The Third Generation

Jacobus Retief

who bought De Krakeelhoek

(now called Welvanpas)

1754 - 1821

The face of the Welvanpas clock
The Chronicles of De Krakeelhoek

Jacobus Retief
The Third Generation

Christened 07.09.1754, died 12.05.1821

Jacobus Retief (christened 07.09.1754 - 12.05.1821) born on D'Oliphantskop
Married 01.11.1772 in Paarl to Deborah Joubert (christened 04.05.1749- 09.06.1814)
Second Marriage July 1815 to Johanna Petronella van Blerk (christened 05.06.1774)

1. Francois (christened 17.10.1773) presumed to have died in Natal in 1838
   Married 30.11.1794 in Paarl to Martha Elizabeth Joubert (christened 28.04.1776)
   Second marriage 24.08.1817 at Graaff-Reinet to Martha Maria Maritz

2. Martha Elizabeth (christened 18.06.1775) died very young

3. Anna Aletta (christened 19.01.1777)
   Married 12.05.1793
   Daniel Gerhardus Malan (19.06.1772 - 29. 93.1837)

4. Pieter (12.11.1780 - 06.02.1838) Voortrekker leader who died in Natal
   Married 04.07.1814 in Graaff-Reinet
   Magdalena Johanna de Wet, widow of Johan Christoffel Greyling

5. Debora (christened 13.05.1781)
   Married 16.12.1798
   Joachim Christoffel Esterhuizen (christened 01.10.1768)

6. Martha Elizabeth (christened 20.07.1783)
   Married 31.08.1800 in Cape Town
   David Carel Hauptfleisch (christened 23.11.1777)
   Second marriage 07.04.1810 in Stellenbosch
   Charl Wynand du Plessis (christened 26.08.1787)

7. Jacobus (christened 10.07.1785) (Koos Pines) Remembered as an old man
   Married 06.08.1809 at Stellenbosch
   Maria Margaretha Hugo (25.01.1793 - 30.11.1852)

8. Margaretha Louisa (christened 15.07.1787- 21.04.1884) made the merklap
   Married 01.06.1811 at Stellenbosch
   Gideon Johannes Joubert (circa 1782- 21.04.1851)

9. Daniel (07.06.1789 - 08.12.1840 Gravestone states 1741) our ancestor
    Married 27.04.1825 in Stellenbosch
    Jacoba Cornelia von Wielligh (26.06.1806 - 18.04.1879)

10. Gideon (christened 25.5.1795 - 15.05.1856)
    Married 03.02.1816 in Stellenbosch.
    Helena Johanna Hauptfleisch (christened 10.05.1801 - 12.05.18480)

11. Anna Elizabeth (circa 1797) who in all records is confused with her cousin Anna Elizabeth
    (daughter of Francois the eldest son) who married a Steenkamp.

12. Johannes Jacobus born 16.07.1818 (from a second marriage)
    Married 29.12.1838 to Debora Susanna Roussouw in Paarl
And now we come to Jacobus, who bought our familieplaas and built the house in which all of us were born. Jacobus grew up as the baby in Frans and Anna's family. In 1754, when he was born, his father was 46, but his mother was in her early thirties. He was still a baby when the vicious smallpox epidemic of 1755 raged for six terrible months, and when he was a little chap of three, his grandmother, Marié, died. As she was second last of the Huguenots to survive, he would not have remembered any of those grand old French people.

Jacobus was growing up on D'Oliphantskop aan die Groenenberg, in the Wagenmakersvallei. Ryk Tulbagh was the governor until he was 6. It was also the time of Ds. Van der Spuy, who took up his position in their church in 1753, christened Jacobus and would remain their dominee for 28 more years.

Almost from the beginning, Frans and Anna must have realised that Jacobus was a particularly independent and resolute child, interested in every facet of what was happening around him. He had three older brothers. Francois and Daniel farmed in the district, and Petrus, three years older than he was, remained on D'Oliphantskop to farm the home farm with his father. Jacobus also had two older sisters, Anna Aletta and Maria, who were both married by the time he was 13 years old.

As he grew older, Jacobus became restless to farm his own farm. At 19 he started farming with his father's support on Soetendal, a farm lying next to his father's farm, D'Oliphantskop. The previous year, 1772, as a mere 18 year-old, he had married Deborah Joubert, who was four years his senior.

Deborah’s father’s family

It is important to meet Deborah’s family because they were also pure French and because of the influence of all these genes on the next generation. On her father’s side, we have the Joubert and De Villiers families, and like most of the French settlers, they have fascinating stories. It so happens that the Joubert and Retief family trees intertwine for generations.

1. Pierre Joubert x Isabeau Richard (Both born in France)
2. Their son Gideon Joubert x Margaretha de Villiers (Deborah’s grandparents)
3. Their eldest son, Pieter Joubert, was Deborah’s father.

In the spring of 1688 the Berg China was one of the ships that sailed from Rotterdam and headed south, bringing Huguenots to the Cape. The 23 year-old Pierre Joubert was on board with Suzanne, his bride of one month. They soon got to know another young couple, Pierre Malan and Isabeau Richard, with whom they could discuss their hopes and fears concerning their great new adventure. Tragically, someone must have come on board with a terribly infectious disease because there were thirty deaths on that voyage and both Pierre Malan and Suzanne were amongst those who did not survive. Faced with a bleak future, Pierre Joubert and Isabeau Richard decided to brave the new world together and were married before the ship docked at the Cape.

Pierre was a hardworking and resolute young man and became one of the biggest landowners in Drakenstein. He had an abundance of restless energy and did not shrink from a challenge. Pierre Joubert named his eighth child, Gideon. He and Margaretha de Villiers were Deborah’s grandparents. Unfortunately Gideon died in his thirties, leaving Margaretha de Villiers a young widow with small children.

1. Jacques de Villiers x Marguerite Gardiol (Both born in France)
2. Their daughter Margaretha de Villiers x Gideon Joubert
3. Their eldest son was Pieter Joubert, Deborah’s father.

Margaretha de Villiers was the daughter of Jacques de Villiers, the youngest of the three De Villiers brothers, also Huguenots, who came out to this country from an influential family in La Rochelle. With them they brought a letter of recommendation from the Chamber of
Delft. It was addressed to Governor Van der Stel, asking him to give them as much help as possible, seeing they had a special knowledge of viticulture. They were the founders of the talented and prestigious De Villiers family in this country. Deborah Joubert's father, Pieter, was the eldest son of Gideon Joubert and Margaretha de Villiers.

Deborah’s mother’s family

1. Francois du Toit x Susanna Seugnet (Both born in France)
2. Their son Estienne (Stephanus) x Deborah Marais (Deborah’s grandparents)
3. Their daughter Martha du Toit was Deborah’s mother.

The earliest Du Toits lived dangerously and seemed to thrive on confrontation, and their adventurous lives remind one of the stories of the Wild West. Two Du Toit brothers came out to the Cape from France two years before the other Huguenots. Francois du Toit married Susanna Seugnet, a French woman, he met at the Cape, and they settled on a farm in the Wagenmakersvallei. However, it seems that this was too hedged in and tame for them, so he asked the governor if he could buy the whole of Daljosafat. I presume that it was unoccupied because of the many Bushmen settlements and Hottentot kraals just across the Berg River from there. The governor refused Francois du Toit’s request, saying that he would surely be plundered if not murdered if he lived there. Francois du Toit persisted and eventually got his way on condition that he took responsibility for his own safety.

This did not deter him in the least. He established the farm, Kleinbos, planting many oaks as required of him. When his kraals were raided and his cattle driven off, he would marshal his neighbours and chase the rustlers right up into the mountain to regain his stock. Later he had two groups on call and they routed the plunderers right up into the kloof, with the blowing of trumpets, it is said, which seems to denote a certain amount of glee. As they were the first to actually go through the kloof, it became known as Du Toit's Kloof, and the name stuck. The irrepressible Francois du Toit became an influential farmer and, still living dangerously, he was involved in the affair in which Adam Tas tried to have Willem van der Stel recalled to Holland. Francois managed to evade arrest and was banned to Mauritius in absentia.

1. Charl Marais x Anna des Ruelles (Born in France)
2. Their daughter Deborah Marais x Estienne (Stephanus) du Toit
3. Their daughter Martha was Deborah’s mother.

Jacobus’s mother and his wife Deborah’s grandmother were both granddaughters of Charl Marais Snr. This made Jacobus and Deborah cousins of a sort. Seeing that Jacobus’s father had married his cousin's daughter, it was a pretty tight set of relationships. However, no harm seems to have been done, because they produced a fine batch of children.

Jacobus and Deborah's first farm, Soetendal

Jacobus and Deborah farmed on Soetendal, lying next to D’Olipantskop, Jacobus’s father’s farm. Sadly Deborah's mother had died the year before their marriage, and two years later, Jacobus’s mother, Anna, also passed away. However Jacobus was glad that his mother had lived to see their first child, Francois, who represented the fourth generation of our branch of the family at the Cape.

After their first son, Francois, was born, Jacobus and Deborah were blessed with three little girls, all born on Soetendal. It was sad that there were no grannies to fuss over them. The eldest girl was called Martha, after Deborah's mother, but she died as a small child. Fortunately the other two little girls, Anna Aletta, and little Debora, flourished. Eight years after the first little Martha was born, they called another baby girl Martha, after Deborah’s mother.

Like all his family before him, Jacobus and his family had remained devout in true Huguenot tradition. They attended the church in Paarl although crossing the Berg River by pont when the river was in flood was an old problem that just did not go away. Ds. Van der Spuy had been their dominee since a year before Jacobus was born. He had become more autocratic and
less popular as the years went by, and when Jacobus was 17, the events began that led to the split in the church that upset his father so much.

In the early days of the rift, Ds. Van der Spuy christened the first children of Jacobus and Deborah. As time went on, the rift deepened. Jacobus decided that he would not have his children christened by Ds. Van der Spuy. So, along with some others who felt the same way, Jacobus put in a request to have his children christened in Cape Town. Ds. Van der Spuy put his oar in, and their request was overruled.

To make matters worse, Ds. Van der Spuy called them to account before the church council and a heated meeting ensued. Feelings ran so high that the Political Council eventually called a meeting and a month later Ds. Van der Spuy requested to be relieved of his position and moved to Stellenbosch. That was in 1781.

Jacobus immediately responded by having Debora, already two, and Pieter, six months old, christened a month later. For three years after this, services were held only every four weeks, with the other ministers taking turns to conduct them. Then, in 1784, Ds. Aling came to their rescue and the rift was finally healed.

While all the upsets caused by the split in the church were still going on, Jacobus had decided that it was time for him to broaden his horizons. Soetendal, his farm, was never anything more to him than a stepping stone, as it was not a big farm and he yearned for a bigger farm to fit his bigger ideals. He had already paid Soetendal off to his father within six years.

Then Jacobus heard that the two brothers farming up at the top end of the Bovenvallei on Doolhof and De Krakeelhoek, had decided to split up and that De Krakeelhoek, now called Wel Van Pas, had changed hands to Jan Vos. Jacobus knew all about this farm, with its mountain grazing, abundant water and level areas with deep black soil. His grandmother, Marié, had held the bond on it for 23 years after it had been left to her by her father, Pierre Mouij, its first owner.

Until Frans, Jacobus's father, was 17, he had visited his grandfather on De Krakeelhoek as it was called at that time. Frans had known for some time that Jacobus needed room for expansion. In fact, Frans must have been quite excited when he heard that his son had decided to sell Soetendal and buy De Krakeelhoek from Jan Vos.

The move from Soetendal to Welvanpas

I am sure Jacobus felt very motivated by the thought of moving. He was 27, with three young children and Deborah was again expecting her biennial baby, this time in November. At last, he owned a proper farm, Welvanpas, as De Krakeelhoek was now known, with lots of possibilities and room for expansion.

Because he was a logical, organised man, he would have given a lot of thought to the logistics of the move. To enter the farm, the drift had to be crossed by the animals and the many wagonloads of goods, so the actual crossings would be dependent on the weather. He would inspect the drift closely before the time. If it rained heavily up in the mountains, they would wait for the stream to subside enough to get everything across safely. There was no need to put anything at risk. No matter what the circumstances, a Sunday would never, ever come into the equation as it was strictly observed for church and a day of rest for all except those performing the daily maintenance chores on the farm. The activities in the kitchen were another matter.

But first, he had to be patient and wait until Jan Vos and his family had moved out. Jacobus had bought the farm as a running concern with f450,000 worth of movable goods. I think it is fair to assume that he sold Soetendal in the same way, with the 15-year erfpag [quitrent] and certain movable goods.

In the family history, as carefully handed down, it has always simply been stated that Jacobus moved to Welvanpas in 1780. I picture the move taking place in the spring time, after the worst winter rains were over.

Before the animals were moved, Jacobus would have ridden over to Welvanpas from Soetendal quite a few times. He had to double check that the shelter and water were according to his requirements, and already he would have stationed some slaves and other workers over on Welvanpas and given them instructions. Kraals, stables, pens, sties and camps, would all have been ready for the livestock.
Moving the animals was not a quiet affair. For days you could hear the cracking of long bamboo whips and the animals’ names being called out in encouragement, as the red Afrikaner cattle were herded along the farm roads. I can visualise the cattle trundling along between the still dormant vines, bedded in bright yellow surings, the redness of the animals magnificent against the blue, blue mountains that are so often snow capped in September. They could move a herd of animals quite easily in a day. It would probably take about two and a half hours of trudging. With an early start and perhaps a good rest halfway there, they would be in the kraal long before sunset. Then the goats and sheep would have their turn to be moved. Pigs would be loaded squealing onto wagons, alongside coops of chickens and other poultry. It would take many days to complete the task.

After the animals were well settled the next stage of the move could begin, but first Deborah would have had a good look at the interior of the house.

Lastly, wagonloads of household goods, furniture and the accumulation of seven years of married life, would slowly have made their way along the farm roads leading deep into the Bovenvallei, towards the mountains. On an open wagon, workers and slaves with their children, sitting with their meagre possessions, would be singing and joking as they rolled along towards their new home. They were great ones to seize the moment and who could resist the excitement of such a day?

Finally, the family would set out for Welvanpas with the farm dogs barking excitedly as they tailed along. Young Francois, a little boy of seven, might even have braved the journey on his own horse alongside the Cape cart that his parents usually reserved for Sundays. Imagine the young family: Jacobus and the pregnant Deborah, with the two smaller ones between them and young Francois at a brisk trot alongside. If they passed one of the slower farm wagons on their way to their new home, the children would wave and shout as they left them in their dust.

An impression of the werf in the time of Jacobus
After crossing the drift onto the werf at Welvanpas, Jacobus and Deborah’s cart would be outspanned and the horses led away to cool off under the spreading oaks, the very same oaks that had been planted by Pierre Mouij, 80 years before.

I feel very sure that their very first visitor was Frans Retief, Jacobus’s father. He may well have brought his brother, Pierre with him. Frans was a widower of 72 by then, and would surely have taken great pleasure in pointing out all the things that his grandfather, Pierre Mouij, had done that were still in evidence. It would all have reminded him so much of his youth, when he had visited his old French grandfather on Welvanpas up to his seventeenth year.

The layout of the original werf

More than 30 years later, Jacobus would build a new house on the farm. That was the one in which we were born and grew up. But precisely where was the original house situated?

"Die oorspronklike huis was in die middel van die werf, dit het my pa vir my hoeveel keer gesê."

["The original house was in the middle of the werf. This my father told me many times."]

He continued. "It stood in front of our present house, which is logical, with the layout of the buildings. The slave quarters would never have been built in front of the homestead. Look, the slave quarter is the oldest building on the farm."

We had been looking at the unplastered inside of the wall. It is built with round and flat stones.

"You know," I said, "I am fascinated by those ancient horns sticking out of the wall inside."

"They were used to hang the bamboo ladders against the wall - to store them. They probably used the front part for storage and the other part was for the slaves. There was a loft, with an inside ladder. Some of the slaves probably slept up there as well, but on hot nights they slept outside, op die werf."

All this, of course, had been behind the original house when Jacobus and Deborah came to the farm.

"And the building where you come into the farm? Next to what was the drift?" I asked.

"That was the old mill," said my brother. "That is why it is so low against the stream. You see, they took their water out of the river."

The waterwheel was on the gable wall of the building and water to turn the wheel was probably brought from further upstream, in a wooden shute, as was the custom, but there is no evidence.

"Uncle Jacques (my father’s brother) told me that when he was a kid, the old wheel was still lying there and rotting away."

My brother continued, “But it was also a dwelling at some stage. You can see it is all smoked up against the inside of the back gable.”

The stables were on the wapad [track], leading through the farm, on the further side of the front werf.

In actual fact, there were two open areas on the werf. The one was in front and the other behind the original house, bordered at the back by a row of Van der Stel oaks. The wine cellar faced onto the back part of the werf and, of course, the kitchen yard and the slave quarters, also behind the house were nearer the stream on the other side.

Then, even further up against the mountain, on an even higher level, the ground levelled off somewhat and there was the old bokkraal with high walls made of sun-baked mud bricks, for the goats. Alongside this was a row of rooms in a flat-topped building. The rooms faced the house and there was a slatted door to each room. One of these was the vieiskamer (surely with fly screen to protect the meat), because every man was his own butcher. The room on the end was for chickens and it still has built in nests that are recessed into the walls. It was used as a woodroom when we were children. Up on this level the animals were accommodated in pig pens and chicken runs. The cattle were some distance away in a huge kraal to the left, even deeper into the valley on what we today call Helshoogte.
The slave quarters – the oldest building on the farm
(Detail from the cover picture)

The interior of the slave quarters photographed while the building was being re-thatched
Pierre Mouij chose the sight for his house on a slope, because the deep level ground next to the stream is ideal for planting, and could not be wasted on a werf big enough to turn a span of oxen. At first Pierre Mouij must have built a primitive abode for survival, and then added a large all-purpose kitchen and more rooms when he was able. But after Marié married Francois Retief, his other daughter, Jeanne, still lived with him for several years, and gradually his house would have taken shape. Housekeeping was virtually a home industry in those days, and even as a widower, he still had to feed the workers from the kitchen. Even after his daughters married, he would have had to provide accommodation for them and other travellers to sleep over. Jeanne may have come home quite often after she was widowed because her second husband was from that area.

Since the whole werf is on a slope, there would be a few steps up to an open stoep in front of the house, facing onto Groenberg. Here, with a neighbour, Pierre Mouij could have smoked a pipe and discussed ponderous subjects like their crops and the uneasy relationship with the Dutch East India Company. As the early farmers were expected to plant one hundred young oaks each, there would have been oaks in every possible place.

Eventually the house was probably much like other homesteads of the time. It would have had a thatched roof with a slight curve over the front door, and you would have entered into a broad room, a gaandery, which was in effect a wide passage, but used as a dining room at the further end. There would be a spacious square room to either side in front, with smallish shuttered windows onto the front stoep.

The kitchen and the slave-quarters would be on the same side as the stream. Because there was no thought of running water in a house at that time, this was convenient. The hearth and bakoon [wall oven] would take up the whole width of the room and be up against the end wall, the gable wall, where the chimney was situated. The old kitchens were generally badly lit. It probably had a bo- en onderdeur [stable door] onto the kitchen yard. And the onderdeur [lower door] would keep the dogs and chickens out, and the toddlers in.

Even a widower like Pierre needed to accommodate pots, and mincers and coffee mills and sausage machines and pickling barrels, and all the paraphernalia needed to run a home in those days and would have the inevitable loft upstairs. It is likely to have been accessed by an inside ladder, and there the dry goods were stored in large quantities. We must not forget that he fed the workers from his kitchen and there wasn't exactly a shop on the corner. By the time Deborah was ready to move in, the house was about eighty years old and would have been improved slightly with every change of ownership as each new owner added on, and added on, according to his needs.

Previous Owners

Pierre (Pieter) Pienaar bought De Krakeelhoek at the time of Pierre Mouij’s death in 1725 from Jacobus’s grandmother, Marié, who held the bond until it was fully paid up in 1748. He was the eldest son of the Huguenot, Jacques Pienard, who had come out on the Voorschoten in 1688, as a young married man. On the list of Huguenots on this ship was the Marais family, and various others including the two Le Roux brothers, one of whom married Jeanne, Pierre Mouij’s younger daughter.

Pieter was born at the Cape in May 1690. It so happens that from 1711, his younger brother Jacques, owned Leeuwenfontein which is situated very near to De Krakeelhoek in the Bovenvallei. Pieter Pienaar must have known the farm, De Krakeelhoek, and its first owner Pierre Mouij. Jacques may even have encouraged him to buy it after the old man’s death. Pieter Pienaar lived on De Krakeelhoek for 18 years and died in the Swellendam district in 1771.

Jan Harm Lategan was in fact, Johann Hermann Lategan. He had come out to the Cape on board the Patmos in 1735, from Billmerich in Westfalia, as a soldier. He worked as a farm overseer from 1736, married in 1742 and became a burgher the following year. He then went to live on Doolhof, next to De Krakeelhoek.

According to the ownership lists of the Bovenvallei farms, he bought De Krakeelhoek in 1743. He changed the name of the farm to Wel Van Pas, later simply Welvanpas.

The Lategans were prosperous farmers and at one time owned the whole top end of the Bovenvallei as far as Nabygelegen. They had bought the neighbouring farm, Doolhof, in 1765, and the farm on the other side, Nabygelegen, in 1774. They lived on Welvanpas for over 30
years, and surely improved the house considerably. After Jan died his sons farmed in a company for a while and then Willem took over Doolhof and his brother Andries, Welvanpas and Nabygelegen next door.

The first Vos to come out to the Cape was Jan Hendrik Vos, who was born in Batavia in 1715. He came out to the Cape before 1748, because in that year he married Johanna Bok and had already become a burgher. Seeing that Johanna remarried in 1766, her previous husband could not have been the man who sold Welvanpas to Jacobus Retief. It is more likely to have been their eldest son, Johan Hendrik, who would have been 31 in 1780.

The paperwork, which did not keep pace with the physical facts in those days, shows that Andries Lategan sold Welvanpas to Jan Hendrik Vos in 1782 and he sold it to Jacobus Retief in 1784.

The house Deborah moved into

Each of the previous owners had left his mark on the old house. Each room was a *deurloop* you had to walk through to get to the next room. Boys would have slept in an outside room they called a *ramhok*, and girls would share large beds in large rooms. Jacobus and Deborah lived in the old house for 30 years.

Deborah was pregnant on arrival, but it is hoped that she settled in before she had the baby. The lying-in period after a birth was a serious matter in the days before our modern medicines. Besides, surely, a woman who became a mother so regularly needed some time out. The baby was a healthy boy, their second son, and they named him Pieter, after Deborah's father, Pieter Joubert.

In order to picture our farm in Jacobus and Deborah's time, I have this little fantasy of a man on horseback who comes to visit. He comes trotting up the old Bovenvallei's sandy wagon track to what is still called *die Vloere*, meaning the threshing floor. From there the road drops down, passing between grain fields. The lovely blue mountains peaked by Sneeukop, are just the same as when we were children, except that no Bain's Kloof road winds upwards through its folds.

As he rides through the drift and onto Welvanpas's *werf*, the horse lifts its feet delicately from the cold clear water, coming straight from the mountain. To his right, a young *jamboesboom* is growing well, sending out new reddish shoots. His glance follows the water downstream to the left. A young loquat tree is also flourishing and further down there are big *syringa* trees all along the banks of the stream, which at that time still followed its original course to the larger Kromme River.

Next to the drift at the entrance to the *werf*, he passes the mill, with its wheel, attached to the gable end of the building, dipping onto the water. He comes to a halt in front of the house. There are lots of shady oaks, and a pig or two, snuffling for acorns, or lying comfortably in amongst the roots. Some chickens look up for a moment and continue with their scratching.

He looks up at the house, situated in the middle of the *werf*. A few steps lead to a built up stoep, running its full length. The afternoon sun is striking the whitewash through the spreading trees and you can just see that the thatched roof has a gentle curve over the *bo- en onderdeur* [stable door], of which the top half is standing open. The shutters onto the front stoep are also open and a wooden bench to the left of the front door looks inviting.

A friendly slave detaches himself from the stables against the *wapad*, offering to take care of his horse, but the rider indicates that he wants to ride up to the back of the house between the stables and the wine cellar that had been built on an old raised foundation. The area behind the house is bounded by a row of large oaks, and under one of them, an old trough is standing full of water. The man dismounts and hooks his reins over a post next to the water.

On this back *werf* there is also room for a wagon to turn when bringing in the grapes. The wine cellar is situated behind the house. The kitchen chimney is smoking and the *bo-deur* stands open. Set back a little, the old slave quarter is situated near the kitchen end of the house. A well-trodden path leads down from the kitchen and slave quarters to the stream where the water is fetched. It is the same stream the rider crossed at the drift. He can hear the sound of a few slave children playing in the deep shade of several oaks. Taking off his hat he walks toward the kitchen door and leans over the *onderdeur* for a while, and then it opens and he disappears inside.
In defence of the family legend

Jacobus and Deborah would have been amazed to hear that the date on which they moved into their new home would become an issue almost a hundred and sixty years later. The reason for this was that their fifth and unborn child, was destined to become famous as the Voortrekker leader, Piet Retief. The question that interested his biographers later was whether he was born on Soetendal before they moved, or at Welvanpas after they had moved there. The history, as passed down in the family, was that Jacobus moved to Welvanpas in 1780, and that Piet Retief was born there.

Welvanpas was always considered the birthplace of Piet Retief without question. I well remember the ox-wagon representing the Retief Trek coming to our farm at the time of the symbolic trek to Pretoria in 1938. I was six years old and there is a photo of the wagon on the werf with us standing in front of it.

In 1909 Gustav Preller published a book on Piet Retief. He sent a signed copy to my grandmother, but this book cannot be used as a source of information as Preller states that Piet Retief was born on the farm Wagenmakersvallei on which Wellington was later laid out. Preller confuses Piet Retief’s father with his brother, also Jacobus Retief, who farmed in that area.

Then in 1949 Prof. Franken published a book, Piet Retief se lewe in die Kolonie, which was published and the story volgens oorlewering [as handed down from generation to generation] in our family and the district, was ignored for the first time. Prof. Franken stated unequivocally that Piet had been born on Soetendal, Jacobus’s former farm, because the kaart en transport [deeds] stated quite clearly that the farm was sold by Jacob Retief on 15 January 1784, when little Piet was already three years old.

This book was hailed as a monumental work of painstaking research, which it was. Prof. Franken of Stellenbosch University was a greatly respected historical researcher and writer, who did valuable work for South Africa. In this book there is information about every aspect of Piet Retief’s life until he left the Cape Colony for Natal. It is a great asset to historians and I personally have gained many insights from it. In the first two chapters he covers the history of my family (with a few minor errors) up to the time Piet Retief left Welvanpas for Stellenbosch in 1806.

Prof. Franken’s book was published against a background of bitter political feelings. It is difficult, after more than sixty years, to realise how intense these feelings were in the decade between the symbolic trek and the publication of Prof. Franken’s book. There had been a great surge of Afrikaner Nationalism strengthened by anti-English sentiments and there was a tragic split amongst the Afrikaner leaders when the war broke out in 1939 and General Smuts came out on the side of the English against Germany and Nazism.

My mother noted in her diary on Tuesday 11 November 1947, that Prof. Franken had paid a visit to Welvanpas with his charming wife and their son, a professor from Pretoria, and also a professor of history from Holland. She told us afterwards that they all wore dark suits and dour expressions, which got dourer when my mother addressed them in English. She was a member of the Hofmeyr family, one of many Afrikaner families in Cape Town who had become anglicised. They were served tea at our big old dining room table, while my father explained that, according to the family tradition, Jacobus Retief moved to Welvanpas in 1780 and that the registration of the farm was not done at the time of the move. He explained that volgens oorlewering, Piet Retief was born on Welvanpas.

Prof. Franken and his team were not impressed by what my father had to say because they believed the dates on deeds to be irrefutable, cancelling oorlewering as far as they were concerned. My father, on the other hand, was not used to being discounted and felt that they were in effect questioning our family’s integrity. They parted on a very tense note, with “faces like thunder”, as my mother put it.

Of course, Prof. Franken judged by the standards of his time, when no transaction was accepted without the paperwork. In Jacobus Retief’s time it seems that it was not the procedure to register the sale of a farm first before moving there. Of course it is unfair to judge one period by the standards of another period, however difficult that may be. Recent genealogical research has highlighted facts that were not available to Prof. Franken and his team.

Margaret Cairns, the well-known genealogical researcher, has studied deeds registry records from 1657 to the early nineteenth century. She states that judging by these, registration
as a prerequisite to ownership and the transfer of the property, seems to have been disregarded in countless preserved instances.

This shows that actual registration dates, as my father said, did not necessarily have any connection to the date on which a family moved to a new home. It was accepted that a man's word was his bond.

I also found an interesting reference to the situation in the book Cape Dutch Houses and Farms by De Bosdari, printed in 1964: A land registry was started by Simon van der Stel in which grants made before 1686 were recorded, as well as those made after it, but title-deeds were not issued or dated until the land had been surveyed. This survey often lagged behind the grantee’s entry on the register by as much as ten or even twenty years.

In a book on the history of Wellington by G. and W. le Roux and a team of researchers, it is also stated that ground that was granted had to be surveyed, and it was quite a process before the erfbrief, an official document, was signed.

“Dit is normaalweg sowat drie jaar na die aanvanklike toesegging gedoen, maar die proses kon soms langer as 20 jaar duur.”

[“It normally took about three years from the time that the original grant was made to the completion of the documentation, but the process sometimes took as long as 20 years to be completed.”]

The erfbrief was the proof of ownership and was supposed to be handed over to the new owner. After that it took more time before the new owner got around to registering his new farm in his name.

As far as I am concerned, this upholds the family tradition, and although I do not have to justify it further, I would still like to mention a few other factors. I do not believe that the whole of the Bovenvallei, not to speak of the surrounding areas, all believed a myth. The old Wellington families, especially in the Bovenvallei, where they lived for generations on the same farms, were people who had exceedingly long memories.

The Jouberts of Twyfelting were relatives of Piet Retief through his younger brother Gideon. Lang Kootjie Malan of Lilienfontein was a brother-in-law of my father’s grandfather who was a nephew of Piet Retief and these people would certainly not have gone along with a myth.

Furthermore, my Oupa Dan was 19 when his widowed grandmother died. As she owned the farm, they were actually living in her house. She was a sister-in-law of Piet Retief. How could she not know in which year her father-in-law moved to Welvanpas? The facts had been carefully handed down from generation to generation because it was a familieplaas. These were people of unquestionable integrity.

I believe that one day in January 1784, Jacobus rode over to Stellenbosch, where these things were transacted, and stayed there until all the paperwork was done. As a matter of fact, it was very inconvenient to go to Stellenbosch, because Jacobus sold his oranges at the market in Cape Town and he therefore took care of his business there.

Franken would have found the following documentation at the deeds office: On 6 January 1784, Jacobus applied for quitrent on a few morgen of land adjoining his farm, Soetendal. The erfpag [quitrent] was granted to him for 15 years.

About a week later, on 15 January 1784, Jacobus sold his farm, Soetendal, plus the erfpag for £4000 (fenning). On the same day, the kaart en transport [deeds] of the farm Wel van Pas, alias De Krakeelhoek, denote the sale of this farm by Jan Vos to Jacob Retief for £70,000.

Franken’s findings were accepted without question and since his book came out, many prestigious writers have stated categorically that Piet Retief was born on Soetendal. However, Prof. Franken did not mention that there was another side to the coin – the family as well as the community, has always accepted that Piet Retief was born on Welvanpas.

Be that as it may, on arrival at Welvanpas, the family had come home to their familieplas. They had completed their wanderings from France to Holland and out to the Drakenstein valley in Africa. From there they had gravitated to the Wagenmakersvallei as early as 1703, when the first Francois moved his family to De Pattattes Kloof in the Bovenvallei. From being oewerbewoners [riparian dwellers] of the Loire, they had come home and become oewerbewoners of the Kromme.
3. Jacobus

Deborah and her daughters

I believe Deborah was as pleased as Jacobus to move to their new farm on the other side of Groenberg. It was far bigger than Soetendal and therefore a greater challenge for her husband, for which she was grateful as he was a very active person. As opposed to the open and somewhat level area around D'Olipphantskop and Soetendal, Welvanpas was more magnificent somehow, up against the rugged mountains and close to a constant stream. Of course, they would no longer be living next door to Jacobus's brother and elderly widowed father, but they were not far away. In the same year that Jacobus moved to Welvanpas, his father transferred D'Olipphantskop to his son, Petrus, who had farmed with him all his life.

There is a sense of acceptance and permanence about the planting of ornamental trees and the story has been carried down in the family of how Deborah brought two young trees to Welvanpas, from Stellenbosch. They must have had particular significance to her, because a lot of trouble had been taken and they were sewn into wet sacking and slung across the back of a horse, one hanging down on either side. The one was a loquat tree and the other a jamboesboom [rosewood tree], both originally from the East. Preller has it that she planted these trees eiehandig [herself], which only a gardener at heart would do. The jamboesboom was planted to the right of the stream near the drift as you entered the farm. The loquat tree was planted a little further down to the left of the same stream. Both trees flourished and were still very much in evidence when we were children, when from time to time people would come to see the trees planted by Piet Retief's mother. The jamboesboom, as we called it, had fallen down, but renewed itself long before we were born. The loquat was swept away in 1954 after a cloudburst up in the mountain caused the stream to become a raging torrent, but a seed germinated in the exact spot.

I believe that Deborah inherited the vitality and restless energy that typifies the Jouberts. Besides heading a busy household, she produced seven more babies after they moved to Welvanpas. She was 47 when her last baby was born. Eleven children had seen the light of day in 22 years, something to be proud of in those days. She lost only one child, her first little Martha, who died while they were still living on Soetendal. On the whole, she and her babies must have had strong constitutions as they all seem to have grown up in good health. Of her five sons, Francois was 22 years older than Gideon, the youngest son, and of her five daughters, Anna Aletta was 20 years older than the last baby, Anna Elizabeth. This means that Deborah was either a pregnant or a nursing mother during most of this time.

A mother of daughters had an obligation to equip them with knowledge of the use of home remedies in time of sickness. Her daughters would one day have to run their own households, which from my present-day perspective, is an absolutely daunting prospect! So the older sisters helped in the house assisted by the younger ones, who were learning from their mother, their older sisters, as well as women who worked in the house. I know they had lots of help in those days, but help does not take away responsibility. The girls still had to know how to do things and how to run a tight ship when their turn came.

One must remember that both Jacobus and Deborah were still of pure French blood and well aware of the fact. Having lost their language, they were even more determined to uphold various French traditions, especially of a culinary nature. For instance, oblietjies, thin little pancakes that were rolled into a cone, are generally accepted to have been of French origin and were commonly made at that time.

The preservation of food was a serious matter, and the fruit season was a time for action. A big copper jam pot and a brass skimmer are still around to tell the tale. The tradition of making the most wonderful translucent preserves is also attributed to the French Huguenots. Citrus was particularly suited for this purpose and citron, shaddoks and pampelmoes, were still growing on the farm when we were children. I don't know exactly what Deborah made, but citron konfyt [preserve] has certainly been made on our farm for centuries, and every year Nanny Spaas kept up the tradition. Loquats were preserved in Deborah's time and as she had taken the trouble to plant the trees, even the rose-apples off the jamboesboom might have been used. They are little round fruit about the size of a ping-pong ball, cream flushed with pink. We
used to eat them and they had a sweet scented sort of flavour. They were hollow inside and when shaken, two pips, very like loquat pips, could be heard to rattle around inside.

Grapes and wild blackberries were also made into jam, and apples and quinces into jelly. Sugar acted as a wonderful preservative of the fruit and the quality of everything was of the utmost importance. A family's reputation depended on it. The Huguenots were also known for preserving grapes and other fruit in brandy, and for making raisins. The Huguenots at the Cape used grapes in many ways, making soet sopies, mosbrood and moskonfyt.

At midnight on New Year's Eve, we always ate jongkêrels, a dish of raisins that had been doused in brandy and was then set alight. We would snatch the burning raisins out of the flames, and eat them out of the palms of our hands. This is a very old custom and possibly also originated from the French.

A great big iron pot of uncertain age stands on the front stoep at Welvanpas, recalling a very old ritual that goes back to the time when the first grapes were harvested in this country and probably even before that in the winelands of Europe.

It was the custom to boil down the mos of the last grapes of the season in an enormous cauldron until it became a thick dark syrup, they called moskonfyt. This was done outside and on every farm you would find a large iron moskonfypot near the wine cellar, built into its position so that a fire could be made under it.

I have not yet mentioned the big copper kettle and tertpan that were my father's pride and joy. The kettle, polished weekly, stood at our fireplace on a special stand, with the tertpan next to it. I never saw them even slightly tarnished. They always just sat there and glowed.

I said to my brother, "But the kettle is huge, wasn't it for hot water?"
He said, "No, it was for coffee. Remember the whole farm was fed out of the house."

It could easily hold two gallons (9 litres)! Coffee served inside, would have been kept warm in a smaller copper or brass koffie konfoor over a little flame. The big copper kettle must have stood in the kitchen, as did the tertpan in those days.

I wonder what wonderful tarts came out of this beautiful article. Like many of them in museums, the lid has not been preserved. Apparently the pan was lined with a crust, filled with some special sweet mixture, and then stood with its little feet in the live coals, while more coals were piled onto the lid, which accounts for the fact that so few lids have survived. It so happens that they had three taarte pannen in Deborah's time. Flavourings as we know them today, were not available, but they would boil peach leaves in milk to get an almond flavour for a melktert.

Naturally, it was very important for Deborah's girls to learn about home remedies and home nursing in order to be equipped for marriage. Sickness could easily lead to untimely death and death was not unknown to the families of those days. A knowledge of the medicinal qualities of the herbs growing in the veld was part of the Hottentot and the Bushman tradition. This they shared in time of need, one woman with another. Buchu grew in the veld on Welvanpas and when we were children, only a few people knew where to go and pick it. Koekemakranka, growing straight out of its bulb under the ground, could be picked in May. When you pulled it out, it was a soft file of fruity pips, about as thick as a pencil, and had a very strong fruit-salady aroma. They were not easy to find and children pressed them in their Bibles.

It sounds like a French idea to have thought of putting these two, buchu and koekemakranka, in brandy to draw and make it more effective to use as a remedy, mainly for the stomach. There were other medicinal herbs like salie, agt-dae-geneesbossie and hottentots kooigoed, as it had become known, also growing in our veld. Mrs Dijkman's recipe book, printed in Paarl in 1892, the first of its kind to be seen in print, contained some recipes that must have been handed down from generation to generation.

One of the mixtures for a cough sounds as though it is typical of the sort of remedy that Deborah might have used.

Ver Hoes no. 3

1 handvol boego,
1 handvol hottentots kooigoed,
'n handvol katte kruie, 1 télepel anys,
laat dit trek soos té. Drink 2 of 3 maal op 'n dag.
Another necessary accomplishment was sewing, and Deborah taught her daughters to sew a fine seam, working their samplers from a Dutch book of motifs. A merk lap [sampler] that was made by Margaretha Louisa, her second youngest daughter, when she was fourteen, has been preserved. I can imagine her sewing as she sat on the front stoep, in the shade of the oaks, on a fine afternoon. The sampler must have been a huge effort. It includes the tree of life, many animals and flowers and what looks like Dutch step gables. It is most beautifully stitched. Near the bottom there is a heart with her birth date, 1787, in it, topped by a crown. Below that are the dates and initials of brothers and sisters: DRT 1779, PRT 1780, and so on. Little Margaretha Louisa lived to be 97 and was the great grandmother of Issie Smuts, wife of General J.C.Smuts. Issie was 14 when her ouma-grootjie died and she must have remembered her well. This sampler is in the National Cultural History Museum in Pretoria.

One look at the fine material and little tucks in baby clothes and christening robes in museums, tells its own story and shows how precious babies were. There were also slaves who could sew beautifully and there is a lovely drawing by Lady Anne Barnard of a slave sitting and sewing. She looks very graceful.

As a family, the Retiefs must have been comfortable enough in the original house because, although Jacobus prospered, they lived there long enough to see their children grow up. One by one the daughters married. The eldest daughter married when her youngest sister was quite a baby.

I have read that the people in Cape Town and vicinity were waited on hand and foot by their slaves. However, Victor de Kock of the Cape Archives comments in one of his books on “magnificent wine farms” in Stellenbosch, Franschhoek, Drakenstein and Wellington (Wagenmakersvallei). He states that such domains could hardly have been planned and developed by lethargic and uncreative people. Manual labour may have been left to the slaves, but the supervision, direction and guidance were constantly necessary. All this took time and energy. He writes, “planned and developed”, but I would add “maintained” as well.
The Chronicles of De Krakeelhoek

I was also most interested to read the comments made by a German doctor, Heinrich Lichtenstein, about the women in the households he visited when in Somerset West in 1803. He stated that it was no uncommon sight to see “mothers, daughters and female slaves, collected together in a cool apartment at the back of the house, sewing, knitting or executing several kinds of fine ornamental work”, probably in the afternoons. He considered the women in these households to be “instructed in every branch of domestic economy”. I place Deborah in this category as head of her household on Welvanpas and believe she ran as fine a home as any in the district.

Deborah the housewife

The farming operation depended on the support of a well run home, with meals on time for the workers. In fact, the home and farm were interdependent. The members of the household knew what they did was important and took a pride in their work and in those far off days there was no such thing as anyone saying, “I'm only a housewife.”

The responsibility of feeding her growing family and as many as 17 slaves from the kitchen, must have been a huge responsibility for Deborah. In effect, Deborah acted as manager of what in many ways resembled a small factory with a production line of commodities made on the premises. They produced candles for lighting, soap for laundering, and processed their own meat.

A succession of meals was served and huge quantities of bread appeared as if by magic to those not involved in the baking. In addition, there were bottomless trommels of rusks for bottomless cups of home roasted coffee. Deborah was definitely the queen bee in her household. After the move Deborah would have wanted her facilities to be adjusted to her needs as soon as possible. As a smooth running household was such an important part of the farming operation, Jacobus would have made the necessary changes. Adequate space for storage was essential as everything was bought on a large scale. For instance, they would have bought enough dry goods like coffee, beans and rice to last for six months. Pantries had not "come in" when they first moved, and were only used from the end of the 18th century. There was probably a ladder in the kitchen leading to an upper storage area.

The best way I can transport myself to the time when Deborah was chatelaine of Welvanpas, is to look at the articles from that time - the last decades of the 18th century and the early 19th - that are still on the farm. The door of the old bakood [wall oven] and the bakkis [kneading trough] are still there. As they were frugal people, they probably moved the oven door from the old house to the new house when the wall oven was built. These iron doors were made in Sweden and imported from Holland.

So let us think about that essential commodity, their daily bread. How did they set about providing that? Well, in the kitchen there was the bakood. It was deep and built into the wall to the left of the open hearth, which was of course, under the chimney. All one saw was the black cast iron door. The old bakood of our house, built later by Jacobus, was still there in our childhood in the thirties, and remains there to this to day.

The meelkis for storing the flour and the bakkis for kneading the dough were also part of the kitchen equipment. At Welvanpas the great old bakkis stood waist high on a wooden stand and was the width of a double coffin and a bit deeper. I would think three people could knead at the same time, especially if one faced the other two. They would have had to bake every day with so many mouths to feed. Of course, they made their own yeast. Nanny Spaas made soet suurdeeg, a type of yeast, when we were children. I don't know which Deborah's household preferred, the soet or the suur suurdeeg. Anyway, the bread was kneaded and put out to rise overnight on the loose lid of the bakkis. Of course it was well covered. The older daughters and some slaves were probably up at about four in the morning, lighting lanterns in the kitchen and kneading down the dough so that it could rise again.

It took time to prime the bakood. It was stoked with special bushes like renosterbos and steekbos that flared and gave off a great heat. When the oven was hot enough, which Deborah knew almost by instinct after putting a hand inside, the ash was removed with a special black scraper with a long handle that is still to be seen on the farm. Coals were banked up to the sides of the oven to retain the heat and then, with a little broom made of bakoodbos, the oven floor was swept clean. At last the loaves were put in one by one, each loaf, with a deft
little movement, slipped off the long handled wooden bread *skop* that had been dusted with flour. The *skop* is still on the loft of the house. When everything was in place, the oven door was shut and the handle secured with a great sigh of satisfaction.

In an hour and a half, the bread would be ready and a wonderful aroma would fill the house as the first cups of coffee were being drunk with the early morning rusks.

*Mosbrood* would also have been baked in the oven in the pressing season in Deborah’s day. I remember Nanny Spaas sometimes made pink *mosbrood*, using red mos just for fun. They also made *mosbolletjies* and these recipes are also attributed to the French.

Another wonderful aroma that would sometimes emanate from the *bakoond* was when honey tea was being dried. It grew on Teekop in the part of the farm called Die Boland. Nanny Spaas also did this on occasion when we were children and the aroma is unmistakable.

During dry spells in the winter, the women would go there with containers *om te gaan bossies skud* [to shake the proteas]. Perhaps in Deborah’s time, the *koppie* behind the house, in the direction of Klein Klofie, was already a favourite place for this task. They would bend the pink and cream waxy sugarbush flowers over a container, without breaking them and give a little shake. Out came the sweet nectar that attracted the bees. Back in the kitchen it was strained and then boiled carefully until it became a pale, clear syrup. *Suikerbossiestroop* was a great favourite.

The wild honey was also gathered from the veld. The brown combs, some filled with *jongby* were put near heat for the darkish honey to melt out slowly. I even remember a shallow, white enamel dish near the side of the stove, piled up with honey-combs when I was a child.

The biggest problem for Deborah in the preservation of food was the meat. She salted just about everything, but also marinated in vinegar and smoked certain cuts. It must have been a battle. It seems they were not at all keen on eating fresh meat in those days and I believe it had something to do with a fear of smallpox. They had not forgotten that they had been warned at the time of the epidemic in 1755 that people working with raw meat might carry the disease.

Deborah personally supervised the metres and metres of sausage that they made, often combining venison, pork and beef. The seasoning was ground in an iron or brass mortar and pestle, as the spices came to them in a very rough state. Huge jars of spices were unloaded from almost every ship from the East and the small ginger jars were particularly beautiful. When the sausage meat was prepared, there was a solemn moment when a small portion was fried and Deborah would taste it. She probably carried the recipe in her head. Perhaps it needed a little more wine? A bowl of cleaned *varkderms* [pig’s gut], just the right thickness for sausage, lay waiting in salted water.

When she was satisfied, a strand of gut would be lifted out of the water and given a little blow-through to straighten out the twists before threading it, still dripping, onto the long nose of the *worsmasjien*. Willing hands filled the shaft with sausage meat up to its copper nozzle, and when the handle was turned, it connected with a ratchet, sending the meat shooting through the gut. At least two people would be involved in this process. Afterwards, some of the sausage was hung to dry a little before storing it in earthen containers, between layers of fat. *Droë wors* would have been made from venison. Nanny Spaas still used what might have been Deborah’s sausage machine, much to our fascination, when we were children. Now it stands in a place of honour on a display shelf in the farm kitchen.

In spite of all the work, meat processing days could be fun days as everyone lent a hand. Often there was more than one kind of meat. In winter a pig would come under the knife and there was chatting and teasing as they minced, salted, smoked and pickled the special cuts in barrels. Of course, the brine in the pickling *balie* [barrel] had been prepared the day before, standing on the stove all day and having the scum removed with the skimmer. They believed it had to be absolutely cold before any meat was put into it. There were hooks and chains in the chimney on which the pots, and also the hams were hung and these are still on Welvanpas. The kitchen was alive with happy sounds and wonderful smells as the *kiatings* formed from bits of fat slowly melted down in a big black pot. Since the fat-tailed Persian sheep had been introduced early in the 18th century, fat was more plentiful than for the early pioneers. The soft fat was stored in earthen jars for cooking. Pork fat was a particular favourite for eating on their lovely crusty bread with *moskonfyt*. The hard fat was kept separate and every little bit was hoarded for making soap or candles.
The brass ladles, *kommetjes* and *kaarsevorm* above, and the sausage machine below.
Venison had to be dealt with when it was brought home, whether it was convenient or not. This might also have been done on the farms in drier areas that Jacobus used for running his cattle. It was customary for a knapsack of biltong and rusks to be available at any time for anyone going out on horseback for the day or travelling any distance.

As far as poultry was concerned, they kept chickens, but the rooikat [cerval cats] and snakes were a nuisance and stole the eggs. Penguin eggs were freely available and I am sure that Jacobus always brought some home from Cape Town when he had been to market with the oranges. They also ate ostrich eggs. Then there were the indigenous fowls like kwartel [quail] in late spring, patrys [partridge], fisant [pheasant] and guinea fowl that we call tarentaal. My father always referred to them as poelpetaters. Deborah did not waste a thing and they ate curried pens-en-pootjies [tripes and trotters], skaakop [sheep’s head], brawn and offal with relish. They even ate porcupines and tortoises.

Soap and candles

Apart from the actual food making there was another side to housekeeping as well and it mostly concerned maintenance and cleaning. My brother excavated an enormous oval iron pot near the homestead and we wondered if it could have been the soap-pot. Soap was usually made outside in a big pot over a fire. It sounds like a necessary but unpopular chore. They had to make their own lye in a separate pot, from the alkaline ash of special bushes, boiled with water and left to cool and settle. Then a large quantity of the hoarded hard fat that had been rendered was put in the soap-pot with water and a little lye was added. It was a tedious business because someone had to stir continuously and regulate the fire. A long-handled wooden implement would allow the stirrer to stand further away from the fire. This operation could take five days or more. If it was not ready by the evening, they started again the next day. Eventually, they added salt to the sticky porridge-like mixture, which would separate out and when the pot cooled, the soap would be floating on a sea of lye. Then they would cut it into blocks.

Also dating back to Deborah’s time and at present displayed in the kitchen on Welvanpas, is a kaarsevorm that makes eight candles at a time. It was also known as a kersbank. Wicks were made from narrow strips of worn cotton mainly from sheets and pillow slips that they rolled between their palms and folded double to form a thin cord. The loop was hooked through a hole at the pointed end of the candle mould, and pulled to the top. It was held in place by putting a stick through the loop. Then the bottom of the cord was pulled tight and also knotted around a stick. Now only, they were ready to fill each mould with melted hard fat. A good stock of candles was always needed in the home. If the fat was not hard enough, the candles would bend over on a hot summer’s night.

The washing and ironing sounds like a nightmare considering the fabrics and fashions of the time, not to speak of the size of the household. I do not know how the slaves managed to iron with irons that had hot coals in them. It was an art and a specialisation and they could be rightfully proud of a job well done. It must have been a time consuming occupation and, of course, along with the laundry, the mending was a never-ending cycle.

A household needed lots of open wooden balies - with or without lids - usually made of teak with iron or brass hoops. There was a pekelbalie for pickling and a teegoedbalie for the teacups. One or more were used for washing dishes and then they also had a special one for washing feet. It was the custom for a slave or perhaps a daughter, to bring warm soapy water so that everyone could all go to bed with the comfort of clean feet after a hard day’s work.

In the summer they had the heat and the flies to contend with. This was another ongoing problem and they did their best to find solutions. The special little vlieëbos bushes that were sticky were hung from the ceiling and were supposed to repel or entangle the flies. When we were children, they used slangbos, a velvety shrub, dipped in some or other kind of poison. They did find one way to side-step the flies though, and that was by keeping the tea things in clean water in the tea barrel. When they needed them again they only had to be dried off, and were not fly spotted. One can hardly imagine life without refrigerators or insecticides! Fortunately for them, the Argentine ant had not yet been introduced.
Lady Anne Barnard writes in her diary in 1795, about "the march of thousands of fleas" that plagued them when she was staying at the Castle. I suppose they were just one of those things early occupants of the Cape had to accept.

Jacobus a versatile man

Today Welvanpas is a wine and citrus farm. It was Jacobus who cemented this foundation in the late 18th century. When he bought the farm, there were probably vines and citrus trees, but he was a progressive farmer who improved his farm. The opgaafrolle [returns for taxation purposes] give us interesting glimpses into his farming affairs, although a tax return would rather tend to play down than exaggerate. Fifteen years after he moved to Welvanpas, there were 50,000 vines in his vineyards, from which he pressed 35 leaguers of wine. He eventually increased his vines to 80,000.

The Wagenmakersvallei was well-known for its wonderful fruit and Jacobus is quoted as "making a living, apart from his wine crop, from selling some millions of oranges."

Apart from this, he also planted grain. As you came into the farm there was a threshing floor and a mill which were probably built by Jacobus as he liked to be self-sufficient. There was a smidswinkel [smithy], as well, where the horses were shod and any necessary maintenance could be done to the many wagons he owned.

As his sheep and cattle increased, Jacobus hired various farms in drier areas on which to run them. On his tax returns the names of these farms changed over the years. De Witteklip, De Persiaanse Klip, Witte Elsrivier and Yzervarkensrug, situated in the Saldanha Bay area appear regularly. After his death, members of his family even took over rights that he owned. Slanghoek, a farm across the mountains from Welvanpas, in the direction of Worcester, was used by generations of the family to run cattle until the 20th century.

After a look at Jacobus, the farmer, it does not surprise one to realise how much drive and energy he possessed in other directions as well. He was a man who did not take interference lightly, as we have seen in The Theron Affair when he refused to have his children christened by Ds. Van der Spuy. There were other problems too that affected him directly, concerning his business and his political rights.

In 1787, a problem arose concerning the farmers’ right to get their produce to the market on the Ou Kaapse Wapad through Klapmuts, Kuilsrivier, Tiervlei, and on to Cape Town. Farm wagons came from Paarl, Wagenmakersvallei, Rooisand and even as far afield as the Bokkeveld and Bruintjies Hooge, bringing their produce to the market. As the ox wagons took so much time to cover distances (a maximum of 20 miles or 33 kilometres a day) there were public outspans with water, where the wagons and animals and their drivers rested overnight. It was a trial to the farmers on or near whose farms these public outspans were situated. When the outspans were found to be blockaded, the wagons were forced to make a detour. The owner of Tiervlei, Hendrik Eksteen, resorted to desperate measures like confiscating cattle and then demanding a fine. He even dug a trench around the public outspan on his property and cultivated it. Jacobus was amongst the farmers who protested and insisted on their right of having an unrestricted passage for their produce to the market.

There were other problems too. The burghers felt oppressed and were thwarted at every turn as the Dutch East India Company officials controlled the prices of produce. From 1779 to 1791, his 25th to his 36th year, an enlightened movement known as De Kaapse Patriotten, was established. Jacobus Retief and his three brothers, Francois, Petrus and Daniel, were part of it in a united front. This movement is considered by some as the beginning of Afrikaner nationalism, because a group of burghers decided to take action and try to bring about change.

In the first year, the Patriotten requested permission to send four delegates over to the Heeren XVII in Holland. Three were given permission, but the fourth, none other than Jacobus’s uncle, Tieleman Roos, was refused because it was thought that he wanted to revive the Theron Affair that had split the church. However they relented when he said he wanted to take some samples of tobacco he had grown on his farm to see if he could find a market.

Once overseas, the delegates prepared a memorandum of their grievances. Then a terrible tragedy occurred when Tieleman Roos died while they were in Holland. It was a huge
setback for the Patriotten and a traumatic happening for their Tant Magdalena, their Roos cousins and the family in general.

The farmers were disappointed as hardly any concessions were made to them at the outcome of the delegation. The answer of the Patriotten was to send another delegation to Holland to approach the States General, who had power over the Heeren XVII. The trip was financed in 1785 by 94 burghers who guaranteed the costs. Amongst them were the four Retief brothers, Francois, Daniel, Petrus and Jacobus.

Again it was a disappointment. However, they did have some small gain in the end when the Heeren XVII agreed that colonists could sell their produce to ships. They were also given representation on a committee that determined the prices when the governor purchased any excess produce on the Company's account.

Apart from the five girls, Jacobus and Deborah also raised five boys and, as in the generations before them, each had only one name in the French tradition. They were Francois, Pieter, Jacobus, Daniel and Gideon. Jacobus had had enough experience with officialdom to realise how important education was to his children. The Retief children probably enjoyed the best education that was available at the time. However, that which was available was not very impressive and it was difficult to find a competent tutor.

Although his brother Petrus, and the widow of his brother Daniel, both had schoolmasters in their service, we do not know what plan was made on Welvanpas. However, some school desks amongst Jacobus's effects do indicate that he probably had also employed a tutor. Letters written by their son, Piet, have been preserved and they show clearly that the children's schooling was a priority and that they were not just left to run wild.

It was not uncommon for the slave children also to be taught by the tutors, along with the farmers' children, but we have no records of what happened on Welvanpas. It is recorded that in 1796 mission work was done amongst slaves and Hottentots in the area by Jacob van Zulch and Bastiaan Tromp who were representatives of the London Missionary Society.

The boys start to leave home

As the boys were growing up, volatile debates at home are likely to have been a common occurrence amongst these brothers, with their pure French genes. They were growing up to think for themselves and the differences in their ages only meant that the younger ones were exposed to political discussions from an impressionable age. Jacobus encouraged his sons to become self-supporting and build up their own possessions like wagons and cattle and horses, in preparation for when they would start out on their own.

Francois, the eldest son, is described as a deeply religious man. He married Martha Elizabeth Joubert in 1794, when he was 21 and she was 18. Both her parents were Jouberts and so the young couple were probably cousins on his mother's side. Francois was drawn to the eastern districts where the town of Graaff-Reinet had been laid out some years before with a church and magistracy. Land was obtainable if you applied for leningsplase [loan tenure], being mainly cattle farms. We do not know exactly when Francois left the Wagenmakersvallei, but he was farming in the Eastern Cape by 1810. Two children from this marriage are recorded. They are Anna Elizabeth and Debora Johanna, who were christened in 1797 and 1798.

By 1817 Francois had been widowed and had married again. Both his daughters were older than his new wife and we know that the elder daughter Anna Elizabeth had already married Johannes Dewald Hattingh by this time. Francois was over 40 and his new wife, Martha Maria Maritz, was very much younger than he was. She was a younger sister of the Voortrekker leader Gerhard Maritz, and her mother is described as a domineering woman who was very interested in the work of the missionaries and gave her daughters in marriage while they were still very young. As Martha Maria and a younger brother were christened together in 1805, she was probably born two or three years earlier and might have been about 15 when she married Francois. No children are recorded from this marriage.

Four years earlier, Martha Maria's sister, Susannah (christened in 1800), had been given in marriage to Eerwaarde Erasmus Smit, an older man. She was only 13 years old at the time. (Susannah was an intellectual woman and several books have been written about her, based on her personal journals. Her husband, Eerwaarde Erasmus Smit's diary is also well known to students of the Great Trek.)
Piet, the second eldest son of Jacobus, left Welvanpas for Stellenbosch in 1806. As his birthday was in November, he was probably 25. According to tax returns for 1804, he was already sowing grain on Welvanpas in a small way, on his own account, breeding horses, owning some cattle and I would imagine a wagon. The tax return also states that he owned one slave.

While Piet and his younger brother Daniel, served with the Stellenbosch Commando on frontier duty in 1812, Piet conceived the idea of supplying provisions to the troops stationed on the border. He was granted the government contract to supply the eastern border posts of the government and his application for two loan farms in the Albany district also succeeded. It took him most of 1813 to get all his plans underway and ready himself to move east like his elder brother, Francois.

Jacobus settled his third son, Koos, on The Pines in the Wagenmakersvallei. He lived there for many years and was remembered later by the schoolmaster, Mr Stucki, as "den oude heer Koos Retief." Daniel, from whom we are descended, farmed with his father on Welvanpas, and Gideon, the youngest, was married when he was 21 and farmed on De Twyfeling (later just known as Twyfeling), a farm nearby.

Before he set out on the journey to Uitenhage, Piet came to Welvanpas from Stellenbosch to say goodbye. His father was almost sixty and his mother a little older. He really did not know if he would ever see them again. He was enthusiastic about the future and told them how he had hired warehouses for his supplies and incurred various expenses. It seemed to his parents that many of the qualities of his intrepid pioneer forebears had surfaced again in him. On the one hand he had the gentle ways and sympathetic nature of his grandfather, Frans Retief. Yet they sensed the leadership qualities and intellect of the old Charl Marais from whom he was descended on two counts. Also the tremendous restless energy of old Pieter Joubert, and the irrepressible pioneering spirit of Francois du Toit, seemed to course through his veins. He also had the determination and the courage of all the other forebears. All his life, people had been immensely attracted to him and he was a very likeable person, but his parents feared that his boundless optimism and trusting faith in humanity, could lead him into trouble.

Jacobus plans a new homestead

1813 was not only the year in which Piet moved to the eastern frontier. It can also be marked as the year in which the new house on Welvanpas was being planned in all seriousness.

It is my perception that the first move made to change the face of the werf on Welvanpas, was when the course of the river was changed. We always referred to it as the river, but it is actually a perennial stream, a tributary that runs down from the Hawequa Mountains, past our house and only gathers momentum in winter as it rushes on to the Kromme. At some time the course of this stream was changed to flow parallel with the wapad that crosses our werf, and joins the Kromme River higher up the stream than it did originally. One day we were talking about it, standing on the bridge where the drift used to be.

"The river's course was not changed on the mountain side," my mother said. "It was only changed on the other side, below the bridge. You see, the river went straight down here," she pointed across her garden below the road. "That's why, when we had that flood in 1954, it went right down there again - it just took its old course!"

"Yes," said my brother. "It came straight down through the orchards and went into the Kromme River at the bottom down there!"

We were talking about a cloudburst on top of Sneeukop in May 1954 that left scars right down the front of the mountain above the Bain's Kloof road.

"I think the changing of the course of the river and the building of a new house are relative to each other," I said.

"We are not sure who changed the course of the river," my brother answered, "but it was in the early days."

"I think it must have been Jacobus! Could it be that Jacobus planned to build the house higher up, when he decided to change the course of the river? I feel sure the two things went together!"

"But, you speak of turning the stream," said my brother. "Oom Johnnie Louw, you know Oupa's brother-in-law, he told me one day, hulle het dit toegesleep met beesvelle. He had been
told that they dragged oxhides covered with soil across the stream. Of course they used oxen to do this. They had plenty of them. *Dan gooi hulle hom vol grond en dan sleep hulle hom.* And so they turned the stream so that it came this way and joined the other river higher up at Skaapdrif. Then the ground was all in one." (Oom Johnnie Louw’s wife Jacoba had grown up on the farm.)

As a matter of fact, oranges have been growing here on this land for well over two hundred years. In the days of the drifts, before the bridges were built on the farm, there must have been a second drift in line with the front door, over the "new" river. You could stand on the front stoep and look down between the orange trees, right down to the Onderland.

I assume that it was Jacobus who changed the course of the river and it may have been several years after this that Jacobus decided he was ready to build the new homestead. At the time there was almost a fever of enthusiasm for beautifying the old homes, but Jacobus did not intend to improve the existing house. He had decided to build a new one on a site higher up.

In the Wagenmakersvallei the majority of the Cape Dutch houses were built in the late 18th and early 19th century.

By this time the Dutch fleet who had wrestled the spice trade from the Portuguese, found itself being ousted by the superior British fleet. In 1794 the Dutch East India Company finally folded and the British occupied the Cape the following year.

As in the case of Jacobus, it was generally the third generation of Huguenots at the Cape that had the means to build the beautiful homes that are so typical of the Cape Dutch style of architecture.

Of course, the Dutch style could not remain pure because it had to be adapted to circumstances out here. The walls had to be plastered as the weatherproof little Dutch bricks were not available. In the long months of pleasant weather, people sat outside, so stoeps were added.

There were also different social customs at the Cape. The farmers were extremely hospitable, and always willing to receive relations and other visitors as people lived greater distances apart. They had large families and needed a room spacious enough to hold evening prayers and even services when it was too wet to travel to church.

These houses on the farms were not the work of architects, although Jacobus probably considered himself an amateur in this respect. The craftsmen were Malays and the raw materials used were what was available, not necessarily what was most suitable. As many of the books on 18th century architecture do not credit the Malay craftsman with influencing the style of the gables, I was so pleased to find a reference in De Bosdari's *Cape Dutch Houses and Farms*, in which he agrees that there was a taste that was entirely un-European and attributed it to the Malay craftsman.

Daniel and young Gideon were running the farm, so Jacobus had more time and he also had more money as he had prospered. With his growing interest in building, Jacobus acquired professional help by buying the Malay artisan, Martyn. Together they gained more experience in building by erecting *Weltevreden* for his daughter Margaretha Louisa, who lived in Stellenbosch. As Jacobus intended to start building on Welvanpas the following year, 1813 was a year of measuring and discussion, planning and ordering and generally getting ready to begin. The time to build the new house on Welvanpas had at last arrived and Jacobus and Martyn were more than ready to get started.

They knew from experience that it would be a long haul and that the house would probably take three years to build. Normally, no new project would be started that could interfere with the pressing season when the grapes were being harvested, but as they needed a special work force for the building anyway, this may not have been an issue.

Usually an older house would be adapted, not replaced. But since there was a right of way across the *werf* to Doolhof, Jacobus had decided that it would be far better to build a completely new house as high up on the slope as possible. The site he chose was right in the middle of the row of Van der Stel oaks that Pierre Mouij had planted. They were more than a hundred years old by that time. As the soil is not deep against the hillside and there is a lot of clay, the oaks were not as enormous as they would have been in deep soil. Of course, today, after three centuries, the oaks that remain in this row are massive, gnarled and mossy. Magnificent and precious as they are, they are past their prime and my brother watches anxiously, as branches die back and some damage occurs after each storm.
So the first step in the building operation was to bring down some oaks. With axes wielded on the south side of their stems, many hands pulling on ropes from the other side and quite an audience, you can be sure, they would have come crashing down in a shower of young acorns. There may even have been the angry sound of indignant bees, because, when we were children, there were always wild bees in the old oaks near the house. After the branches had been lopped off, the main stems could be sawn into logs and removed and the roots prized out. Then it was still necessary to excavate more soil from the hillside, so that they would be able to place the house exactly where they wanted it.

In order to achieve a level sight, a wall, three metres high, had to be built of bricks and then filled in and compacted before they could begin to peg out the foundations. This would support the *hooge* [high] stoep of the new house. But where did they get the bricks?

"They had their *stenemakery* in Klein Klofie," my brother said. "The clay bricks for the building were made and fired there."

Klein Klofie is not far from the house. If you follow the *wapad* a little way along towards Doolhof, a small seasonal stream trickles down from the mountain. Looking up towards your right, you will see an abundance of indigenous yellow-wood trees deep in a little kloof, known as Klein Klofie. On the hill rising to the left of Klein Klofie, Jacobus’s cattle kraal was situated.

There were plenty of other places on the farm where there were *kleiputte* [clay deposits], but this place was the most convenient. Here the clay had to be kneaded to a suitable consistency. My brother says that they would chase the goats across the clay several times and then turn the surface and chase them across again. Slaves also helped *om klei te trap* [to tread the clay] and it was the sort of thing the children also loved to do, enjoying the feel of the clay squishing through their toes.

It must have been a tremendous task to actually fire the bricks, and the wood from the old oaks would have come to a useful end. Nothing remains of the kiln after all this time, but there were still some wooden forms for bricks lying on the loft when we were children.

To build and fill in the *hooge* stoep so that they could mark out the ground plan for the new house was an enormous task. They would build the wall half a metre in height and then with the oxen, drag in river stones and soil and compact it and then take the wall up another half metre and fill that in. Slowly the height of the wall grew as the oxen continued to drag in stones and soil from the left-hand side as you faced the site, because it was easier to access it from there.

I was curious about the special slave, Martyn. For Jacobus to buy such an accomplished slave must have been a seriously considered investment. One day, as we were enjoying a cup of coffee on the front stoep at Welvanpas, I asked my brother about him.

"Dan," I said, "I know the house was built by this special slave - but all I know is that his name was Martyn."

My brother said, "Come, let's take Martyn then. All that I know is that he was a builder and a Malay. He built this house and Nabygelegen next door, and, of course, Twyfel's house. Also Rooshoek, so the Louws tell me, and then he also built Weltevreden in Stellenbosch for his daughter. Jacobus said they could use Martyn on Rooshoek, but he had to sleep on the farm every night. Of course, you know that there is a shortcut around the back of Groenberg. Well, he had to walk home every evening."

"But isn't that terribly far?" I asked, quite shocked.

But my brother said that people thought nothing of taking a shortcut around the back of the mountain. All the country people, not only the labourers, were accustomed to walking considerable distances in those days.

Martyn had been bought for his special knowledge and training and it is not surprising that Jacobus was so possessive of him as he was a very big asset. His plastering of gables was the envy of the neighbourhood. He was in demand, and Jacobus being a businessman, hired him out when he was free. My brother said he was a master builder and he even ordered the raw materials. Of course, nothing was ever ordered that they could possibly find or produce on the farm.

We paid a visit to our friend Dirk Visser, a respected restoration architect that we have known since our student days and spoke about different gables plastered by the same slave.

"*Daar is 'n hele paar plekke waar jy huise kry wat verwant is aan mekaar - dieselfde patroon het. Byvoorbeeld, Bekkersvlei. Hy en Nancy in die Pérel, het dieselfde patroon op die*"
3. Jacobus

In other words, he said that you could tell the work of a man like Martyn by his style and he mentioned several places where houses can be compared with each other. This means that if you made a study of the gables attributed to Martyn, you should be able to see the relationship between them.

I believe that of an evening, Jacobus and Deborah would go and stand on the terrace that was steadily growing higher where the new house would be built. They would picture the view from the stoep with the old house demolished and the nice big werf. The house was certainly going to be a more comfortable distance from the wapad, that thoroughfare that they were committed to provide through the farm as access to Doolhof next door.

Jacobus and Deborah would have discussed the interior of the house many times. It would not be very different from the houses being built at that time. They would have Batavian tiles in the voorhuis and yellow-wood for the beams. Deborah fancied a dispens [pantry], a new idea at the time. She could still store bulky things on the loft, but it would not be accessed by a ladder from the kitchen, but rather by an outside ladder. They planned to have a wooden division between the voorhuis and the big room behind it that would be used as a dining room. The lower part of this dividing screen could be opened by sliding panels back, or removing them completely, when necessary. Jacobus had seen several of these in Stellenbosch while building there and he considered this a must.

The tragedy

But Deborah was never to see the new house. In the winter of 1814 she died on 9 June. She was 64 and hers was the first death in the family in the thirty-four years they had been on the farm. She died in the original house, where so many of her babies had been born and where she had experienced the rough and tumble of raising a large family. We have no details of whether her death was sudden or not. I do not think it was a long illness, because I cannot imagine Jacobus getting started on such a big project as the building of the house, if his wife was terminally ill.

Seven married children lived near enough to come home and I cannot help wondering - was it raining on the new foundations, that wintry day when the kapkarre stood on the werf and the children tried to console their father? Letters were posted to Francois and Piet on the eastern frontier. We do not know how long the news took to reach them. There was a regular postal service as far as Rooisand and Swellendam, but runners may still have been used from there on.

Their new church, the Strooidak Kerk in Paarl, had been completed nine years before Deborah’s death, and the original graveyard was still in use, but we are not able to identify her grave as this area was later levelled off. Deborah’s name is reputed to be on a list of people who were buried there, but we have not been able to establish this definitely. Deborah’s death was a bitter blow for Jacobus, caught up in the building of a house for them to enjoy and live in together. He and the remaining children still at home (Daniel, Gideon and possibly Anna Elizabeth) felt lost in the old house without her. I feel sure that the dear faithful slaves, who had shared so much of her life’s experience with her, mourned her too. They would have tried to keep the household going as she would have liked, and supported the 17 year-old Anna Elizabeth on whose shoulders the responsibility would then fall if she was not yet married.

Less than a month later, on 4 July, Jacobus and Deborah’s son Piet, married the widow Greyling in Graaff-Reinet.

The outside of the homestead

After a trauma, life goes on and so did the building of the house, its walls slowly rising from the well-compacted foundations. Such a good job was done that it has never subsided at all. In Cape Town itself, it was the custom to use blouklip and in the Peninsula, koffieklip up to window sill height, but Jacobus would not have made his oxen bring in such heavy material if he...
had something suitable at hand. So when the foundations had been carefully pegged out, he had round river stones placed one on top of the other, to a height of about 18 inches (45cm), as a base of each wall. This would prevent the damp from coming up, but it must have been backbreaking work for the labourers as well as the oxen. To this day there is no electric plug lower than two feet (60cm) from the floor, because the electricians just cannot get into the wall.

Meanwhile, in Klein Klofie, helpers continued to tread the clay to the right consistency and shape them into bricks, while others gathered wood for the firing of each batch as it was ready. They had to keep going if they were to stay ahead of the builders, who built with the fired bricks and used clay for mortar. This operation of firing the bricks must have started even before the actual building began and been an ongoing operation over a long period. The design of the house was based on the H-plan. That is an H lying on its side. The walls of the house would be thick, the rooms spacious and the ceilings high. The front door would be situated in the middle of the front facade and would open into a wonderful long room - the crossbar of the aitch.

As the building proceeded, the walls gradually reached roof height. Teak doors and window frames were built in flush with the outside of the wall. They were made on the premises.

The basic shape of the end gables and the more decorative gable over the front door had to be built before the plastering, which was Martyn’s forte, began.

I asked my brother, “Tell me, what do you know about the wood? Where did the wood come from that they used to build our house?”

“As far as I know,” he said, “they fetched the wood in Table Bay where it washed up on the beaches. It was the wood used for ballast on the ships coming back from the East with spices. They didn’t even bother to unload it, they just jettisoned it and it washed up out of the sea. It had no value, it was just ballast.”

It was usually Burma teak.

“Petrus Bosman told me,” my brother continued, “that some of the beams, actually whole trees, were so big that they could not load them on a wagon. So they made a contraption where you loaded only one part on the wielstel [chassis] of the wagon and then the oxen had to drag the trees. The wood was so blooming hard that when they got to the farm, it wasn’t even worn down.”

I imagined a wagon arriving on the werf. The oxen would be snorting and sweating from the effort of dragging an enormous tree and it would have caused a big commotion and everyone on the farm would come running to have a look.

“And what did they do when they got the wood to the farm?” I asked.

“Hulle het by Skaapdrif dit gesaag. Daar was die saagput.”

My brother explained that the sawpit was situated at Skaapdrif. It is where the little seasonal stream that flowed down from Klein Klofie, seeped into the river below the wapad.

“They had to wedge the stump against the river's embankment and then hollow out the soil so that it lay across a pit. And then one man stood at the bottom and one at the top and then they sawed the wood.”

Then my husband Willem, said, “Oom Bertie (my father's youngest brother, an architect) one day explained that it was a specific saw that they used to saw in this way.”

An ordinary long saw was alright if you sawed slices of wood across the tree, against the grain. But they needed to saw planks and beams with the grain, along the length of the tree.

“Die handvatselfs sit dwars op die saag!” my husband said.

With one man standing in the pit and one on top, the handles of the saw needed to be at right angles to it. It was a special saw.

Sawing was a gruelling job and even a strong man could not saw for many hours before someone else would have to take over. The Sawyer had to have a strong physique, so a small person just could not do it. I should think they would take turns to stand at the bottom of the pit, because the one at the bottom had a harder time and unless he wore a toering, one of those wide hats the Malays wore, even his face would be covered with sawdust. If you look at the beams in the ceiling on Welvanpas and the width of the planks in the inner doors, it gives you some idea of what they were up against.

Although the present kitchen is on the right-hand side, towards the stream where they fetched their water, my brother has found evidence up in the loft, that the original kitchen was built on the other side of the house. There are the sawn off beams of an old soldertrap, and in the loft, slightly blackened bricks show where a chimney had been.
We think that Jacobus had plans to move the slave quarters and housing for their workers to the other side of the house. This is logical because the slave quarters now stood in front and to the right of the new house. The only problem was that there was no water on that side, but it was possible to divert water from much higher up the stream.

The reason for moving the kitchen to the side nearest the stream must have been that the south-easter carried the sparks from the chimney over the dry thatch. That would never do and as soon as they saw their mistake, they rectified it. The first chimney was built on the inside of the gable, but when they moved it, they built it on the outside of the end gable.

At this stage, with the walls at roof height, and with the chimney in position, the plastering could begin. One custom was to plaster with softened clay that could dry hard, but it could be softened again by heavy rain. Burnt lime from seashells, mixed with sand, gave a permanent set and was not affected by the rain. The catastrophe of the end gable of their church in Paarl collapsing after heavy rain only a year after it had been completed, was still fresh in Jacobus’s mind, so he decided to take the option of adding burnt lime.

He could send a wagon to fetch the sand at convenient places on the riverbanks on the farm and, of course, the clay was no problem, but a great deal of lime was needed and it had to be fetched from a limekiln [kalkbrandery]. They probably chose the limekilns on the West Coast nearby. This was quite an expedition, but they knew the area well as Jacobus grazed his cattle in the Saldanha Bay district, also on this coast. There are two kilns on the way to Yzerfontein that have now been declared National monuments. The lime was baked in the kilns from shells. In the early days the shells were brought from huge deposits on Robben Island and alarming stretches of forest were denuded in order to keep various kilns fired near Cape Town.

At this stage of the building operation Martyn really was in his element and his mastery of proportion and balance was awe-inspiring. Plastering gables was long since well known as a Malay skill at the Cape, The four end gables of Welvanpas have been described as holbol with very fine proportions and a cap that is split into two scrolls with a small shell between them. Holbol means that the outline of the gable is alternately convex and concave.

The end gables really are beautiful, particularly when the oaks are bare and you can see the whitewashed gables against a blue winter sky. It is not at all surprising that neighbours and family wanted Martyn to design and plaster their gables as well.

The front gable is neo-classic with straight sloping sides. Later, a veranda was built over the stoep because it was unprotected in the winter. This was done by my father’s grandmother who sold the front door with its fanlight, and put in Victorian sash windows as well. So now we can only guess at the total beauty of Martyn’s work, where the front door and the gable were conceived as one. However, if you take other gables that are attributed to him, you can get a better idea of the beauty that must have been, once the house had been whitewashed.

Symmetry was the name of the game and there are two pairs of urns adorning the gable at different heights. In all likelihood (my architect uncle said) a pair of fluted pilasters ran from under these urns, down on either side of the front door, with its large fanlight, continuing down to the stoep. A teak window with shutters on either side completed the perfect symmetry of the facade.

Life for Jacobus changed dramatically after Deborah died. They had been married since he was 18 years old and at the age of sixty, life as a widower did not suit him at all. It seems that there was a widow, twenty years his junior, living on Doolhof at that time. Perhaps it was inevitable that they were drawn to each other, and a year after Deborah had died, Jacobus and Johanna Petronella van Blerk, the widow of Joel Daniel Herholdt, were married in July 1815.

My father told me that Jacobus married the widow who lived on Doolhof and went to live there with her. He always said that Daniel finished the building of our house. I wrote this and other facts about our farm down in the journal that I kept when I was a girl of seventeen. I accept this fact although my brother feels that it seems out of character for Jacobus to have moved off the farm. However, circumstances had changed for Jacobus, and Welvanpas would have lost the challenge it had always presented to him. His children were grown up, Deborah was gone, and his two youngest sons were running the farm for him. His youngest daughter, Anna Elizabeth, was 19 and probably married by then.
The Chronicles of De Krakeelhoek

An impression of the original front façade

The side gables at Welvanpas showing the patina of years of white wash
There is no record of Joel Daniel Herholdt or his wife Johanna van Blerk owning Doolhof. However, there is a grey area in its ownership in the 10 years between 1813 and 1823 and Jacobus and Johanna were married for six of those years. When Johanna married Jacobus, she may simply have preferred to stay where she was in her own household, and may even have made it a condition of their marriage. There was all that building going on at Welvanpas and the old house was due to be demolished at the end of it.

Seven months after they were married, Jacobus’s youngest son, Gideon, just a few months short of 21, married Helena Johanna Hauptfleisch of Twyfeling in the Bovenvallei (February 1816). Three months later, in May, Jacobus and Johanna made a joint will in which Jacobus named his children as his heirs and Johanna named her children as her heirs. Should they have a child, he or she would be a joint heir. They both made provision for certain of their respective slaves and Jacobus left his farm, Welvanpas, to his son, Daniel, under condition of certain payments into the estate.

Although the house on Welvanpas was by no means completed, Jacobus saw his way clear to start a new project, namely to build a house on Twyfeling for Gideon and Helena. My brother believes that the wood for the Twyfeling house was probably sawn on Welvanpas and the bricks baked there as well. As Twyfeling was a small hilly farm with very few level areas, it is a logical assumption. If so, there would have been quite a lot of cracking of whips as oxen struggled to pull their loads up the steep road leading past Optenhorst to the building site on Twyfeling.

At some stage Jacobus handed over the Welvanpas building operation to his son, Daniel, and it is his name and the date, 1817, that appears on the gable. To my way of thinking, this confirms my father’s statement that Jacobus lived elsewhere with Johanna.
Twyfeling was originally a part of Openthorst in the Boovuvallei. When the owner, Louisa Hauptfleisch, died in 1812, it was divided into three parts. Her son Gabriel, going on for fifty, inherited 7 morgen of hilly land. He is said to have called it Twyfeling because he could not decide where to build a homestead, but there are other theories as well. He may also have been unsure as to whether the farm was big enough to be viable. Although the farm was small, he probably had quitrent land as well. I asked my brother about Twyfeling.

“Gabriel Andreas Hauptfleisch het vir Twyfeling gehad,” he said, “en hy het net een dogter gehad en Gideon Retief is getrou met die dogter. Ja,” continued my brother, “en hy het toe ‘n hele string kinders gehad en die oudste een is met Jacobus Andreas Joubert getroud.”

[So Gideon married the only daughter of the owner. He had a string of children and the oldest daughter married Jacobus Andreas Joubert.]

That is how Twyfeling became a Joubert farm and, of course, Gideon and the Jouberts had a communal ancestor through Gideon’s mother, Deborah. My brother Dan’s wife, Andrenette, is descended from this family, and therefore their children are descended from both brothers, Daniel and Gideon Retief.

There is another homestead on Twyfeling that is older than the one that Jacobus built for Gideon and Helena, and that is where her parents would have been living. Jacobus and Martyn put their hearts and souls into this, their last project that we know of. The house they built on Twyfeling is also built on the H-plan like Welvanpas and also has a neo-classic gable. Today it is one of the most beautiful old houses in the Boovllei and one of Martyn’s masterpieces. Bo-plaas, as it was also known, has a view down the valley of the Boovllei. It has an especially lovely front door with an extra glass bo-deur that can slide down when the wooden inner bo-deur is open. Twyfeling was completed a year after Welvanpas and carries the date 1818 on its gable.

My father also told me, and I wrote it in my diary, that Jacobus and Johanna had a son called Johannes, who married someone from “agter die berg” (up north) and had four sons. In the Retief genealogy book, printed 30 years after my father’s death, it is stated that Jacobus and Johanna did indeed have one child. On 16 July 1818, a baby boy, Johannes Jacobus, was born to them. Jacobus was 64 at that time. Predictably, little Johannes did not remember very much about his father, but he named his first son after him and when he did not survive, he named another son, Jacobus Benjamin, also after his father.

Names can be confused and according to the Retief genealogy book Jacobus farmed on Doolhof. A certain Jacobus Retief did own Doolhof at one time, but the dates don’t fit with it being the son of Johannes. My brother says it was Daniel’s brother, Koos “Pines” who bought it for his daughter. She married her cousin, also a Retief, Gideon of Twyfeling’s son.

The thatching and the inside of the house

Once the roof timbers on the new homestead on Welvanpas were up, it was time to thatch. I don’t know exactly where the original thatch came from, but there are many varieties of biesies growing wild all over the place. I asked my brother what he thought.

“Kyk,” he said, ”Dirk Visser het vir my gesê die ou mense het die materiaal gebruik wat om die huis staan. Jy moet kyk hier in die veld van hier nie ’n ding is om te gebruik, Dirk het gesê kyk net rondom jou.”

[Dirk Visser said that the old people used what was at hand.]

The best thatch these days comes from Riversdale and Albertinia and the biesie family, restio, is a very common plant family at the Cape and one sees a lot of it among the fynbos. All through my childhood I can remember it being cut for brooms on Welvanpas. This local thatch was probably used and replaced on the old house that Gideon and Deborah had lived in for all those years. For the new house, a more suitable thatch might just have come from somewhere else. Biesiebos for brooms cannot be considered the best kind for a roof.

If the thatch came from somewhere else, the wagons would have been sent to fetch huge loads that would have been stacked in bundles on the werf, ready for use. The thatchers working in teams, some throwing the sheaves to the roof, others wielding their bamboo needles and sewing the thatch onto the rafters as the roof was gradually covered, would have been very exciting. We do not have a record of how long the first roof on the new house lasted, and successive generations have had to face the ordeal of re-thatching the old house.

Because thatch is so inflammable, this hazard was taken very seriously by all. If the
thatch caught alight, the twine sewing it onto the roof timbers would burn off and the burning sheaves would slide down into the courtyards. As a result there were no windows opening into the courtyards, so the fire could not enter the house. From there the burning thatch could be pulled out of harm's way with what looked like long-handed wooden forks. There are still some of them on the loft. The main gable protected the front door from burning sheaves as well.

Another danger area was the chimney, which was cleaned religiously so that no burning soot could float out and come to rest on the thatch. The loft itself was only used for the storage of non-flammables like sweet potatoes and so on.

Then the other important feature for fire prevention, was the brandsolder which was the fire-proof floor of the loft, onto which burning thatch could fall without danger. It was a thick layer of clay over reeds that lay on the ceiling beams. Of course, dust tended to sift through from the brandsolder, especially in the back rooms of the house where there were plain reeded ceilings. In the reception areas and the bedrooms, beautiful yellow-wood ceilings between the beams prevented the dust from falling through.

The only other place the fire could spread from the loft to the lower part of the house would be along the beams that support the roof. The loft is beautifully open, as there are no supports in the middle.

However, where the lower ends of the beams that support the roof rest on the walls, there is another little wall running all along on the inside of the loft. This makes a trough that had to be kept topped up with sand. The reason for this is that if a beam caught alight, it could not burn through to the lower level of the house, because the sand would smother the flames. Keeping the trough topped up with sand was an important maintenance chore that was never neglected and is still relevant to this day.

We were raised with an awareness that we were living in a house with a thatched roof and that thatch was flammable. Celebrating Guy Fawkes was not part of our childhood experience.

In 1816, when Jacobus committed to the building of Twyfeling, the shell of the new house on Welvanpas was probably standing and Martyn was free to focus elsewhere. The roof would have been thatched and the walls plastered and possibly even whitewashed. Furrows had to be dug on three sides of the house to carry off rain water and it would have been time to concentrate on the interior of the house.

On the inside of the house, the walls were also plastered, and in those days many were tinted or had friezes around the doors, like one sees in the main homestead on Boschendal, but we have no evidence of anything like that. Whatever the situation might have been, it was taken care of by my father's grandmother, who had modern ideas in the late Victorian days.

There was plenty of woodwork to be done before the interior would be finished in all its glory. After Governor Van Plettenberg had discovered the goldmine of wood in the Outeniqua forests in 1788, yellow-wood, ironwood and stinkwood soon became available at the Cape. Special artisans were brought in for the task. Some were slaves and others were itinerant Dutch or German cabinet-makers from Europe staying on the farms for some time, but special names have not been preserved. In one of the wagon houses, craftsmen and their helpers worked in a world of their own as sash windows started to take shape and the inside doors were crafted. The adept use of antique tools must have been wonderful to behold. The sash windows that would be fitted into the frames had small panes of glass. Dirk Visser told us that the glass for the windowpanes was imported in sheets and cut into small squares. Apart from panes in special wall cupboards and fanlights, the size of the windowpanes, 8 inches by 6 inches (19cm x 15cm), was the same from Cape Town right up to Graaff-Reinet.

A fresh smell of newly planed wood and calf's foot glue melting in a double boiler over a little burner, would greet you where they worked. For French polish, a mixture of shellac, gum ararack, and gum tragacanth, would be standing in bottles in a sunny place, dissolving in wood spirits and would be given a good shake every now and then.

I can imagine the farm children finding the carpenters and cabinetmakers at work irresistible and gradually creeping as near as they dared. Perhaps they gathered up the curly wood shavings to play with, until they became a nuisance and were shooed away. The beautiful big inside doors that were taking shape, were made with yellow-wood inner panels and wide teak styles. They were to be set in a moulded teak architrave. The yellow-wood and teak combination for the doors is pleasingly mellow. The width of the inner panels gives some idea of
the size of the trees they were working with.

There are six of these large doors leading from the long room. It is a beautiful room, balanced and symmetrical. One pair of these doors leads to the rooms on either side of the voorkamer. Another pair leads to rooms on either side of the agterkamer beyond the two courtyards. The third pair can be seen on either side of the muurkas on the end wall directly opposite the front door. These last two doors lead into a small sewing room and a pantry. I cannot describe the original muurkas, because it was probably removed by my father's grandmother when she modernised the house. However, it was replaced by my father with one that fitted so perfectly into the arch where the old one had stood, that it could even have been the original one itself.

The house on Welvanpas has beautiful ceilings of squared yellow-wood beams running across the long room, from the front door, right through to the end wall where the muurkas stands. The yellow-wood ceilings between the beams run lengthwise and the muurkas forms a focal point as you come in at the front door, enhancing the lovely symmetry of the room.

Many of the old farms have a wooden division known as a portfisiedeur in between the voor- and the agterkamer. They are all magnificent. Some merely have two glass doors you can open, some have louvered doors and some even have exotic fanlights above the doors. They are usually made of mahogany. The portfisie on Welvanpas can open up completely and is the crowning glory of the house. The middle beam right across it is of yellow-wood, but the rest is made from the wood of syringa trees that were cut down on the farm and is the only one made of this wood that we know of. In order to provide the broad planks that were needed, these trees must have been of a considerable size.

I have wondered whether they could have been planted by Pierre Mouij in the deep fertile soil along the stream before it was turned. If he planted them around 1714, and he lived there until 1725, they would have been a century old. The syringa is a large Indian tree bearing bunches of scented lavender blue flowers and is also known as the Kaapse Sering. To design and craft the portfisie must have entailed a good deal of very professional planning. First of all a decision had to be made on whether the wood was suitable or not. Syringa wood is a very unusual choice for a portfisie and was not commonly used as a wood for furniture either. However, my father was delighted to acquire a most beautiful antique syringa wood cupboard with silver escutcheons. It was made by an itinerant cabinetmaker working on Lelienfontein in the Bovlei, perhaps around that time.

Once the decision was made, the trees had to be felled and dragged to a saagput. After the planks had been sawn, they had to be stacked criss-cross in a waenhuis to dry out completely. This was part of the planning that had to be done about a year in advance. Only then a craftsman would have begun the work. When we were children the "r" in portfisie had already been dropped and it was just referred to as "the potfiisie". I will try to describe it:

As you come into the voorhuis, the glowing patina of the syringa wood compliments the yellow-wood and teak doors. This wide expanse of glowing wood never fails to thrill me. A beautifully finished beam of yellow-wood runs right across the width of the room just above door height. Above this beam there is fixed panelling in five sections.

The portfisie is not only impressive. It is also practical, because precisely under each one of these panels there is another large panel reaching to the floor. The three central panels below the beam can be removed completely and the two outer panels are wide doors, which can be opened against the wall, transforming the two rooms into one.

When more space was needed for gatherings like weddings and funerals, it was removed. Then it formed a very large room, which is at least 40 feet (12 metres] long.

The floor of the voorhuis is paved in Batavian tiles. My brother was telling me one day. "Die Bataafse teëls kom uit Holland, dit was nie Batavia in die Ooste nie. Jy weet, ek was altyd onder die indruk dis die Ooste toe iemand my eendag gesê, "Nee man, `- iemand wat nou weet - ‘daar’s 'n kleiwerke in Batavia in Holland waar die teëls gemaak is.'"
3. Jacobus

The copper tertpan, kettle and jam pot on the bakkis in front of the portfisie.
The kwispedoor of Cape silver stands on the Batavian tile floor in the voorhuis.

The portfisie from the other side
I had also thought the tiles came from Batavia, meaning East India. Later I found out that in the early days, the tribes in Holland were called the Batavii. So if someone said a house was built in the Batavian style, he meant that it was built in the Dutch style. The same applies to Batavian tiles.

These tiles came out from Holland as ballast and were freely available. Of course, if a ship sank, they went to the bottom of the ocean. Their transportation must have been very hard on the oxen.

My grandfather's sister told us that one room in the house was called die pitkamer because it had a peach pip floor. We do not know exactly where it was. I cannot help wondering whether it was polished like the one in the Drosdy Museum in Swellendam. The original floors in the rest of the house did not have the broad deal floorboards that we grew up with and I think it is fair to assume that the original floors were plastered like the ones on Nabygelegen, next door, which was also built by Martyn.

Our friend Dirk Visser was called in to do restoration work there, and he said: "Nabygelegen se voorhuis het 'n pleistervloer. Hy is rooi maar as jy deur die pleister krap kry jy wit kalk pleister."

[Nabygelegen's front room has a plastered floor. It is red, but if you scratch you find white lime plaster.]

One can assume that most of the floors on Welvanpas were lime plaster, but that it was customary to have a misvloer in the kitchen area.

I was interested to read in the memoirs of Mr Stucki, the famous Dutch schoolteacher of the Blaauuwvlei, about his impressions of the interiors of the houses in the Wagenmakersvallei around 1860:

Huiise met strooidakke en gepleisterde vloere, wat eenmaal per week met verdunde koeimis gesmeer is, was toe algemeen. Slegs 'n paar van die ou boerehuise, die van die aristokrasie, het gladgepleisterde kalkvloere gehad, wat in plaas van met koeimis, met osbloed gekleur is, maar wat daarenteen in die winter verskriklik koud was. Plankvloere was slegs by uitsondering te vind.

[Houses with thatched roofs and plastered floors that were smeared with diluted fresh cow dung once a week, were common. Only a few of the old homesteads of the aristocrats, had smoothly plastered lime floors that were coloured with ox blood, but they were very cold in winter. It was exceptional to find wooden floors.]

My brother Dan thinks that the plank floors were probably put in when Oupa Dan changed the house in 1915. But I think it was more likely to have been my father's grandmother when she modernised the house in 1895. We don't really know.

Eventually the house was completed. On the house loft drie kasjes met ruiten, had been stored in case extra panes of glass should be needed. On the loft of the big waenhuis, agt kleiformen, lay ready for further action if any more bricks were needed. In an outside room eight planks of a special wood remained unused, and in the smithy the special saws had been put away. All these were reminders of the building operation.

All in all, the house had taken three years to build.

In my opinion Ronald Lewcock said it all when he wrote of the Cape houses:

The oaks, planted in rows in front of the houses, threw dappled shadows on the whitewashed walls and formed cool pools of generous shade along the stoeps; time stood still in a perfect union of architecture and nature.

A mission church in the Bovenvallei

Two years after the homestead on Welvanpas was completed, Lord Charles Somerset granted land in the Bovenvallei for the purpose of mission work amongst the slaves and other workers. The building of a little church was begun. This church was inaugurated the following year (1820) by Ds. Gebhard of Paarl. Upkeep of the property has been a joint responsibility of the owners of the surrounding farms, one of which is Welvanpas. This beautiful little church in the Bovle is one of the oldest in South Africa that is still in use.
3. Jacobus

In the meantime, mission work in the Bovenvallei had been continuing since before the turn of the century when the London Missionary Society had sent out Jacob van Zulch and Bastiaan Tromp. But it made all the difference for them to have their own church and the Bovenvallei certainly had gained a beautiful building.

The funeral and the inventory

Jacobus was 67 when he died on 12 May 1821, a man of stature who must have had a big funeral. Fortunately it was autumn and crossing the Berg River was not likely to have been a problem. The beautiful new Strooidak Kerk had only been in use for 16 years, but some of the graves in the churchyard dated back a century. A sea of carts would be standing quietly around the church during the service, and every now and then, the mournful sound of hymns, accompanied by the tenuous sounds of an organ on its last legs, would drift towards those who were tending the animals. By then letters had been posted to Francois and Piet and their families on the eastern frontier as had been done after Deborah's death. There was a friendly relationship between the Retief family and Jacobus's widow and her family. Johanna and Jacobus had been married just on six years, and little Johannes was a child of three and younger than most of his father's grandchildren.

It was four years since the house they had all grown up in had been demolished, but most of the slaves and workers that Jacobus and Deborah's children had known all their lives were still there and that was a comfort. Eventually, when the brothers and sisters found themselves alone in the new house, they must have been enveloped in a feeling of gratitude and upliftment that comes when a beloved parent dies and a loving family comes together.

Presently they were recalling the old days, the old house and a time when both their parents were alive. They were quite a crowd if you count five married daughters and three of the five brothers and their families. Daniel, Koos and Gideon all lived in the Wagenmakersvallei. Of course, Francois, their serious eldest brother, and Piet, the popular but restless second eldest, were sadly missed.

Afterwards, Anna Aletta, the eldest daughter, and her husband Daniel Malan, stayed on at Welvanpas for a while, because a sad, but necessary task lay ahead. An inventory of the contents of the house had to be made for the purpose of the estate, and Daniel and Gideon and their brother-in-law, Daniel Malan, were the executors. They lost no time and completed the inventory within a week.

It is a rare feeling to wander, as a time traveller, through the furnished rooms of my childhood home, as documented 134 years before I was born. This window into the past is like a precious gift. The wonderful thing is that it not only gives an intimate glimpse into the household effects, but it also gives an idea of the lay-out of the farm, because it extends to the wagon houses, the wine cellar, the mill and the smidswinkel. And then, as a bonus, even the contents of those fascinating twilight areas, the lofts, are given.

The portfisie was open, because the inventory of "het voorhuis" deals with the long central room as one entity. The back half had housed a dining room table in my time and sure enough one with twelve chairs is mentioned. The front portion sounds quite cosy, with a rusbank, four tea tables dotted around and the inevitable theegoedballetjie which was found in the reception area of every well appointed home for safely protecting the cups from fly spots. A thee masjien, is also mentioned, although I have not been able to find out what it was used for. The precious blue and white Nanking china teakommetjies that are still kept in the muurkas, may be those mentioned in the inventory.

There was no fireplace in the house, but six little stoven or tessies to keep your feet warm, are mentioned. In the bedrooms, to the left and right there was a Bybelknaap [a lectern] and a large family Bible, and a quarter size Bible stood ready to be brought out for the family prayers. There were also another 21 chairs in these two rooms. With the church being so far and not accessible if it rained, prayer meetings would often be held in the homes. Every father was capable of leading a home service and I believe many inventories record a large number of chairs in the old houses.

The house would not be complete to any of the generations who have lived there without the presence of the beautiful grandfather clock, the staande horologie, the pride of the family. It was with a shock of pleasure that I saw its earliest mention in despatches. Exactly
when Jacobus bought it, we do not know. I would hazard a guess that it was during the second Dutch occupation (1803 – 1806) that he either ordered it or a consignment of these beautiful Dutch clocks arrived, carefully crated, aboard a Dutch ship. It was a marvel to behold and he just could not resist it. If he did buy it then, it must have stood in the old house for a few years before Deborah died.

I cannot picture the voorhuis of our house without seeing the grandfather clock towering against the yellow-wood beams of the ceiling and the soft blue sky on the clock-face softly contrasting against the warm colour of the syringa wood portfisie. It is a tall and dignified presence that we have all looked up to in awe, since we were toddlers. It has always just been there.

The clock is made of a deep golden walnut and stands on the Batavian tiles. A wooden clock stand adds to its height and keeps it aloof from water or the scuffing of any broom or scrubbing brush. From the bowed lower part, it narrows into the long case, which has a corresponding long door.

In the centre of this long door there is a little brass filigree design on glass. Many a time, when I was still at eye level with this window, I stood and watched the flash of the big brass pendulum as it swung past in time to the stately ticking of the clock. There is also a little brass keyhole into which a beautifully crafted brass key fits.

Then the long case broadens to accommodate the brass clock-face which is covered by an ornate glassed top that can be lifted off for the purpose of maintenance. The upper part has a turned wooden spire on each side and the wood curves up to its tip, where there is another elegantly turned wooden spire. Carved angels curve forward over the face. It is hard to describe its beauty, and only a good photo can do it justice.

My father was the only one who ever touched the clock when we were children, and he never tired of opening the glass front carefully for visitors to see the face more clearly. I wonder how many hundreds of times he did this and I can still see his expression of pleasure and awe at possessing this precious thing.

My brother told me, "We once had a Dutch visitor who could name all the buildings, including the Skreiende Toring, where the wives went to wave goodbye to the fleet and was so called, because of all the tears they shed. Most of these buildings dated back to medieval Amsterdam, but were destroyed in 1944 during World War Two."

The clockmaker signed himself Fr. Pasteur. There is no date, but Amsterdam was called "Amsteldam" for a short period in the mid 18th century, and Pasteur worked in Amsterdam from 1767. He was a Swiss clockmaker who had worked in Geneva and Leyden. Grandfather clocks were only developed in the late 17th century when the pendulum and weights were enclosed in a long case.

How well I remember the sacred ritual on a Sunday evening. My father opened the long door and took out the strange hollow winder from its special hook, leaving the door open. Then he opened the arched glass door in front of the clock face and inserted the winder into the correct hole and started to wind. We watched as the big brass weights rose to the accompaniment of a ratchetty noise, while the pendulum continued its measured swing. From the age of sixteen, my father allowed my brother as a special treat to wind it when he was home from school.

The alarm had a long cord with a weight at the bottom of it. I well remember its sound. You could not ignore it and many a time it must have woken the whole family with its loud clanging sound that seemed to go on forever, while the whole clock vibrated ominously. Mr Dellenbach from Cape Town, a jeweller and clock master who used to service the clock in the City Hall in Cape Town, was the only man my father trusted with the maintenance of the clock. He used to come out into the country periodically to attend to various priceless clocks on different farms. He brought out his glocken öl and began oiling.
The grandfather clock

A length of soft solder had a flattened tip like a spoon, and could be bent into various shapes so that the oil could be put on exactly the right cog or bearing, even around corners. He examined the clock as attentively as any doctor, while my father hovered anxiously and we stood around at a respectful distance. If we made a sound, we were quelled by a look.

On one occasion, Mr Dellenbach said in his thick German accent, "You must tie down the alarm cord. This clock is getting too old for the vibration!"
His word was law as far as the clock was concerned, so the alarm was tied down and was heard no more.

In the bedrooms (in the 1821 inventory), there seems to be rather a jumble of furniture, including many beds and, of course, the impressive number of chairs have been mentioned. There were gueridons for the lamps, a corner cupboard, a cabinet and two little school desks that conjure up a picture of the family some years before. There was also a large kist, a pipe rack, a mirror, a gunrack, a weatherglass, two paintings and some books. Some furniture may have gone to members of the family when Deborah died, when Jacobus remarried or even when the move from the old to the new house took place.

The keyhole to the left
The pendulum can be seen through the glass next to the keyhole

The kitchen and the pantry (called the dispens) were, of course, of great interest. Here was an assortment of different lamps they called kandelaren and many of the things mentioned that we dealt with when describing Deborah as a mother and housewife. It is interesting to note, that, of course, she also had wine glasses and decanters, a double set of cutlery, of which the spoons are specifically called silver and the rest was probably the same. There was a 24 piece blue dinner service with 34 dishes of assorted sizes and 12 Chinassen cups and 11 deep and 11 shallow Chinassen plates. Could these be the Nanking china, like those beautiful kommetjies that are still in the muurkas?

The pantry seems to have been used to store articles, whereas another little room also connected to the housekeeping, seems to have been where food was stored, seeing it had a kostkas [food cupboard], vleesbalies [meat barrels] and cupboards with shelves.

On the house loft we find the sort of paraphernalia that one finds on old lofts, like a bag of salt, some earthen jars, some boxes of window panes, and more paintings. Also various miscellaneous articles, like pruning knives, lanterns and things that all make the house seem lived in and very real and human from this distance in time.

In the large wagon house there were five ox wagons and one horse drawn wagon, and in the smaller wagon house stood a kapkarwagen (kompleet), and een kar. The kar, I take to be a trap or buggy drawn by one horse, and the kapkar, I take to be a smarter affair, drawn by two horses, probably used to go to church, but it would not seat a family.

The livestock included 77 oxen for drawing the ox wagons, eight horses, a team trained to pull a special horse wagon are also mentioned and 13 head of cattle, 35 goats for breeding purposes and four pigs. It is obvious to me that his farming operation was greatly reduced and that Jacobus had retired from farming.

It seems that Jacobus owned 20 male and 10 female slaves at the time of his death. He stipulated that Maria and her children, and Adam, Jeptha and Esau from Mozambique should be sold amongst his children and I presume the so-called Hottentot workers probably stayed just where they were.

And so Welvanpas became a family farm as it passed over from father to son and it was Daniel, still a bachelor, who took over the responsibility of his own farm, Welvanpas.