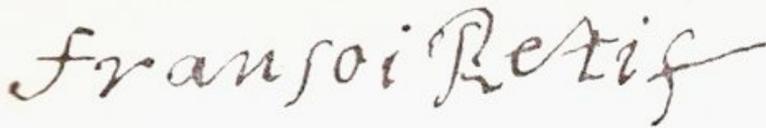


The Founding Generation



Fransoi Retif

The French Huguenot

1663 – 1721



**Francois Retif the Huguenot
The First Generation**

02.02.1663 – 23.09.1721

Francois Retif, born in Mer near Blois in France

Married 02.05.1700

Marié Mouij, born in Calais, France (15.05.1685 – 23.09.1758)

1. Maria (16.05.1702 – circa 1738)
Married 10.04.1729
Pierre (Pieter) Rossouw (1703 - ?) from Hex River
A widowed son of Francois's sister Anne
2. Anna (20.10.1704 – circa 1764)
Married 16.05.1728
Pierre (Pieter) Hugo (1710 – 04.03.1752)
A cousin's son in Hex River
3. Jacques (16.10.1706) died in infancy
4. **Francois (07.04.1708 - circa 1789), our ancestor**
Married 03.12.1741
Anna Marais (about 1722 – 24.05.1777)
A cousin's daughter
5. Pierre (circa 1712) died in infancy
6. Paulus (27.05.1714 - ?)
Married 19.02.1743
Dorothea Melius, christened 22.08.1717
7. Pierre (13.12.1716 – 07.06.1800) who was sometimes confused
Did not marry
8. Hester (01.02.1719 – 15.04.1805)
Married (?)
Jacques Marais (12.07.1709 – 06.06.1751)
9. Magdalena (20.11.1720 – 10.04.1817)
Married 29.01.1747
Tielman Roos (22.01.1728 – 28.08.1780) died in Holland

The map on previous page is taken from
In the Steps of Piet Retief by Eily and Jack Gledhill

1. Francois Retif, the Huguenot

Francois and his sister, Anne

Blois is an ancient city lying on and around a steep hill on the banks of the Loire, to the south of Paris. The road runs along the river in beautiful scenery all the way to Orleans. Seven miles from Blois there is a lovely castle, Menars, surrounded by a parkland. Just across from it there is a small town called Menars-de-ville, and a few miles further on we reach Mer. It is here that Francois Retif, the Huguenot and founding father of our family in this country, was born on 2 February 1663.

Albeut and Jean, Catholic Retifs living at Blois near Mer, came to South Africa for the first time on invitation in 1971, with their daughter Arlette. They had been invited by Bertrand Retief of Pretoria who had made contact with them while on holiday in France. They told of how, centuries ago, the first Protestant church at Mer was burnt down and the pastor hanged from a tree. The church was rebuilt later using the same stones. In 1680 it was again burnt to the ground and after that many Huguenots fled for their lives. It is believed that Francois and his young sister, Anne, were amongst them. They would have been 17 and 13 at the time. Years later this little Protestant church in Mer was rebuilt for a third time, again using the same stones. It is still in use today. An article about the Retif's visit was printed in Rooi Rose on 18 October 2000.



When the Retifs visited Welvanpas, they gave this picture of Mer, taken in 1870, to my brother Dan. Mer probably looked much like this when Francois and his sister Anne lived there.

After the years of feeling that they had no roots, the invitation from the Dutch East India Company to Huguenots to go out to the Cape of Good Hope must have filled them with a new enthusiasm for their future. To have their own property in a Protestant place that had a Mediterranean climate, sounded like a dream. Their ship, the Borsenburg, was one of the first group of seven to take Huguenots to the Cape. Francois was 25 and his sister Anne, 21 when they boarded the Chamber of Amsterdam sailing ship at Texel on a bitter January day in 1688. They had a safe passage of nearly four months to the Cape and were lucky that there were no deaths on the ship during the voyage. It so happens that the first Lombards to come out to the Cape, were also on this ship. I hope that when they dropped anchor at the fairest Cape in May, it was on a beautiful autumn day.

On arrival Francois is recorded as "francois retijff d' Switser", so we can assume that they had spent some time in Switzerland after they left France and probably understood some Dutch and German as well by then. Soon after their arrival at the Cape, the extra "e" was written into their surname by the Dutch notaries, and the spelling changed to Retief. Simon van der Stel allocated farms, each 60 morgen, to the Huguenots who arrived between April and August 1688.

After the allocation of their goods and provisions, the Company's soldiers conveyed them to their land in wagons. They had free burgher status and were settled between the Dutch free burghers. This was a nasty shock to them as they had assumed that they would be settled together in a group. To add insult to injury, the 23 Dutch free burghers who had been settled in the Berg River valley the previous year, naturally had the most arable land in the area allocated to them.

The Huguenots soon discovered that the Drakenstein valley was not considered very good farming land. They found, as they later explained, that their land had rocky and stony areas, boggy areas with deep pools, and hippos that were hardly likely to respect a ploughed field. Some complained that scarcely six morgen of the 60 morgen, was arable. Governor Willem van der Stel is quoted as saying later that "Drakenstein is a bad and watery place, where people live too near each other and cannot get on."

For most of the first year Anne could help her brother get started. Francois's name is mentioned with a large number who all received a similar *voorschot* [allocation of goods] on account so that they could start up their farms. He was one of those who was able to sign his name in receipt of his material. On our farm there is a framed picture of the signatures of all the Huguenots and he signed his name "fransoiRetif", all in one word with a small f as given. As a bachelor he had to share some of the allocated material with three other bachelors. With these resources he had to manage as best he could. It was a big disadvantage that his starter pack was smaller than that of a married person. Couples were being encouraged, and this gave them a head start on the bachelors. Of course, they did not count his sister as a partner.

The starter pack included seed for farming, tools for building, a gun and shot for hunting and basics for the kitchen. Francois had to share a plough, an iron pot, lead, rifles and shot. He even had a quarter share in ten head of cattle. There was quite a wagonload of supplies that had to be stored and a shack had to be erected as soon as possible to keep everything safe. The very first homes were extremely basic. How Francois would have envied the squatters of today their black plastic, bits of packing cases and corrugated iron or asbestos sheets. Wattle and daub houses were constructed of timber and earth and roofed with the *biesie* that grew all over. He would have made a timber framework with twigs woven (wattled) through it and then roughly plastered it with clay. Then he had to chop down young indigenous trees for rafters. Fortunately they had been allocated *vaderlands zeilgaren* to stitch the thatch onto the roof. He might even have put in a reeded ceiling.

There was no such thing as glass for windowpanes. Sturdy wooden shutters with leather hinges had to be made and closed to keep bad weather out. This meant that they had to light a candle or lamp on a rainy day. Perhaps Anne put a thin piece of linen stiffened with wax in the window openings to keep the insects out and let some light through. It was hard work to clear a piece of veld and put in seed for the first crop of wheat. Survival was the name of the game, and so, as the four had to share things like a plough, they were interdependent. It is my guess that they helped each other in true pioneer style. If they shared the pot, the gun and the shot, they would be able to rotate the job of hunting for the meal as well, and it doesn't sound as if they had to go very far to find their supper. They may even have had milk from their shared cattle.

Three months after the arrival of Francois and Anne, the much-awaited moment arrived on 19 August, when the Zuid Beveland sailed into Table Bay in stormy weather, bringing their very own minister, Dominee Simond. He had been the minister of the French refugees even before they left Holland and was very important to them. Ds. Simond was a man of 37 and newly married. Those of the French community who were nearby, came to the shore to welcome the ship. A strong wind was blowing that day and as they watched with bated breath, the first landing boat with passengers was lowered and they saw it struggling in the surf. To their horror it capsized, but fortunately Ds. Simond and his wife were still on board. At last, they were brought safely to the shore and given a heartfelt welcome. The Huguenots felt that everything would be all right now that their own minister had arrived.

Ds. Simond was employed and paid by the Dutch East India Company which had the responsibility of providing him with accommodation. His young wife must have been shocked when they were given ownership of a piece of land in the remote Banhoek. A horse and a wagon with oxen were lent to them for transport and they were provided with two carpenters and material for building a house. There was a great deal for Ds. Simond to do and his first move was to call on all the Huguenots on the land allotted to them. He was barraged with complaints that the farms were poor and not placed together. They had already sent a delegation to see Simon

1. Francois Retif, the Huguenot

van der Stel, informing him that they would rather be settled as a group, but the Company was not negotiable on this point. Ds. Simond was asked to write to Simon van der Stel, to ask for a better land deal for the Huguenots. The result was that Simon van der Stel sent someone to investigate and then allowed the Huguenots to move to land on both sides of the Berg River.

All this took time, and by then Francois's sister Anne was married to Pierre Rousseau. He had also been a passenger on the *Borssenburg* and came from their neighbouring town, Menars-de-Ville. They were married about a year after their arrival. If moving to the Berg River meant building another abode, it may not have been such a bad thing. The roof timbers could possibly have been re-used and they had certainly gained building experience by then. The brother and sister were now living on adjoining farms a short distance from the others, in the wilds of Drakenstein near Wemmershoek. Francois named his farm La Paris, and Pierre and Anne named their farm L'Arc d'Orleans. These were wonderful names showing both nostalgia and great hopes of making a success of their new venture.

Francois is described as living in Drakenstein "*bij't Olijfants pad.*" It is interesting to note that Franschoek was originally known as Olifantshoek and there were some nasty encounters with elephants among the early settlers. The elephants used to come from inland once a year to calve in that vicinity on the banks of the Berg River. What a sight to see those great animals come plodding over the Franschoek mountains in their leisurely way. The Franschoek Pass was later built on the elephants' path. One old man told the historian Alice Fane Trotter, of how his grandfather remembered watching the departure of the last elephant with her calf around 1840. "Eastward over the mountainside they went, and none were ever seen again."

In many ways, each day was a fight for survival, but also a great adventure. Francois was young and working towards his own future. He was not alone as all around him the other farmers were pioneering as well and also struggling. They cleared land, ploughed it and planted the wheat they had been issued. They shared their experience and learnt from each other. Baboons would come to investigate and wild pigs, buck, birds and locusts caused damage as they had done in the time of Van Riebeeck. Although the Huguenots worked hard, they remained very poor.

In April, almost a year after Francois arrived at the Cape, Simon van der Stel wrote to the Batavian Council, who administered the Cape. He described the extreme poverty of the Huguenots, writing that they needed financial assistance. As a result they received 600 riksdalers from a poor fund. In 1690, Francois received 130 gulden which was very welcome, from this fund, and he may have been able to buy a slave. What he needed most was a helper and to increase his stock. His sister Anne and Pierre by now had one child and as a family they received 400 gulden from the poor fund. This was more than three times his allowance, so they had an advantage over him and could acquire a substantial amount of stock.

The question of having their own congregation and church was of the greatest importance to Francois and the other Huguenots. It was not unreasonable for them to have assumed they would be allowed to have their own church when they were told they could bring their own minister. After Ds. Simond had arrived, they assumed that this goal would at last be realised. However, he could only preach at their gathering in Drakenstein on alternate Sundays as he was given other preaching duties as well. When he could not be present, Paul Roux, their *voorleser* [prelector], read a sermon in French.

Long before he received a reply the letter to the Batavian Council about the plight of the Huguenots, Ds. Simond and a delegation of four men went to see him. They informed him of their need to have a separate congregation and their own church. They also told him that they found their present situation untenable. Unfortunately their timing was bad. Although Simon van der Stel had not yet received a reply from the Batavian Council, he felt he had done what he could. As there was bad blood between the French and Dutch in Europe at the time, this made Van der Stel uneasy about the attitude of the French at the Cape and gave him even more reason to want to integrate the French into the Dutch community as soon as possible. Ds. Simond and his delegation found Van der Stel unapproachable and they were dismissed as impertinent.

All was not lost. Even before they had gone to see Simon van der Stel, Ds. Simond had also written to the Heeren XV11 [Chamber of XVII] in Holland, with a request from the Huguenots to establish their own congregation.

When there was still no reply after a year had passed, their hopes faded. After almost two years the answer finally came. The good news was that they were given permission to have a

separate church and congregation. However, there were conditions that showed very clearly that the Dutch East India Company's Dutch language policy was as strong as ever. All the members of the church council (elders and deacons) had to be able to speak Dutch. This excluded many of the older Huguenots. The church council had to be approved by the Council of Policies so they still had the final say. Teachers also had to be bilingual and French children had to learn Dutch at school.

After waiting two long years for the reply from Holland, another three years passed as the local Council dragged its feet before Ds. Simond acquired a piece of land for a church. It was near the school in Simondium, at Babylon's Toren. What they erected was hardly a church and was described as "*een hokje* [a hovel]" in the church minutes. A graveyard must have been situated in the vicinity. The Huguenots did not like to owe money and they were all trying to pay back their debts to the Company and trying to establish themselves, against terrific odds. No one was in a financial position to do very much about the church, however much they cared.

Life was not easy for the Huguenots. The roads were dusty wagon tracks in summer and turned into slippery, muddy sloods in winter. Danger lurked at every turn from dangerous animals like lions, leopards, elephants, snakes and even hippos down at the river. There was also the problem of vagrants and bands of dissatisfied Hottentots, as they were known at the time. It was a risk to travel at all and Francois could not be sure his belongings would still be there when he returned. As far as the farming was concerned, the weather was unpredictable, but I believe that he soon got the measure of the prevailing winds and seasons.

The great day arrived when the settlers gathered their first grain crops. It was an important crop and the yield from the virgin soil must have been magnificent. Private milling was discouraged by the Company. However, it seems that when the grain was ready, a mill may well have been available, because there is a record of a water corn-mill that served the whole Drakenstein district being repaired later and it may well have been erected at that time.

A Frenchman, Francois Leguat, who visited the Cape ten years after the first Huguenots arrived, wrote that they had been provided with land, tools, food and clothing, all on account. Another visitor wrote that they had also received rations of ship's biscuits, dried peas and salt meat. They had indeed been helped to make a start and they probably didn't lack venison for their tables, but they did live by the sweat of their brows. If these visitors were insinuating that it had been easy for the Huguenots to get established, they were certainly mistaken. The Huguenots' courage and tenacity carried them through, but pioneering is for the young and strong and some of the older Huguenots must have had a terrible struggle.

Francois was still a poor man, but was making some headway. He must have been innovative and adaptable in the first place to survive those years in Europe. I believe his sister Anne worried about him and was concerned that he remained a bachelor as the years went by. Suitable marriageable French girls were in short supply so she set her hopes on new arrivals coming out from Europe. All the same, Francois was so busy establishing himself that any social life, with the exception of pleasant evenings he would enjoy at L'Arc d'Orleans with Pierre and Anne and their growing family, would be a luxury indeed. On summer evenings, as they sat on the stoep, the old country started to recede in reality, and seem like a dream.

This is also the story of a farm

Our story is also the story of a farm, the *familieplaas* Welvanpas, formerly Krakeelhoek, on which I grew up. This is where generation after generation of my family was born and it is the place that makes the story of my forebears come alive for me. This farm became linked to our family when the first owner settled there, which is a very rare occurrence in the history of our country, as far as I am concerned.

The land had been lying there, season after season, through the mists of time, backed up against "the Mountains of Africa" as Van Riebeeck called them. It was a wild piece of veld, populated by baboons and dassies and tarentaal, grazed by eland, bokkies and tortoises and traversed by Bushmen (the San) and bands of Hottentots (the Khoi). It was the haunt of animals like elephants, lions, leopards and hyenas and was situated in a floral kingdom, the likes of which had never been seen before.

Almost from the beginning of the expansion of the settlement at the Cape, this valley became known for its wagon makers and was therefore originally known as the Val du Charron.

1. Francois Retif, the Huguenot

Inevitably, its French name changed to the Dutch Wagenmakersvallei in the district of Drakenstein.

Pierre Mouij and his daughters

The very first owner was a widower, the Huguenot Pierre Mouij. He had fled from St Armant in Calais with his wife and baby at the time of the persecutions in France. They may have had several more children, but all we know is that when he came out to the Cape on the Donkervliet, he was a widower with two young daughters.

The Donkervliet was a small merchant ship and in those days, the officers and crew tended to be a tough crowd. There were also some employees of the Dutch East India Company on board, a ship's doctor and a group of Huguenot immigrants. The men and women were most likely accommodated separately and they were allowed to bring only the most essential luggage. I smile when I remember that as a child I had a mental picture of our Huguenot forebear arriving with the family's grandfather clock under one arm.

The passengers must have spent a lot of time down below, especially in bad weather, praying for the time to pass and for a safe delivery. Of course, being French they could never be quiet for long and would soon have got to know each other, help each other and tell each other about their ordeals. They would not have realised that they were in the eye of a storm, as it were, with turbulent times behind them, and more turbulent times ahead. They were literally all in the same boat and a very special bond must have developed between those who crossed the seas together.

Of course the food was monotonous, although there were usually some animals on board for fresh meat. Their diet mainly consisted of ship's biscuits (usually dried bread), salted meat, pickled fish, dried beans and peas. The water on board was scarce and no longer fresh and scurvy was a serious threat. The storms were terrifying and there was always the danger of an attack by pirates. They had to be patient as there was no guarantee of how long the voyage would take. It was not easy for anyone.

Fortunately the Donkervliet had a safe passage and entered Table Bay in full sail on a cold July day in 1699. Pierre Mouij stood on the deck with his two daughters, anxious to catch a glimpse of their new homeland. Marié, who had turned 14 during the voyage, was the eldest. Her sister Jeanne, was a year younger. It was Marié, who was destined to become our *stammoeder* [founding mother].

It is likely that she grasped something in her pocket that seemed to give her courage and was too precious to carry anywhere but on her person. It was a small miniature in an oval frame, nearly 50 years old at that time. Her mother probably had it with her when she fled from Calais when Marié was still a baby. It was certainly precious enough for Marié to have brought it with her on the ship. The little miniature probably often distracted the girls during the voyage, which seemed to go on forever. It had 14 mica transformations that you could place over the little face, creating different characters. There was a lady wearing a mask, a nun, a cavalier and various others. This miniature that belonged to Marié is at present preserved in the Africana Museum in Pretoria.

At last the journey was over and the scene before them - of Table Mountain with the small town beneath it - became more beautiful and intriguing as they neared the shore. Eventually the sails were folded one by one and after they had dropped anchor, the ship came to a standstill. Now they could be rowed to the shore. We do not know how new arrivals were welcomed, but they may even have known some of the French people who had come out before them.

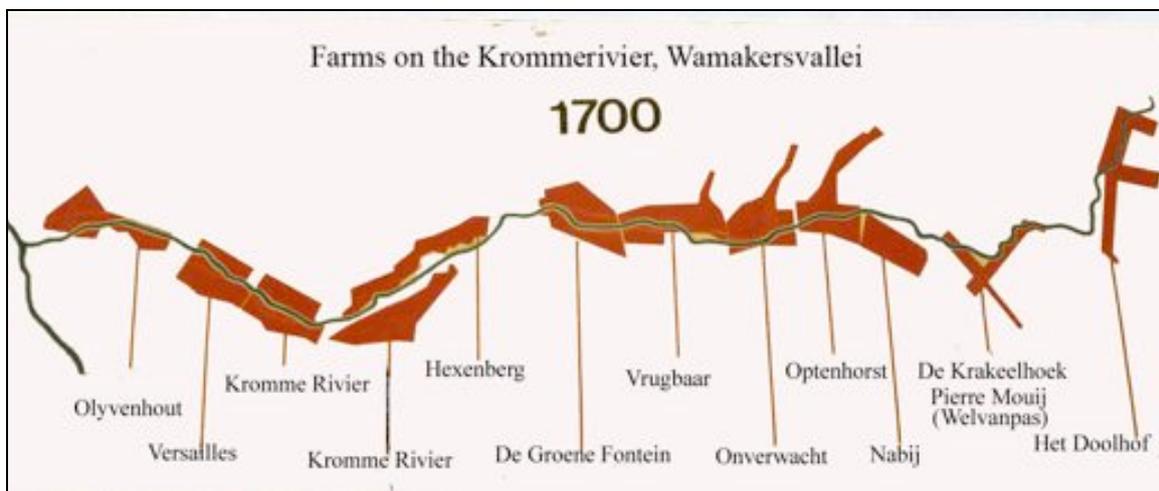
Pierre Mouij could hardly wait to be allocated a place of his own. He started to look for a fertile and unoccupied spot, where there was good grazing, a level area for planting and a strong stream of water. In Franschhoek and Drakenstein, Huguenots had been farming for a decade by now, so Pierre travelled northwards towards the blue Limietberge and the Val du Charron, where he may even have been looking for a wagon. In the Bovenvallei, the farms had been occupied as far as Opperherfst (Optenhorst), so Pierre continued past this farm, and there, deep in the valley, he found a stream of the clearest water flowing down from the Hawequa Mountain to join a stronger stream further down. This was what he wanted and it was here that he was allocated his



Marie Mouij's miniatures



One of the oaks planted by Pierre Mouij, drawn by our late son-in-law Francois Loubser at the age of 17.



1. Francois Retief, the Huguenot

farm by Willem Adriaan van der Stel who had succeeded his father by then.

As a widower with two daughters, he was classified as a family man. It is unlikely that there was anything left of the poor fund after just more than a decade, but Pierre would still have been entitled to a larger portion of the basic equipment than a bachelor like Francois Retief, had been. Amongst the goods given to him at cost, was a *snaphaan*, which is a sort of blunderbus. You might even call it a flintlock. He signed for these articles with a mark. His daughter, Jeanne, also signed her name with a mark, but Marié, who in time became a person to be reckoned with, signed with her initials MM.

The size of Pierre's farm is described as *twintig morgen en 255 kwadraad Roeden, strekkende NNW na Jan Louwrens van Rostock, en ZZO naar de woeste gebergtenmet volkomen magt en autoriteit om hethalwe van nu af te mogen bezaayen, beplanten, bepooten, betimmeren en bezitten, etc.* [On the north westerly side it lay next to the land of Jan Louwrens and to the south east his property stretched back to the rugged mountains. Pierre had full rights on his property. He could build, cultivated and graze his stock.] But he also had an obligation, and that was to provide a wagon track and drift to the width of three square roods through his land.

Who knows what hardships the pioneers had to undergo. Although Marié was scarcely 14 when they arrived at the Cape, she must have been a very mature young lady at that, if you consider for a moment what she had been through. She had had the responsibility of being the elder daughter in a family that had lost its mother. She had suffered all the privations of being a refugee and had endured a long sea-voyage on the Donkervliet. Now she was in a strange land, where even her home language was being oppressed. To crown it all, she had to be satisfied to live where her father had taken them - a lonely piece of veld.

Like the other pioneers, the family would have started out with a *hartebees (harde biesie) huisie* [wattle and daub hut]. It is possible that those Huguenots that were already settled helped a new arrival, especially a widower with two young daughters, in many small ways. But all the neighbours were not friendly.

Pierre, whom the locals called Pieter, had to put up a fight for a certain portion of rich level land when his neighbour, Jan Louwrens tried to oust him in order to enlarge his portion.

Pierre, who spoke fluent Dutch, stated, "*Dat hij egter den eersten was geweest wat aldaar hadde gelegen.*"

[“that he had, however, been the first to be established there.”]

Eventually Willem van der Stel decreed a “Solomonic division”, sharing it. We call the area in dispute the Onderland and it is situated along the river. Pierre was allocated the nearest two thirds, while Jan Louwrens received the rest. Pierre started to farm and later to erect the beginnings of the first homestead.

The formalities and the paper work took time. De Krakeelhoek, the name Pierre gave his farm, was formally granted to him in 1705. Through an oversight no *erfbrief* [deed] was given to him, but the matter was rectified on 11 May 1712. He was contracted to deliver one tenth of his grain crop to the Company and plant oak trees. Failing to comply could cause his land to be confiscated.

The two Van der Stels' wonderful fervour for planting oaks is still evident on this farm. Pierre Mouij planted a row of Van der Stel oaks above the sloping *werf* and in various other practical places on his property as he was required to do. Some of these trees still survive.

He also had to replace felled trees with young oaks or other suitable trees. There were indigenous yellow-wood trees growing in many a kloof and it was forbidden for them to be cut down. This law must have been quite difficult to enforce, but nevertheless, the widow Le Riche from the area, quite possibly desperate for some money, was caught red-handed with a wagon load that she was in the process of selling. These trees are known as the Breërivier yellow-woods (*Podocarpus elongatus*) that can still be found on the farm today. However, the *Kaapse geelhout (Podocarpus latifolia)* that grew on Table Mountain was considered the best for rafters.

Pierre probably chose the name De Krakeelhoek for his farm because of the heated altercation with Jan Louwrens about the land. (*In die Woodeboek van die Afrikaanse Taal (WAT) word 'krakeel' beskryf as 'twis met skelwoorde'*.) I was intrigued by the fact that Pierre gave his farm a Dutch name.

“But wouldn't he have given his farm a French name?” I asked Oom Jan Bosman of Lelienfontein.



The Van der Stel oaks planted by Pierre Mouij drawn by Gregoire Boonzaaier in 1952, about 250 years after they were planted.

Oom Jan said the people were settled one Frenchman, one Dutchman, which would force them to communicate with their neighbours in Dutch, but that still did not quite answer the question. The names of the Bovenvallei farms (later called the Bovlei) are in contrast to the French farm names given in Drakenstein and Franschoek, where the earliest arrivals settled. Those French names recall the places that the people wanted to remember, while the Dutch names are descriptive. Pressure must have been put on the Bovenvallei farmers, because every single farm in this valley was given a Dutch name. The original names were De Groene Fontein, Vrugtbaar, Onverwacht, Opperherfst, Nabij, De Krakeelhoek, Het Doolhof and so on.

Although the name was changed to Wel Van Pas not long after Pierre's death, one will still find it registered under De Krakeelhoek in the Master's Office. This is because a farm's original name does not get changed.

Francois and Marié

Francois Retief had been farming on his own for 12 years when he met the Mouij family. It is likely to have been at a church gathering that he attended with his sister and her family to welcome the new arrivals. I picture Marié - a young girl, standing slightly apart, as if to size up the

1. Francois Retief, the Huguenot

situation in this strange new land. Despite her youth, she would have had the look of someone who was used to taking on responsibilities. Francois would have noticed her at once and after being presented to her and enquiring about the voyage, she would have asked him about life at the Cape. In spite of his being older than she was, she probably liked and trusted him.

Although the Mouij family was living in the Bovenvallei, the Huguenots all belonged to the same church community, so Francois and Marié would have met again at their church. He would also have travelled to the Wagenmakersvallei to see more of her. Fortunately his farm, La Paris, was on the same side of the Berg River, which made things much easier. Francois could easily have been almost the same age as Marié's father, Pierre, whose efforts on De Krakeelhoek must have reminded Francois of his early days on La Paris. By now Francois was in the position to lend a hand and give some valuable advice.

Now that he had found someone at last, Francois was impatient to take Marié home to La Paris and it was not long before he asked her father for her hand. Fortunately for him, she was willing when he approached her. Marié became the bride of the 37 year-old Francois Retief, on 2 May 1700, two weeks before her 15th birthday and only ten months after she had arrived at the Cape. Ds. Simond married them in French, of course, and as Marié's father was a widower, Francois's sister, Anne, would have assisted in a motherly way. Marié was pleased that Anne and her growing family, lived next door to them. Anne's husband, Pierre Rousseau, had become a well-established farmer by this time and their eldest child was already ten years old.

Francois and Marié became the founders of the Retief family in South Africa. They lived on La Paris in Drakenstein near Wemmershoek in luxury compared to the basic conditions at De Krakeelhoek. After twelve years Francois had planted a vineyard, grown wheat, built up his herd and owned a few slaves to help them. He might even have refined his house a bit in preparation for his bride. Marié had been shocked when she first saw their church building, after the beautiful churches she had seen in Europe. Of course, the building at Babylon's Toren was a very primitive construction. Valentyn, a naturalist who visited the Cape in 1705, wrote that it was more a barn than a church. Kolbe, the German traveller and scientist who lived at the Cape between 1705 and 1713, described it as a *gevaarte* [abomination]. He wrote that it was very small, with clay walls that were only three or four feet high (just over a metre), with a low thatched roof. Perhaps the roof appeared low to him for a church, but surely they must have had enough headroom. Francois and Marié sat separately in church, the men on benches and the women on their own chairs. In winter the attendance would be very poor, as people could not come in from the outlying districts in bad weather.

Marié was horrified when swarms of *sprinkhaanen en calender* attacked their vines and she had to watch helplessly as the insects damaged the 1701 crop so badly that it affected the next year's crop as well. It was not easy to adapt to this new world.

When they had been married for 21 months, Francois and Marié had a nightmare experience. It happened in 1702, in the hottest month at the Cape. At midnight between 22 and 23 February, just less than three months before the birth of their first baby, a naked *kalant* [scoundrel] crawled through a window of which the shutters may have been left open because of the heat. He crept up to the bed to attack them, but both Francois and Marié awoke and as the intruder jumped on the bed, they leapt up and a terrible struggle ensued in the darkness. The assailant had a knife, but he was overpowered. A runner was sent to Pierre and Anne next door and they arrived before the first light. There was blood everywhere and when Pierre asked who had done this thing, Francois replied, "*Daar legt de man die ons dat heeft gedaan.*" ["There lies the man that did this to us."]

Well, it certainly was a happening. The Heemraden Hercule du Pre and Coenraad Cloete accompanied the *chirurgyn* [surgeon], Paul le Febre, to La Paris on the 25th to take a statement. Le Febre reported that he was called to the Retief's farm at daybreak on the 23rd where he found them both heavily wounded. Retief had a terrible cut on the right side of his head taking half his ear off, his shoulder had a deep wound as well as lesser wounds and there were also various wounds to his left hand. His pregnant wife, Marié, had light wounds to the right shoulder and hand. Her left hand was cut open so that you could see the bone from both sides. She had also been stabbed under the left breast.

Pierre Rousseau said that he had found the intruder still naked, but bound. He was an old scoundrel named Daniel. When he asked him where the things were that he had stolen from his brother-in-law four or five weeks before, Daniel told him where he had hidden them, with his

clothes. Daniel was also seriously wounded and attended to by Dr Le Febre. He had six wounds in all, to his right and left arms, and to his scrotum. They took him to Stellenbosch, but he later died of his injuries in "Banghoek". Fortunately Francois and Marié were resilient with strong constitutions and completely recovered. Unfortunately there is no photograph to show whether Francois's ear was permanently scarred.

Marié no longer felt safe on La Paris after the attack and Francois thought he would rather move to the Wagenmakersvallei, where Marié's father and sister were living on De Krakeelhoek. A while after the baby was born, Francois acquired his second farm, De Pattattes Kloof, at the foot of the Hawequa Mountains, not far from Marié's father's farm. In same year, 1703, Marié's sister Jeanne, then seventeen, married Jean le Roux.

By the time the baby was christened, Ds. Simond had already gone back to Holland and Ds. Beck, their *dominee* for the next five years, christened her Maria. He was instructed to preach only in Dutch, but wrote to Holland and explained that there were many older people who did not understand the Dutch sermon. He then preached in French on alternate Sundays, but after he also became responsible for the Stellenbosch congregation, there were fewer French sermons. Ds. Beck also complained very bitterly about the bad road he had to use to get to the French congregation in Drakenstein. He said it was three hours away and hard work in the cold and wet weather, when the roads were slippery and full of potholes.

In 1705 Ds. Beck stopped his French sermons completely because he said the congregation was making snide remarks about him. Actually, the congregation did resent his support of Governor Willem Adriaan van der Stel, whose monopolies were impoverishing them. Fortunately, they still had the French *voorieser* [prelector] and *sieketrooster* [sick comforter], Paul Roux, and from 1707, Hermanus Bosman, the Dutch *krankebesoeker*. They each read a sermon in their respective languages on Sundays when there was no minister. Ds. Beck left their congregation in the same year that Willem van der Stel was recalled to Holland.

The next minister to be appointed, Ds. Le Boucq, came out to Drakenstein, and when he saw the primitive church building and realised there was no parsonage, he went straight back to Cape Town, saying he could not preach " *in een vuil en van de hujsen afgelegen hok.*" ["in a dirty hovel so far from his house".] For a year he preached once a quarter, after which the position was vacant. Through all the trials and tribulations that befell Francois and Marié in the next seven years, from 1708 to 1714, they had no minister to turn to.

In 1710, Francois and Marié were saddened by the death of Francois's sister, Anne, at the age of 43. To Francois it was a very bitter blow. She was his only relative and he had felt responsible for her from his 17th year, when they had fled from Mer. She had born her husband 12 children of which two had died. We shall see that there was a certain amount of intermarriage between the Rousseau and Retief cousins and second cousins, later.

The following year, in 1711, Marié's only sister, Jeanne, was widowed in her twenties, when her husband, Jean le Roux, and his brother were drowned in a tragic accident in the Berg River. Jean le Roux, also from Blois, and Jeanne had also called their farm after the beautiful French capital and lived on Parys along the Berg River in Paarl. The community was shocked by the accident. Both Le Roux widows were pregnant and later their infant sons were christened on the same day. They both remarried a year later, probably from necessity.

In 1713, a disastrous smallpox epidemic raged mainly in Cape Town. It carried off a quarter of the population in six weeks, in spite of any medicinal herbs or medication they could think of administering. We do not know in what way it affected the Retief household directly, but it must have been a very stressful time.

For the years since Ds. Beck had left, Francois and Marié and their congregation of 200 members, 700 souls in all, as stated in a letter to the Political Council, felt as if they were abandoned in the wilderness because they had no minister. Time and again, when their church council asked for a minister who could speak both French and Dutch for the sake of the older people, they were told that there was no minister available from Holland. Actually, they had little to offer, with no parsonage and a derelict building in which to hold their services. Still, the onus was on the Company to appoint and pay a minister and provide him with accommodation. No one could be found and their frequent requests for a church and parsonage continued to fall on deaf ears.

When eventually it was realised, even in Holland, just how bad the situation was, Ds. Van Aken took up the challenge. His heart must have gone out to this neglected congregation when

1. Francois Retif, the Huguenot

he arrived in 1714. Although he did not preach in French, Paul Roux still read a French sermon. The congregation realised at once that things were about to change for the better. Ds. Van Aken brought in a new discipline with regular services and meetings of the Church Council. He realised that the existing church building was a hopeless case and behind the scenes he was investigating what could be done. I do not think anyone could have been sorry when the original church practically disintegrated from the heavy rains in 1716. Even before Ds. Van Aken had obtained permission from Holland to build a new church, the congregation had decided to dismantle the old building and store the rafters. After that, they held their services in private homes or barns.

However, by the next year there was good news when they were given a large piece of ground for a church where the Paarl Strooidak Church stands today. Fortunately, there was a building that could act as a parsonage for Ds. Van Aken and his family to move into on this land. They were eager to get started and even after Henning Huising left 3,000 gulden in his will towards the project, they still had problems finding enough money. It took another four years of ups and downs before the new church was inaugurated in 1720.

In the meantime, on the domestic front, Francois and Marié had been raising a growing family. Marie was just seventeen when their first baby, Maria, was born in May 1702, three months after the attack. Anna was born in 1704 on De Pattattes Kloof (later Patatskloof) and these two girls must have meant the world to their mother, especially as she came to experience, along with most women of her time, the tragedy of losing young children. Now Marié gave birth to a series of boys. Jacques, born two years later did not survive. Francois, who was born in 1708, became their eldest surviving son from whom my family descends. Four years later, she named a son after her father, but little Pierre only lived for a few years. Then Paul, a healthy child, was born in 1714. Marié was pleased when another boy was born in 1716, so that she could again have a son to name after her father. Although little Pierre was deformed in some way and sometimes confused, he was physically strong. Marié was to become very protective towards him.

In 1712 they moved to De Hartebeest Kraal from De Pattattes Kloof, but Francois did not sell La Paris until six years later. Now, Marié was delighted when, after five boys, two healthy little girls, Hester and Magdalena, were born to them in 1719 and 1720 respectively. At this time Marie was 35 years old and had born nine children in 18 years. In 1720 the older girls were 16 and 18 respectively and the little ones a mere toddler and a baby. Marié had become a fine woman, who raised fine children. Francois and Marié had prospered and were an asset to their community.

After leaving France in order to find freedom of religion, Francois and his compatriots had had to struggle against a different bureaucracy to establish their own church where they could worship with dignity and had at last achieved this goal. But then, the following year, when all was going so well, tragedy struck, when Francois died at the age of 58, on 23 September 1721.

In the same month that Francois died, a disaster befell their new church. After a very wet winter, still more heavy rains fell and the northern gable plus 20 feet of wall, including the roof of their church collapsed and the pulpit and the benches of the deacons and elders were ruined. After the first shock and disappointment was over, the community looked for solutions to their problem and each member of the *Kerkraad* [Church Council] donated a worker for a month to help restore the damage.

It would have been from this church that Ds. Van Aken led the service at Francois's funeral. We cannot tell how far they had progressed with the reparations to the damage sustained only a few weeks before, but they would have made the best of a difficult situation. In deference to his background, Paul Roux would have read a lesson in French, and a dwindling number of those Frenchmen who had made the journey from Holland by ship, would have attended. And so it came about that one of the first to be laid to rest from their new church, was Francois Retif from Mer.

The new graveyard near the church had officially been in use since January of the previous year and this is where we can safely assume that Francois was buried.

Francois and Marié had been married for 21 years when he died. He had adapted to his new country and not looked back when times were hard. He had managed through tenacity and hard work to prosper. He did not take a leading role on the church bodies, but he was active in his community and his name regularly features on *Rolle te paart* and *Rolle Van de Kavallerije* [lists of

those doing cavalry duty]. He held strong opinions and was prepared to defend them and various incidents are recorded in which he stood his ground, although he could lose his temper in doing so. Francois was described in his dealings with the Stellenbosch Heemrade as "*kortgebonde en heethoofdig*." ["short-tempered and hot-headed."] On one occasion, he pounded the table to accentuate his point when he brought a suit against a compatriot and the *Heemraden* was not willing to pass judgement immediately. He may not have been an easy man to live with, but he was kind and is said to have helped his neighbours, whether French, German or Dutch in times of danger.

Francois had lived in his new homeland for 32 years and the two Van der Stels had been governors for the first 19 of those years. He had seen all the good they had done and sadly witnessed Willem Adriaan's fall caused by too much power and being out of touch with reality. It was sad because the governor had been so enthusiastic and full of promise at first. In his will, Francois demonstrated his humaneness when he actually stipulated that if two young slaves loved each other, they should not be parted. This makes me think that he had been a happily married man.

Marié, a pioneer in her own right

Whereas almost all the pioneers' wives married again after they were widowed, Marié was an exception. She faced the future alone and with a courageous spirit. She had done it before when she fled from France, when her mother had died, when she boarded the *Donkervliet*, and even when she married so young. She knew what it was like to face the future looking only for solutions.

At the time of Francois's death, Marié's father, old Pierre Mouij, was still farming on De Krakeelhoek in the Wagenmakersvallei. He had not married again either and remained on De Krakeelhoek, until he died in 1725. We do not have the exact date of his death, or birth for that matter, but in May of that year, the property was transferred to Pieter Pienaar, who paid 1800 Kaapse gulden, putting 400 down as a deposit. The balance in a mortgage bond was to be paid off in seven instalments, leaving Marié as holder of these bonds until full settlement in 1748. After Marié lost her father, her strongest tie to all that had happened to her before she came out to this country was broken. She eventually outlived her younger sister, Jeanne, as well.

Marié proved to be a remarkable businesswoman. She bought De Wildepaardejagt and kept Hartbeeskraal lying alongside it and improved her financial position. Later she sold Wildepaardejacht in 1738 and only sold De Pattates Kloof in 1748. She remained a widow for almost 37 years. Records show her as a caring mother and grandmother. She showed deep concern for her family and raised her daughters to become *volksmoeders* of the Rousseau, Hugo, Marais and Roos families. Of the five sons born to her, only two married. Paul married Dorothea Melius and is the founding father of the Paarl Retiefs, while Francois (Frans), the eldest son to survive, married Anna Marais, from the Wagenmakersvallei and fathered the Wellington Retiefs.

To Marié, slaves were far more than mere possessions. They too were pioneers and had earned respect and trust. When her daughter, Maria, died after only ten years of marriage, leaving five small children, Marié sent one of her slaves, Candesa van de Caab, to be with them. She knew Candesa would mother the children and she made provision in her will that Candesa remain with the children until the last one had attained majority, and then she could continue with one of those children to the end of her days.

Marié also made special provision for Pieter (Pierre), her beloved youngest son, who at times experienced *verwartheijt van sinnen* [confusion], and appointed various guardians over the years. It was Titus van de Caab to whom she entrusted him. Pieter lived to be 84 and never married. Marié felt a deep responsibility to make provision for each slave so that not one would be sold on the open market. Anthony van de Caab had to go to Francois, September van de Caab to Paul, Sibilla van de Caab to Hester, Vilida van de Caab to Magdalena and so on. Her farm was to be sold in special terms to Tieleman Roos, her son-in-law, the husband of Magdalena, her youngest daughter who lived to be 97.

Ryk Tulbagh was the governor of the Cape, when Marié died on 21 September 1758. She was a respected woman of 73 and had lived to be the second last of the Huguenots who could still be asked about the old country and all that had gone before. She was one of the strong women that our family was privileged to have as part of its story.