmother and the youngest sister Emmie Margaretha (tant Emmie) moved to a small house on our farm. At a later stage another sister, tant Lenie also moved in with three children after her divorce. For many years they lived crammed into the small house with two bedrooms and an outside dunny. They had to walk over to our house to take a bath. Eventually they moved to a more regular house in the Strand.

There was a story in our family that my grandfather's father lost money with ostriches. Ostrich feathers were high fashion during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Fortunes were made primarily in the town of Oudtshoorn where one can still visit some of the stately homes (ostrich palaces) built during that time. Prices of feathers spiralled upwards and our Theron ancestor paid a small fortune for a breeding pair of ostriches. The climate and irrigated lands of Graaff Reinet were ideal for raising ostriches.. In 1914, with the outbreak of the first world war and increased use of motorcars, ostrich feathers were suddenly out of fashion and the whole investment bubble burst. The expensive breeding pair became worthless overnight. The story was most likely true but it would not have been Pieter Carel Theron, my great grandfather. He died in 1895 while the ostrich bubble burst in 1914. It probably involved a brother or other relative in Graaff Reinet.

Sources and Notes:

1. I received information about the Theron family from various members of the internet chatrooms, Genforum and SA Genealogy. Members such as Jean Le Roux from Paarl, and Juna Malherbe of the Huguenot Museum in Franschoek have been most helpful. I received copies of the famous letter from France and the Mother's verses from more than one source. I also used information from a history of the family compiled by D.F. Theron of Wellington, October 2007.
2. The family line from Stamouer Jacques Therond to my mother was kindly provided by Dr. Chris Theron of Upington, South Africa.

Family Line for Catharina Elizabeth Morkel (née Theron)

- a1 Jacques THERON(D)** Nimes, Languedoc * 15.5.1668.. Arrive at the Cape of Good Hope on the ship Oosterland. † Drakenstein (Paarl) 2.12.1739 x **1697 Marie Jeanne DES PRES** (du Preez) of Béthune * 1675 d.o. Hercules de Pres of Kortryk, French refugee and Cecilia d'Atis.
- a1b4 Pierre (Pieter)** * 10.8. 1709 ~ Drakenstein 22.9.1709, † 3.6.1778 x Paarl 19.4.1732 Anna PRETORIUS d.o. Lodewyk Pretorius and Maria Rossouw xx **29.1.1741 Anna DU PLESSIS** d.o. Jean Louis du Plessis and Madeleine Rossouw.
- a1b4c5 Jan** ~ 29.12.1741 † 1814 x **6.5.1770 Maria Justina RYKVOET** ~ 24.11.1748 d.o. Carel Christoffel Rykvoet and Johanna van Ellewee xx 1.5.1774 Hester Magalena DE VILLIERS ~ 2.10.1759, † 1780 d.o. Pieter de Villiers and Magdalena Gertruida du Plessis xxx 11.12.1781 Geertruy Magdalena DU PLESSIS ~ 7.11.1762 (she xx Paarl 29.8.1813 Carel de Vogel) d.o. Charl du Plessis and Geertruy Boeiens.
- a1b4c5d1 Pieter Carel** ~ 20.6.1771, Teacher † Rietvlei, district Sneeuberg Graaff Reinet 23.8.1841 x Cape Town 14.8.1798 **Aletta Catharina STEENBERG** ~ 10.10.1779 d.o. Jan Joost Steenberg (Steinberg) and Aletta Catharina Ferryn.
- a1b4c5d1e1 Pieter Andreas** * 22.7.1799 ~ Tulbagh 11.8.1799, Farmer, Rietvlei, Graaf Reinet 17.5.1843 x Somerset East 22.10.1826 **Hester Jacoba Maria BURGER** ~ 30.3.1807, † Graaff Reinet 31.3.1884, d.o. Barend Bartholomeus Burger and Rachel Dippenaar.
- a1b4c5d1e1f1 Pieter Andries** * 29.8.1826 ~ Graaff Reinet 4.2.1827 † 17.11.1895 x Graaf Reinet 18.9.1848 **Magdalena Elizabeth NIEWOUDT**.
- a1b4c5d1e1f1g10 Charl David (my maternal grandfather)** * 10.10.1869 ~ Graaff Reinet 19.12.1869, missionary † Paarl 10.10.1918 x Cape Town, **Frida Magdalena STAHL** * Hamburg, Germany 15.5.1872 † Strand 16.4.1954, d.o. Frederick Stahl.
- h1 Catharina Elizabeth (my mother)** * Langlaagte (Johannesburg) 15.3.1899 ~ Langlaagte 9.4.1899 † 10.7.1980 x 28.6.1924 **Daniel Johannes MORKEL (my father)**.
- h2 Andreas Johannes (Oom Andries) * Beaconsfield (Kimberley) 21.11.1901
- h3 Charl David (Oom Charles) * Beaconsfield (Kimberley) 15.1.1903
- h4 Magdalena Frida (Tant Lenie) * Johannesburg 13.8.1904 ~ Fordsburg (Johannesburg) 9.9.1906
- h5 Frederick Cornelius (died young – I never knew him) Johannesburg 5.8.1906 ~ Fordsburg 9.9.1906.
- h6 Elsa Johanna (Tant Tokkie) * Paarl 29.12 1909 ~ Paarl 23.2.1910
- h7 Emmie Margaretha (Tant Emmie) 8 Paarl 20.11.1912 ~ Paarl 5.1.1913.

Source: **Dr Chris Theron. Upington, South Africa. 2002. Private communication.**

Appendices

1. Die brief van Frankryk in Afrikaans:

"My liewe kind,

Was ek nie bly om van Mnr. Fisquet te hoor dat jy onder die sorg van die Liewe Heer aan die Kaap woon, getroud is en 'n gesin het nie. Dink net watter vreugde dit vir my op my oudag was. My bede is dat ons Liewe Vader my genadig wil wees om voor my dood van jouself te mag verneem aangaande jou welsyn. Ek glo dat die Heer deur Sy goedheid aan hierdie wens sal voldoen mits jy my brief ontvang.

Jou broer Moyze (Moses) en sy gesin stuur groete, hulle is almal fris en gesond. Hy is na jou vertrek getroud en sy vrou het twee seuns en 'n dogter. Hul oudste seun, jou nefie, is ook al getroud en het 'n seuntjie. Ook jou ooms Moyze en Pierre Therond met hul vrouens en kinders is almal wel en stuur hartlike groete. Die seuns van jou neef Moyze wens jou met vrou en kinders net die beste toe. Ek woon nou by jou nefie (broerskind) Daniel waar ek volgens Gods wil waarin ek my berus, my laaste dae slyt en ook hierdie brief skryf. Vier van jou ooms Moyze en Pierre se dogters is getroud. Ook hulle stuur groete. Jou neef wat in Calvisson woon en sy hele gesin groet jou. Sy vader, my oudste broer, is sowat agt jaar gelede oorlede, maar sy weduwee is gesond en stuur groete.

Dit, my liewe kind, is al wat ek nou het om te skryf. Ek bid onse Liewe Heer om jou in alles te sien wanneer jy hierdie brief ontvang. Rig jou antwoord aan die adres van jou broer Moyze in die voorstad Prescheurs.

Aangaande die landsnuus--Dit is op 3 Desember 1718 met tamboer en trompetgeskral in Nimes aangekondig dat Frankryk en Spanje in oorlog verkeer-- Die eerste keer wat dit so gedoen word. Daar word nie meer iets oor ons Godsdienste gese nie. Ons bid in ons huise, maar word fyn dopgehou om te verseker dat ons geen samekomste hou nie. Die oorspronklike galeislawe is vrygelaat, maar twee jaar gelede is nuwes ingestel.

*Jou liefhebbende Vader,
Jacques Therond Nimes Languedoc 2 April 1719"*

2. Die Versies van Maria des Pres by die geboorte van haar kinders:

Daar is verskeie vertalings van Maria se versies op die internet. Die volgende twee weergawes is van Jean Le Roux:

Weergawe 1: (* = gebore)

Vir Marie*1698

"Die eerste haar naam is Maria, omdat
Uit Maria is gebore die Hemelse skat.
Mag ons Vader haar bring, waar Maria nou woon,
En die Hemelse Skat ons ewig beloon."

Vir Jacques *1699

"k Het Jacob zijn naam vir zijn oudste gekies,
Mag hy nooit die seen van Jacpb verlies,

Mog Jacob zijn seen hom volg tot sy dood,
en hy dan gedra word in Abrahams skoot."

Vir Pierre *1709

"Nou die een syn naam sal ek Petrus laat lees.
Mag hy dan in waarheid 'n Petrus ook wees.
Ag seen hom Here, soos Petrus op aarde,
en gee hom soos Petrus, ook hemelse waarde."

Vir Thomas Arnoldus *1716

"Aan Thomas het Jesus sy wonde getoon,
Vertrou dan op Jesus, my Thomas, my soon,
As jy dan op Jesus soos Thomas vertrou,
Dan sal jy soos Thomas hom eenmaal aanskou."

As slot versie skryf sy :-

"O Vader, wat al die vrome behoed,
O seen my kinders deur Jesus se bloed,
O bring ons tog almal verheerlik daarbowe,
dan sal ons tesame vir ewig U lowe."

Weergawe 2:

1. Anno 1698 den 7 Augustus is gebooren Marie Theron.
Den eerste van hier was Maria verkooren
Een Maria heeft voor dees den groten schat gebooren
De vader brengt haar daar waar Maria nu woont
En daar dees Edele schat ons Eeuwiglijk Loont.
2. Anno 1699 den 9 July is gebooren Jaques Theron
Jakob den eerste zoon des Jacobs stam verkiezen
Des Jacobs zeegen rijk laat hem hier niet verliezen
Brenge hem ook zeegens vol des Jacobs aan den Dag
Dat hij ook Eeuwiglijk Triomph verkrijgen kan.
3. Anno 1709 den 10 Augustus is geboren Piter Theron
En nu mijn ander zoon zal ik ook Piter noemen
Petrus getrouwigheid laat hem dan bij hem koomen
Heer maakt hem zegenrijk alhier op deze aarden
Maakt als Petrus gelijk in hemel groot van waarden.
4. Anno 1712 den 30 April is gebooren Johannes Theron
Johannes heeft voor dees aan uwen borst beleegen
Laat dezen Jongen maat ontfangen uwen zeegen
Legt hem in uwen schoot, zoo is hij zeker vrij
In allen dat hij doet ook uwen zegen zij.
5. Anno 1716 den 12 Maj is gebooren Thomas Theron
Aan Thomas heeft de Heer zijne wonden laten schouwen
Hij set op Hem daarna zijn vast Eeuwig vertrouwen
Thomas bouwt daarop u zeegens fundament
Soo blijft gij eeuwig staan in Thomas genade fent.
6. Anno 1718 den 27 Augustus is gebooren David Theron
David na Gods harte werden nu en niet geagt
Den zegen was door hem in 't huis Jesse gebragt
Heer laat ook David groeijen in de voorhoven soet
Geeft hem ook Davids zegen bewaart hem voor tegenspoed.

Andre,

Die eerste stel versies het ek gekry in die "Hugenote-Familieboek" van Mev AJ Kannemeyer, gedruk Kaapstad 1939. Die tweede verwerking kom uit "Die Hugonote aan die Kaap" deur Prof JLM Franken van Stellenbosch en gepubliseer in 1978 deur die Argiefjaarboek. Franken meld dat hy die versies oorgeneem het uit die geslagsregister opgestel deur PF Theron tussen 1823 en 1826 en gepubliseer in 1827. Theron het dit op sy beurt oorgeneem uit die oorspronklike geskrifte van die stammoeder wat destyds beskikbaar in die Grey-versameling. Hierdie dokumente het sedertdien verlore gegaan, maar verskeie ander navorsers soos Noble het egter nog die oorspronklike dokument onder oe gehad. Noble het selfs sommige versies in Engels

vertaal. Alles in ag genome, wil dit voorkom asof Franken se weergawe baie na aan die oorspronklike moet wees. Moontlik het Mev Kannemeyer Noble se Engelse vertaling in Afrikaans oorgesit.

Vir sover dit die Theron brief aanbetref, bestaan daar geen rede om die bestaan daarvan te betwyfel nie. Navorsers Soos Proff. Franken en later Boucher van Unisa het die historiese feite soos genoem in die brief noukeurig nagegaan en korrek bevind.

*Daar is heelwat gegewens oor jou oupa Theron by Drakenstein Heemkring. Ek herinner my dat ek jare gelede besonderhede oor hom aan een van sy kleinkinders verskaf het. Was dit aan jou?
Vriendelike Groete,
Jean le Roux, Paarl. 17 April 2008.*

D.F. Theron in sy vertelling (Oktober 2007) van sy lyn van die Theron familie gee die volgende vertaling van die versies:

(B1): Maria, gebore 17/8/1698 – “Die eerste haar naam is Maria, omdat uit Maria gebore is die Hemelse skat. Mag ons Vader haar bring, waar Maria nou woon, En die Hemelse Skat ons vir ewig beloon.”

(B2): Jacques (gebore 7/7/1699 - 1756) – “’k het Jacob sy naam vir die oudste gekies, Mag hy nooit die seen van Jacob verlies, Mog Jacob se seën hom volg tot sy dood en hy dan gedra word in Abrahams skoot.”

(B4) Pierre gebore 10 Augustus 1709 – “ou die een syn naam sal Petrus laat lees. Mag hy haar in waarheid ‘n Petrus ook wees. Ag seën hom Here, soos Petrus op aarde, en gee hom soos Petrus ook hemelse waarde.”

(B6) Thomas Arnoldus (28 April 1716 - 1790) – “Aan Thomas het Jesus sy wonde getoon, vertrou dan op Jesus Thomas my soon, As jy daar op Jesus soos Thomas vertrou, dan sal jy soos Thomas Hom eenmaal aanskou.”

Met die dood van haar eggenoot skryf die moeder: “Ano 1739 in die nag tussen die eerste en tweede Desember, omtrent kwart voor tienuur, is my eggenote Jacques Theron oorlede in die ouderdom van 71 jare, 6 maande en 16 dae, nadat ons 42 en ‘n halfjaar getroud was.” Na die aantekeninge sluit sy af met die woorde: “ O Vader, wat al die vrome behoed. O seën my kinders deur Jesus bloed, O bring ons tog almal verheerlik daarbowe. Dan sal ons tesame vir ewig U lowe.
