

Vanities, Fables and Foibles

Part 1

We tend to remember and record the good things about the dead in obituaries and family histories. As a member of GenForum once remarked, mens wonder hoe hul die vlerkies in die kis kon vou (one wonders how they managed to fold the wings into the coffin). I hope the following stories about the family will bring an indulgent smile that they were also human.

2012 Update.

Two sections have been reworked into freestanding stories: “The Family Crest” and “The Dovecote”. “The Royal Morkels” have been incorporated into “The Morgenster Morkels Part 2”. These items have thus been deleted from this story. More recent additions include, a moppie about rich Mr Morkel, a date error of *Stamvader* Philip’s arrival at the Cape, and a story about brother-in-law, Hendrik Biebow.

Arrival at the Cape: 1691 or 1708?

Some have it that *stamvader* Philip Morkel arrived at the Cape in 1691. This is at odds with documentation that he first arrived at the Cape in 1708 on board the *Oosterstijn*. (He married that year to Maria Biebow and had to serve out his contract with the VOC. So he returned to Holland, and finally arrived at the Cape in 1709 on the return journey of the *Noordbeek*).

The 1691 date is from the 1894 genealogy of old Cape families by C.C. de Villiers (1).

De stamvader van deze familie was Philip Morkel, van Hamburg, in 1691 burger te Stellenbosch, gehuwd met Maria Bibon, weduwe van Hercules Verdeau, hertrouwd 17 September 1713 met Catharina Pasman (1).

Translated:

The *stamvader* of this family was Philip Morkel, of Hamburg, in 1691 citizen of Stellenbosch, married to Maria Bibon, widow of Hercules Verdeau, and remarried 17 September 1713 to Catharina Pasman

Note that he does not say Philip arrived in 1691. Rather, that he was a citizen of Stellenbosch at that date. This is clearly an error, and it is well documented that he first arrived at the Cape seventeen years later in 1708.

Historian George McCall Theal (2) records that land was allocated to Philip Morkel in 1691. In his *History of South Africa under the Administration of the Dutch East India Company [1653 to 1795]* (3) he states “According to the census of 1691, corrected by entries in the church registers, the most notable burghers in the Cape district were: (a long list including) “Morkel, Philip, with wife”. Thus, according to Theal, Philip was already established at the Cape in 1691.

Apart from the date error, de Villiers and Theal also incorrectly have Maria Biebow (there are several spellings of her name, such as Bibou, Bibon, Bibault and others) as the

widow of Hercules Verdeau. Hercules was married to Maria Huibeaux, a similar sounding name, but a different person.

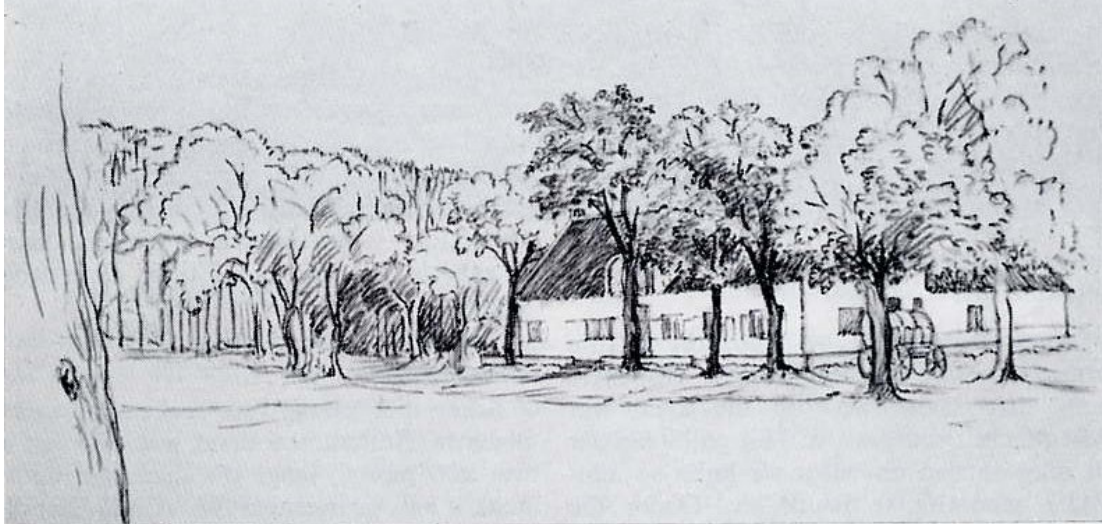
Sisters Inheriting Farms – With a Twist

An enduring story within the family was that once two sisters stood to inherit a farm each. When the time came, they were surprised that the allocation was the reverse of what they had anticipated. The one sister named her farm *Onverwacht* or “Unexpected” and the other farm became *Nooitgedacht* i.e. “Never Imagined”. The husband of the owner of *Nooitgedacht*, a Morkel, was keen on fishing and the two families agreed to swap farms because *Onverwacht* stretched to the beach at present day Strand. By swapping farms everyone was happy.

A lovely story not supported by facts. There were indeed two sisters, Catharina and Sibella Pasman (4). Catharina was married to Philip Morkel and they farmed *Onverwacht*. Sibella was married to Jan Loubser and farmed on *Nooitgedacht*, outside Stellenbosch. However, the story about the mixed inheritance would have been concocted afterwards to fit the names of the farms, which predate ownership by the Pasman and Morkel families. *Onverwacht* had that name when it was bought by Claas Elbertsz, husband of Margaretha Pasman. When Claas and Margaretha died in the small pox epidemic of 1713, the farm passed to her mother, Sophia Pasman (4). Sophia allowed Philip and Catharina to farm there and eventually in 1718 it was transferred to them. Sophia also bought the farm *Nooitgedacht* with that name and gave it to Sibella. Thus there was no swapping of farms, whether for fishing or other reasons.

No Vanity Here

The main house on *Die Bos*, is large but it has only a simple triangular gable above the front door, in contrast to the ornate gables popular on the old Cape Dutch houses, such as at *Morgenster*. According to family tradition the house was built by second generation Willem Morkel (1718 – 1788), but it would have replaced an earlier dwelling of his parents Philip and Catharina Morkel, and even earlier of Jan Hartog. Sir John Herschel who visited the farm in September 1835 (5) used a *camera lucida* to sketch the house which shows a simple curved (leg-of-mutton) gable. The house would have been built before fancy gables became popular – most are from around the 1770s to 1820s. Willem was a man of means but saw no need to change the gable to keep up with the neighbours. More than half of the house was destroyed in a severe rainstorm in July 1822 and its then owner, Daniel Johannes Morkel (who had the dovecote with its neoclassical gable built) also did not change the gable. No vanity here. Thatched roofs deteriorated with time and had to be re-thatched every 40 to 50 years. In 1897 my grandfather replaced it with corrugated galvanised steel and retained the simple triangular gable. He also took the opportunity to spruce up the house in the Victorian style of the time. The family rented a house in the Strand during the renovations and my aunt, *tant* Maraaitjie (Maria Dorothea), was born there.



Die Bos in 1835, by Sir John Herschel

Source: H.C. Hopkins 6, p.15



Die Bos in the 1970s

Photo: Author

Pecking Order in the Graveyard?

The History of the Stellenbosch Church (7) is a fascinating account of the peculiarities of the time. While sympathetically written, it also documents squabbles, petty jealousies and vanities of the people involved. They were status conscious and at a time that the church became too small for the growing population there were acrimonious demands for seating privileges. P. A Myburgh of *Meerlust* – of a family with close connections to our own, wrote a forthright letter threatening to come with his own chair to church (7, p116). One day in the future, someone will no doubt be amused (sympathetically, I hope) about vanities revealed in my own style of telling stories.

It is tempting to deduce that status extended to grave allocations. Grave 1 was bought by Philip's mother-in-law, Sophia Pasman, wife of the acting-*landdrost* Pieter Robberts. Sophia and her daughters, Catharina (Philip's wife) and Sibella were buried in this grave. Philip and his son Willem are lower down the scale in grave 96 (7, p224).

However, a careful reading of the book seems to indicate that the grave sequence was more a matter of timing – i.e. when people bought the lots than social status. A nice story spoiled by facts.

A Moppie about Rich Mister Morkel

*Ryk mister Morkel
Ons kommandant
Hy regeer sy vollek met goed en verstand
Laat wy drinken de Kaapse koele wyn
Laat wy drinken de Kaapse koele wyn
Jan Burgers kom te staan met sy wapen in sy hand
Stryk met syn land (hand?) en syn verstand (8).*

My attempt to translate a ditty where sense is not the first priority:

Rich mister Morkel
Our commandant
He rules his folk with a good mind
Let us drink the cool Cape Wine
Let us drink the cool Cape Wine
Jan Burgers comes to stand with his weapon in his hand
Strokes with his land (hand?) and his mind.

Composed in the eighteenth century, this Moppie was written by freed slaves to thank their former master Mr. Morkel, for their liberation. The song was rediscovered in 1960 and collected by Willem van Warmelo, after reading an interview with Mrs. Brinkhuys who was interviewed in a Cape Town newspaper about her memories of slave times and her former master Mr. Morkel from Somerset (West) (8).

The second of January (*tweede nuwejaar*) has long been the traditional day of celebration of the coloured community of Cape Town and the Western Cape. With colourful parades with marching choirs and floats it has become one of the tourist

attractions of Cape Town. The choirs sing traditional “moppies”, or ditties, as well as new ones.

‘The best time of the year is New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day’, the words of a popular song, written and performed in Cape Town to salute the New Year. New Year’s Eve is, as the song claims, seen as the most important event in Cape Town for the Cape Coloured Community (the descendants of the slave population brought to the Cape in the seventeenth and eighteenth century), because the celebrations are considered to be a ‘crossing ritual’. It is a time of remembering the past, a time for closure but also for hope and ideas for the New Year. The satiric/comic songs, also known as ‘Kaapse Moppies’ have been an important part of this ‘ritual’. The ‘Moppies’ sung by the Coons Troupes and the Cape Malay Choirs, both musical clubs of the Coloured Community operating in Cape Town and the surrounding area, reflect on the year gone by and comment on the events and characters who have put their mark on the past year. In a way this repertoire of songs are musical annals, presenting in a comical way which issues or events have made an impact on the community in that particular year. The songs give us a unique look into the thoughts, ideas and feelings of the Cape Malay and Coloured Community during past events. It could therefore even be argued that these songs are historical sources.

This ‘tradition’ of singing comical songs is as old as the city of Cape Town itself. ‘Ghoemaliedjies’ were sung by slaves on their picnics, these being an important aspect of a slave culture. In fact, part of the slave owner’s obligation to his slaves was the provision of an annual picnic. The Ghoemaliedjie is thus known as a ‘Malay picnic song’, but also as a ‘straatlied’, a ‘skemliedjie’, a ‘moppie’ or a comic song’. Moppies are still sung by choirs today at the annual Cape Malay Choir Competition. For centuries, these songs have brightened up picnics, weddings and parties (9).

Caring Mrs Morkel

Hendrik Swellengrebel, had extensive correspondence (13) with particularly Hendrik Cloete, the grandson of Sibella Pasman and owner of Nooitgedacht and Groot Constantia. In one letter he asked about the habits and lifestyles of Hottentot (Khoi) tribes. On one aspect Cloete reported that twins were undesirable and one of the twins is killed. He writes:

A Hottentot, named Piet, is a Goeijman who works on the farm of Willem Morkel. He was one of a pair of twins, and according to Hottentot custom had to die. They placed him on a branch overhanging a river to fall off and drown, but before he fell off Mrs. Morkel found him and reared him. I do not know what ceremonies are attached to this custom and whether it may be dying out, since the Gonjemans have been in contact with the Dutch for so many years.

The caring Mrs Morkel was Helena Catharina Malan 1736 - 1825, married to second generation Willem Morkel 1718 – 1788.

Angry Letters to the Elder

The history of the Church of Somerset West (6, p45 – 46) tells of constant problems with seating arrangements for wives. Men had seats along the walls, with the center area reserved for the ladies. They arrived, each with a slave carrying a chair and *gesangboek* (hymnal), and were seated according to rank. This caused conflict and argument about who outranked whom. The annual meeting to decide seating arrangements (*Verzetting der Stoelen*) was exhausting and challenging. The Church Council listened patiently to the claims and grievances but could not satisfy everyone. Appeals were lodged to the *Landdrost*, but when that office was abolished in 1828, the problems were back with the Council. Philip Hendrik Morkel (1760 – 1831), as the senior and oldest Elder, had this responsibility and copped most of the complaints.

Field Cornet H.R. De Vos, while “reluctant to complain” (*waarsch voor klachten*), appealed to *Landdrost* van Ryneveld. He could not allow that his wife be insulted (*in haar eer gekrenk*) when her chair was arbitrarily (*eygendunkelyk*) moved several times by Morkel. He could not agree to an informal arrangement (*minlike schikking*), and the issue had to be settled publicly. By placing the chair of his wife among people of lesser reputation, his whole family was insulted. The Church Council was unhappy over the tone of the letter (*ongepaste en beledigende uitdrukkingen*) and they went to Stellenbosch to put their side of the argument. M.W. Theunissen of Vergelegen wrote to “oom Morkel” urging him to take the case to the Chief Justice, Sir John Truter, to tell him about the lies spread by de Vos. The *Landdrost* eventually decided that the Church Council acted properly according to regulations and thus concluded the case.

In 1822 it was Koos Theunissen of *Vergelegen* (M.W.'s son) who complained that his wife's chair was placed lower than Hercules Morkel's wife. (The first wedding in the new church was between Hercules Morkel and Geertruida Woutrina de Vos, and they lived at *Welgelegen*, later renamed *Erinvale*, next to *Vergelegen*). Morkel explained that Hercules told him that he had been promoted to *wachtmeester* and his wife was entitled to her place.

In the same year Wouter de Vos of *Paardevallei* wrote to *Geachte Neef Morkel* to express his unhappiness that his daughter Geertruy's chair was set down below that of miss Teunis (sic – most likely Theunissen). Geertruy was married to Hercules Morkel, the son of Hercules and Helena Munnik.

At this time Hercules Morkel borrowed the penknife of Jacobus Pentz and scratched out Pentz's name on his (Pentz) bench and from then on he (Hercules) occupied that bench. The Church Council had to discipline him.

Brother-in-law Hendrik Biebouw – Hero or Scoundrel?

Stamvader Philip's brother-in-law, Hendrik Biebouw was a colourful character (10). Born in 1690, he was the brother of Maria Biebouw, Philip's first wife. He became famous as the first colonist to say, on 6 March 1707, *Ik bin een Africander* - I am an Afrikaner, and a plaque honouring that event has been erected in Stellenbosch on the site where it happened. For Afrikaner patriots in the 20th century, this was a significant event and they found links between their struggles for recognition and the protests in the 1700s, against the autocratic and corrupt Governor Willem Adriaan van der Stel.

On a Sunday afternoon four drunk young men, Hendrik Biebouw, Jan Cloete, Hans Beijer and Matthijs Greef, entered a flour mill, and made a nuisance of themselves. They were rowdy, tore the scales apart and overturned a stack of measuring tin cans, making a loud racket. The neighbour, *landdrost* (magistrate) Starrenburg, heard the noise and investigated. Two of the culprits quickly disappeared, leaving Biebouw and one of his friends behind. Starrenburg confronted them and gave them a number of lashes with a *rottang* (rattan cane). Biebouw hit back with a bag of flour. The *landdrost* accused them of drunkenness and ordered them to go away quietly. Biebouw then uttered the famous words:

Ik kry slagen, ik wil niet loopen, ik ben een Afrikaner. Al slaat den landdrost mij dood, of al sette hij mij in den tronk, ik sal niet stil swijgen! (10).

Translated:

I am being assaulted, I will not go, I am an Afrikaner. Even if the *landdrost* kills me, or throws me in gaol, I shall not remain silent.

Starrenburg was angry at this insubordination and recommended physical punishment and a fine of 25 rixdollars. He also recommended that it would be good if the four culprits were drafted as soldiers on one of the VOC ships heading for the East. Three of the culprits were thrashed by soldiers before the gate of the fort and had to pay 12 rixdollars each to the miller. However, it was Starrenburg who, as part of van der Stel's henchmen was fired from his job and deported to Holland. The *Here Sewentien* (Board) of the VOC had received a petition from the burghers at the Cape and deposed the Governor and his top henchmen, including Starrenburg.

Hendrik Biebouw then vanished from Cape records. He was listed as a dragoon, but in 1708 the entry against his name was simply "weg" – away. A chance discovery by Martie Bredenkamp of *Genforum* (an internet genealogy chatroom) found him listed in 1716 as crew on the ship *Zandenburg* bound for Batavia. He died there on 20 March 1719 (11).

-- *Hendrick Bibou. Herkomst: De caab. Rang: Matroos. Datum einde verbintenis: 20/03/1719. Einde verbintenis: Overleden Plaats einde verbintenis: Azie. Gegevens van de vaart: Schip: Zandenburg. Inventarisnr.: 12771. Kamer: Zeeland Folio: 84. Uitreis: 05/04/1716 Bestemming: Batavia. DASen reisnr. 2266.4. Aankomst: 26-10-1716.*

This information laid to rest an earlier speculation that Biebouw was shipwrecked on the Zuytdorp in 1712 on the coast of Western Australia. Playford and Dean surmised that he had children with an Aborigine and spread the genetic disease *Porphyria Variiegata* found to this day among tribes in that area (12). This disease has a relatively high occurrence among Afrikaners in South Africa and one of the carriers is thought to be Ariaenje de Jacobs, a half sister of Hendrik Biebouw's mother, Willemijntje Ariens de Wit. However, Biebouw was not on the Zuytdorp and it is unfounded speculation that his mother carried the disease. It has also since been established that the *Porphyria* found among the Aborigines differs from that found in South Africa (10).

André T. Morkel

Updated 2012, and 2014.

Sources and Notes

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13. Hendrik Swellengrebel jr., *Briefwisseling oor Kaapse sake 1778-1792* (ed. G.J. Schutte). Van Riebeeck-Vereniging, Kaapstad 1982 p334