

A Boer Settlement that was never Settled: Tamaulipas, Mexico

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Introduction

The history of humankind is a history of population mobility. Much of this movement involved people simply expanding their geographical frontiers as they sought greener pastures, wider areas to settle, or personal safety. Such population relocation may have resulted from imputed or actual threats to the lives, livelihood, or future of a people. The decision to move is always stimulated by a variety of factors, experienced in varying degrees of intensity. Factors such as fear, disillusionment, loss of hope, or a subjectively felt need for self-preservation may result in an avoidance of conditions and places seen as threatening. It may even result in flight from these conditions.

Recent history documents numerous occasions where war, famine, disaster or threat of punishment brought flight. Such conditions have been based on religion, language, ethnic group membership, geographical borders, or access to resources. The most recent examples of forced migrations (also involving genocide) have resulted in masses of fugitives and emigrants struggling for a future. Where possible such groups of desperate persons have looked beyond their residential or national borders for safety and relocation.¹ The result frequently has been a refugee camp, an expatriate community, or an ethnic enclave. Some such communities-beyond-the-borders aim at the perpetuation of ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural values while other groups, in the absence of strong identities, are soon absorbed by the host population. In the process they lose their identity as a separate interacting community.

The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) was one such war that caused people to leave their land of birth. This study follows a number of persons who felt that they and their people were threatened by conditions resulting from war. These conditions made them a

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1 As an example see B M du Toit, "Boers, Afrikaners, and Diaspora," *Historia*, 48, 1, May 2003, pp 15-54.

subjected people in their native land. Their search was for a location and conditions which would permit retention and continuity of ethnic group membership, identity and cultural values. Their hosts may have been altruistic and empathetic, but were also assuring that their venture was profitable. This is an account of schemes and scheming.

As the Anglo-Boer War dragged on, and conditions started to wear on those in battle, a number of the leaders were traveling abroad in the hope of finding places of retreat and relocation. They would soon be joined by persons who refused to take the loyalty oath as well as persons residing in the Cape and Natal who had supported the Boers. The British warlords formally declared them as being disloyal and subject to prosecution - even the death penalty. Some of those in the Cape went abroad as the end seemed obvious, and one finds persons exploring settlements for expatriates.

When a declaration of peace was signed on 31 May 1902, many Boers felt it was forced on them by conditions, including the treatment of non-combatants in the concentration camps. The Boer fighting men were required to lay down their arms and swear an oath of allegiance to King Edward VII. For many, including persons who had been in prisoner-of-war camps in Bombay, Ceylon, Bermuda and St. Helena, this was too much. Joined by numbers of persons from the Cape (and a smaller number from Natal), people in groups as well as single families, left South Africa to seek a future elsewhere. For them it was a matter of survival, both physically and culturally. Early settlement attempts involved North America, Mexico and Argentina, as well as Venezuela and Chile.²

Following the Anglo-Boer War, three major treks extended the frontiers even further. Two of these, due to the number of trekkers and the continued contact with the mother country, survived for decades. The first group settling in Chubut, Argentina, and the second in East Africa. In both cases Afrikaans, the Dutch Reformed Churches and Christian National Education perpetuated an Afrikaner ethnicity. The third settlement was small. It lacked contrasting ethnic, religious and linguistic conditions and gradually blended into the social and cultural milieu. It is in this location, where Mexico, Texas and New Mexico meet, that the Boer generals (and their most loyal supporters) who had been fighting the British forces in the eastern Free State and the eastern Transvaal, were seeking a fresh start, a new future.

Senator Butler and the Mexican connection

Marion Butler, born in North Carolina in 1863, taught in an academy for three years and then purchased and served as editor of *Caucasian* in 1888. In 1891 he came to the Legislature as senator from Sampson, the county in which he was born. "Butler in the Senate made an enviable record for he led the way in establishing rural postal deliveries, postal savings banks and parcel post..."³ He was involved in a number of historic legislative acts, working originally as a Democrat. In 1892 he left the Democratic Party and assisted in organizing the Peoples Party. Butler was senator for North Carolina from 1896 to 1901. After his Republican-Fusion party was defeated for re-election, he practiced law in Raleigh, North Carolina in 1901 and after 1902 in Washington, DC. In Washington Butler developed a strong relationship with Richard Franklin Pettigrew, United States senator from South Dakota from 1899 to 1901.⁴ Here too was a man who

2 *Land en Volk*, 23 May 1903

3 S A Ashe, *History of North Carolina II from 1783 to 1925* (Edwards & Broughton Printing Co, Raleigh, 1925), p 1203

4 See discussion by R F Durden, *Reconstruction Bonds and Twentieth-Century Politics: South Dakota v. North Carolina* (Duke University Press, Durham, 1962), p 136 Daniels speaks of "Butler's intimacy with Senator Pettigrew" See J Daniels, *Editor in Politics*, (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1941), pp 584-586

acted vociferously against the Republican Party, of which he was a member, on issues of finance and trust. These two men became involved in joint ventures of mining and land development.

Into this relationship stepped Henry B. Wall, who lived in or at least operated out of Mexico City. From 1902 we find reference to oil and mining interests in Mexico and the joining of these three persons. However, records do not indicate how their paths crossed nor how plans for a Boer settlement first emerged.

Boers in North America

In South Africa, the heat of battle was increasing during 1901. British forces had been strengthened - at least in numbers - and there soon were 450,000 soldiers. This number was more than the total white population of the two Boer republics. In February 1901, Lord Kitchener proclaimed his scorched earth policy, by which homesteads, farms, crops and animals were destroyed and those not fighting (including women, children and the aged) were placed in concentration camps. Even blacks, who may have remained loyal to burghers, were interned and more than 115 000 were restricted to six camps.

During these dark days, a number of Boer leaders, either banned from South Africa or traveling on their own initiative, started to arrive in New York. Many American statesmen had sympathy for the Boers. The Governors of Arkansas and later of Colorado offered Boer delegates vast tracts of land for Boer resettlement. In June 1900, Representative Fitzgerald from Manhattan formally proposed that the Secretary of State invite the whole Boer nation to settle on public lands in the United States.⁵ Theodore Roosevelt, in part due to his Dutch ancestry, Huguenot ties and Dutch Reformed Church membership, had a special feeling of sympathy for the Boers. On 3 July 1901, two months before the assassination of President McKinley and almost a year before the Peace of Vereeniging which ended the War, Roosevelt wrote to his British friend Cecil Rice: "A good many of the Boer leaders have called on me ... I confess I am wholly puzzled by the duration of the war and the bitter and stubborn determination with which the Boers continue to fight."⁶ One of these visitors was Commandant Willem D. Snyman (and his sixteen year old son Gerhardus Cornelius) who had traveled to Oyster Bay - the vice- presidential retreat - in April 1901.

In late 1901 and early 1902, Snyman traveled south into Mexico seeking a suitable site for a Boer colony. Ben Viljoen, who had been captured near Lydenburg on 25 January 1902 and had been interned on St Helena until the end of the War, now joined Snyman. They explored various parts of Mexico and spent time in Mexico City giving lectures about the War. In January 1903 they consulted with officials regarding a site near Jimenez in the state of Chihuahua. Viljoen and Snyman returned to El Paso, Texas, seriously considering the Mexican venture.⁷ Subsequently they spent ten days in the state of Sonora but were disappointed by the quality of the land. Commandant Willem D. Snyman decided to establish a Boer colony at Mesquite (near Santa Rosalia) in Chihuahua. General Ben Viljoen attempted to settle down with this group of friends and relatives, but after about a year decided to return to the Texas-New Mexico border. (In time the Snymans and their friends abandoned the settlement and returned to El Paso).

5 E Rosenthal, *Stars and Stripes in Africa* (National Books, Cape Town, 1968), p 152

6 E E Morison (ed), *The letters of Theodore Roosevelt* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1951), p 109

7 *El Paso Morning Times*, 8 February 1903 See also *El Paso Herald*, 9 February 1903

During this time a number of South Africans were searching for places to settle, each promising to recruit scores of Boers and Netherlanders as settlers. One of the important early visitors was Dr Francis Reitz, ex-President of the Orange Free State and Secretary of State of the South African Republic (*Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek*, hereafter ZAR) during the War. He was a guest of Colonel S.F.B. Morse of the Southwestern Pacific railroad company.

Dr Reitz absolutely committed himself to Texas, and stated that between 4,000 and 5,000 Boer families were sure to settle here from South Africa and the Netherlands. Negotiations have been taken up by the South Pacific for options on 200,000 acres of land along the line of the Southwestern Pacific Company.⁸

It seems that the Mexican government was promoting settlement of parts of the country. Tamaulipas was one state which offered an attractive settlement contract.⁹

Early exploration for a Boer settlement at Tamaulipas involved General P.H. Kritzinger and Captain W. S. O'Donnell, an Irishman who had grown up in South Africa and fought on the side of the Boers. They visited the site but could not come to terms and so Kritzinger packed his bags and returned to New York City. "General" Gideon Daniel Joubert¹⁰ joined up with O'Donnell (see Figures 1 & 2). They indicated that they

wanted to settle in Texas, but could make no terms that our people could meet. The Texas company did not understand our situation. Our people were left ruined by the war. The poor burghers are all thrifty people but they have no money, and will have to be helped until they get a footing.¹¹

Out of El Paso it was reported:

Gen G D Joubert and Capt W S O'Donnell, promoters of the Boer colony in Tamaulipas, Mexico, are here after closing the contract with a syndicate that will furnish the finances for the colony. This is the second Boer colony to be planted in Mexico. The Boers will occupy 83,000 acres. The syndicate in Mexico will bring people from Africa, let them have implements, live stock, and give them credit at their stores. The settlers pay for land at the rate of 15s per acre each year for a number of years. The land, 100 miles north of Victoria, Mexico, has a frontage on a navigable river. A railroad will be built through the tract.¹²

Willem D. Snyman, in the meantime, was completing final arrangements for their settlement in Chihuahua. He stated: "This colony will be open to all Boers from South Africa, including General Joubert and Captain O'Donnell, although I have no interest in their colonization scheme in Tamaulipas".¹³ Who was the syndicate responsible for organizing the scheme? What were the requirements and conditions for land acquisition? The undertaking was to purchase a major *hacienda* in the state of Tamaulipas including the land, natural wealth and rights to subterranean products including oil and asphalt.

8 *El Paso Herald*, 11 February 1903. Reitz spent a number of years in Mexico and Texas but finally returned to South Africa where, in 1910, he became President of the new Senate of the Union of South Africa. He held this position for nineteen years.

9 During February 1903, one such group consisting of some two hundred people, chartered as The Blalock Mexico Colony, left their homes in Greer County, Territory of Oklahoma. Ken Titt, "The Unfinished Dreams of The Chamal Colony" at <http://www.rootsweb.com/~mextam/chamal.html>

10 *El Paso Herald*, 22 May 1903 describes him as having fought with the Orange Free State army; 32 years of age; a man of strong physical constitution; refined and pleasant mannered. According to information from the Anglo-Boer War Museum, Joubert derived from Smithfield and at the age of 31 "was captured at Fouriesburg in 1901". He was a commandant. (Personal communication: E M Wessels, Senior Researcher, War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein, 20 August, 2003.)

11 *El Paso Herald*, 22 May 1903

12 *New York Times*, 24 May 1903

13 *El Paso Herald*, 26 June 1903



Figures 1 & 2: Boer officers General G D Joubert (left) and Captain W S O'Donnell (right), Mexico, 1903 **From:** Collection of Milo Mims, San Antonio, Texas

Planning for the Boer settlement

Prominent members of this colonization scheme were two United States senators, Marion Butler of North Carolina and R.F. Pettigrew of South Dakota, and a legal-business agent H. B. Wall in Mexico City. As will become clear, the ex-senators may have had greater empathy for the Boers than Wall, who was in it from the start for money. In mid-April 1903 negotiations commenced to purchase a *hacienda* in Mexico. Wall writes to Pettigrew that he needs

... the personal cooperation of Sr Don Antonio Hernandez As you can readily understand I am in no position to hurry or press the Boers until I have the Lopez arrangements finally completed, nor do I want the Boers to think there is any hitch about the proceedings on my part we have an unusual opportunity both directly and indirectly of making a great deal of money¹⁴

By this time Pettigrew had met some of the Boers who were searching for a site to settle a colony (see Map 1 for the provinces of Mexico). He wrote to Wall that he had had an interview with "Gen. Philjune" and "Gen. Slyman",¹⁵ and that they are not ready to

... take up another land deal in Mexico until the one in Chihuahua is a success They propose to bring over 50 families Philjune sailed yesterday for South Africa to bring them over They intend to locate these people on the purchase in Chihuahua¹⁶



Map 1: The provinces of Mexico

From: "Tamaulipas Gobierno del Estado" at <http://www.tamaulipas.gob.mx/ninos/images/mexico.gif>

- 14 Pettigrew Library in Siouxland Heritage Museums, Sioux Falls (hereafter PLSHM): H B Wall – R F Pettigrew, 15 April 1903
15 This obviously refers to (Ben) Viljoen and (W D) Snyman
16 PLSHM: R F Pettigrew – H B Wall, 21 May 1903 On the same day Pettigrew also wrote to Marion Butler pointing out that "Gen Slyman" had said they would not be interested in the new Mexican settlement "until next winter after they see how they get along in Chihuahua "

At about the same time Pettigrew wrote to Butler about “the Mexican matter” indicating that he would need at least sixty days to raise the money, and pointing out that he had to stall somewhat on the financing of the venture since “the market ... for stocks is bad”.¹⁷ This information must have been forwarded to Wall in Mexico City because, in a letter on 25 May he refers to “your second telegram of May 23rd reading as follows:- ‘My people [I assume this refers to investors] insist upon option in writing for sixty days to examine land and title and secure Boer contracts.’”¹⁸ In the letter under discussion, Wall expressed some concern about all the negotiations at long distance. After all, he stated, the land had been inspected by outsiders, and “also ... very thoroughly examined by these Boer generals ... probably there are no better judges of land anywhere ...”¹⁹ Wall went on to state that he did not understand whether he should have done anything in the way of financing the enterprise “and if I am I want a very much larger interest in the total that [sic] at the present time”²⁰ In the meantime, Senator Butler had traveled to Mexico City where he had been working on the title and looking up the matter of concessions. He had another visit from Joubert who was planning to travel to South Africa as soon as the “Boer contract is signed ... I see that Gen. Snyman has given only one interview in N.Y. arguing that there will be only one Boer Colony in Mex. and that it will be in Chihuahua under his concessions”.²¹ He (Butler) requested that Pettigrew reply to him at the Hotel Reforma. No doubt Wall was working in tandem with Butler, and so a day later he wrote to Pettigrew stating that “the final contracts for the purchase of the San Jose de las Rucias, and the 50 year lease for the sub-soil in connection with the San Jose have been signed.”²² Two weeks after the former exchange Pettigrew wrote to Butler (at the Hotel Reforma). He started the letter without the usual pleasantries:

Look up the law of Mexico and see if we can form a corporation under the laws of South Dakota to handle this Mexican deal Of course we want Wall connected with us all the way through; he is a valuable man and understands that country I think it would be a good plan to secure an option on the strip of land between our land and the Gulf of Mexico It would also be a good plan if you could secure an option on the land North of us we might induce the Indians of Indian Territory to take it off our hands at a big profit It would be quite important to have that property in case a railroad is built ²³

It is interesting that the senator from South Dakota, who obviously had a great deal of influence, was planning to sell this land to Native Americans from Indian Territory or perhaps more correctly to government agents administering Indian Affairs, “at a big profit”.

While in Mexico, Marion Butler and Henry B. Wall must have drafted the contracts and supplied addenda which were then forwarded to Pettigrew. Two important documents formed the basis of this settlement planning. One dealt with the *Company* that was constituted to finance the settlement, while the second was the *Contract* Boer settlers would sign.

17 PLSHM: R F Pettigrew – M Butler, 20 May 1903

18 PLSHM: H B Wall – R F Pettigrew, 25 May 1903, p 1

19 PLSHM: H B Wall – R F Pettigrew, 25 May 1903, p 2

20 PLSHM: H B Wall – R F Pettigrew, 25 May 1903, p 3

21 PLSHM: M Butler – R F Pettigrew, 19 June 1903

22 PLSHM: H B Wall – R F Pettigrew, 20 June 1903 The purchase price, indicated in the letter, was “\$325,000 00 Gold”

23 PLSHM: R F Pettigrew – M Butler, 7 July 1903

The first of these documents is titled: "The Boer Colonization and Improvement Company of Mexico." With a sub-title "Incorporated under the Laws of South Dakota."²⁴ Officers mentioned, are: R.F. Pettigrew, President, Marion Butler, Vice-President, A.L. Pettigrew, Secretary, Marion Butler was General Manager. Under the Directors appears the name of "Genr'l. G.D. Joubert²⁵ of the Boer Army." The Company consisted of capital stock: 10 000 shares, par value \$100.00 each, full paid and non-assessable. The greater part of this document discusses the history, geography, economics and potential of Mexico. It also speaks of the natural wealth in the form of native timbers and oil. It furthermore outlines the *hacienda* system:

The laborers are peons; were born on the land as were their fathers before them They live on the property as tenants from year to year They are strong, healthy people with great powers of endurance They are blessed with the most happy disposition, and go about their work with cheerfulness, and often song Under the direction of a foreman they do splendid work They are much superior, and more intelligent laborers than the negro and will work for less per day or month²⁶

In South Africa, the Church and local newspapers were attempting to prevent the emigration of Boers, emphasizing culture, language, religion, and related factors. A report in *Land en Volk*²⁷, warned that "Mexico [is] no Paradise" as it was in the heart of Roman Catholicism and the climate would sap the energy of settlers "recreating them into miserable sluggards like the Mexicans". This writer may have been influenced by contemporary literature. One source described "the average Mexican" as "slow, generally lazy, quite ignorant, very superstitious, and non-progressive" with "little ambition to accumulate property or wealth"²⁸. Another source described the Mexicans as "in-bred and isolation shrunken descendants of the Castilian worldfinders, living almost as much against the house as in it."²⁹

"The Boer Colonization ..." document continues. For the sake of investors and share holders it is pointed out that: "These Boers will furnish us labor, and they agree to work for us in getting the timber and in sinking for oil."³⁰ It seems as though the Company could not go wrong. Obviously this was no philanthropic undertaking but rather a hard business proposition in which the Company was planning to make money. In fact, the officers were already counting their profits:

The bonds are secured in the first place by the Boer contracts and Boer mortgages amounting to \$650,000, and also by the remaining 300,000 acres of land with the 200,000 acres of timber on it and with the fifty year oil and asphaltum lease which the Company owns

The \$650,000 of Boer mortgages, themselves drawing interest and running for ten years, will at the end of ten years retire \$400,000 of bonds with interest, leaving a surplus of \$250,000 plus interest, in the treasury of the Company

It is very conservative to estimate the net profit on the timber at over a million dollars, but if we should estimate it at only \$800,000, the profit on the timber alone would be double the amount of the bonds

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- 24 University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Archives (hereafter UNCCHA): 114 Marion Butler Series, 3 2, file 789 This document is undated and was sent accompanied by a hand-written note from Pettigrew to Butler: "Dear Butler, Inclosed [sic] the contract I have no copy of it I fear it will be late in arriving Yours truly "
- 25 Daniel Joubert was from Smithfield in the Free State He was captured at Fouriesburg, having the rank of commandant, in 1901 at the age of 31 (Personal communication: E M Wessels, Senior Researcher, War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein, 20 August, 2003)
- 26 "The Boer Colonization and Improvement Company of Mexico", p 8
- 27 *Land en Volk*, 5 June 1903
- 28 H T Wilson, *Historical Sketch of Las Vegas* (Hotel World Publishing Co, Chicago, 1880), p 2
- 29 C F Lummis, *The Land of Poco Tiempo* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1902), p 6
- 30 Lummis, *Land of Poco Tiempo*, p 24

With this timber cut off and sold for \$1,000,000 profit and placed in the treasury of the Company, the remaining 300,000 acres of land, even if sold at no higher price than the low special price made to the Boers, would sell for \$1,000,000. So the land alone, which can not be lost or squandered, even if there were no Boer mortgages, and even if there were no timber, would itself be a security of more than 200 per cent for the bonds

So we see that after the bonds have been retired, we have \$250,000 worth of Boer mortgages, with accumulation interest; \$800,000 worth of timber and over \$1,000,000 worth of land, amounting to over \$2,000,000³¹

The document goes on to state that:

The most valuable tanning material known is the root of the canaigre plant. It is indigenous to this country and grows wild. There are only limited latitudes where it can be raised. The Boer Generals who have visited this property noted this fact. They say that it grows wild in some parts of the Transvaal and Orange Free State - where there is enough rain fall - showing the similarity of the soil and climate of the two countries, though most of South Africa has less rain fall³²

According to this document, the property had been visited by several Boer generals, including Generals Joubert, Pearson, Fonchet, Kettinger³³, and Captain O'Donnell. "They are all delighted with the soil, grass and climate. They say that they have never seen any country superior to it."³⁴

President Porfirio Diaz was, at this time, interested in the development of Mexico. It is clear that he was consulted concerning concessions that could be offered to settlers. To make the settlement conditions more attractive, colonists on this property were granted liberal concessions. These included:

- 1 Exemption from military duty
- 2 Exemption from import duties on everything necessary for the colonists, including household furniture, seeds, farming implements, stock for breeding purposes, etc., for ten years or more
- 3 Exemption from all taxes, except municipal taxes for ten years or more
- 4 Exemption from export duties on fruits and other products, for ten years or more
- 5 Exemption from transfer taxes on land purchased
- 6 Exemption from legalization of signatures and issuance of passports (Done by Company for colonists)
- 7 Premiums or bonuses paid to colonists for improved new crops introduced and successfully grown for three years, during the first ten years or more³⁵

Attached to this document were a number of addenda. One of these by Professor Hill speaks glowingly of the mineral wealth and promise of sub-soil values. Another, Exhibit No. 3, is a "Report by G.D. Joubert about the hacienda San Jose de las Rucias situated in the state of Tamaulipas". Joubert comments that the *hacienda* "consists of hills, tablelands, lowlands and highlands, rivers and creeks and springs". The grasses change from summer to winter. "When dry the grass gets hard, but during winter it always remains green at the bottom, just like our veldt grass in South Africa." Joubert made two visits, one in mid-summer, the other in mid-winter. He traveled by land and also up and down the Soto la Marina River in a small steamboat, commenting on fish and shellfish, wild game and birds, as well as development potential. He concluded his report by stating: "The climate is magnificent, particularly about six miles from the Coast and further to the west. Sickness among the peons and foreigners is unknown" [sic].³⁶

31 Lummis, *Land of Poco Tiempo*, p 29

32 Lummis, *Land of Poco Tiempo*, p 18

33 While Pearson was an American, I suggest the last two names are phonetic transcriptions of "Fouche" and "Kritzinger"

34 Lummis, *Land of Poco Tiempo*, p 22

35 Lummis, *Land of Poco Tiempo*, p 7

36 "Report by G D Joubert about the hacienda San Jose de las Rucias situated in the state of Tamaulipas", p 4

On the last page of this document there is a postscript:

Since the above was written, a letter has been received from Commandant Bresler, a distinguished Boer Officer from Holland, enclosing a copy of the Boer Contract (already signed by other Boer Generals) signed by himself. In this letter he says, that he will gladly co-operate in bringing over several large Boer Colonies, and will come himself with his family and settle on the property.

It is of critical importance to keep in mind that other *emigres* were leaving or planning to leave South Africa. The largest of these settler groups consisted of three treks which left Cape Town for Buenos Aires, and then southward to Comodoro Rivadavia.³⁷ Obviously the leaders of these settlement plans were attempting to attract potential settlers to their venture - as in fact Joubert and O'Donnell were doing. Unfortunately the initials of Bressler³⁸ are lacking, as is confirmation of the spelling. In a letter dated 1 September 1903, Pettigrew referred to a cable from Holland from a "Commandant Bressler".³⁹ There was a Commandant Danie Bresler who in late September 1903 sailed from Cape Town for Argentina. He in fact settled north of Neuquen and not in Chubut. If "Bresler" and "Bressler" refer to the same person⁴⁰, a possible reason for not joining the other Boers may be found in a memorandum from the Governor of the Cape Colony marked "Secret"⁴¹. This memo states:

Bressler, however, has lost caste with the Boers, as having collected a number of cattle and horses in Holland and Belgium, gifts for the benefit of Boer widows and orphans. Bressler sold the animals in and near Cape Town and then decamped with the proceeds to Argentine.

I would suggest however that there was in fact only one gentleman whose name may have been confused or misspelled as Bresler and Bressler respectively⁴². Bresler first appeared as a correspondent from Holland where he was soliciting aid for the widows and orphans of the Boer soldiers. Obviously he was in a hurry to settle somewhere outside South Africa. When there was some uncertainty about the immanency of the Tamaulipas plans (and since he had cattle and horses donated to the needy in South Africa) he sailed for Cape Town, arrived in time to dispose of the animals and sign on with the Third Trek aboard the *Cornwall*, which departed Cape Town on 3 September 1903 for Argentina. While in Holland, he wrote a letter to General G.D. Joubert, but for some reason this letter was only mailed from London on 10 October 1903 signed "Bresler". Is it possible that another person completed and/or signed this letter?

37 For a study of this settlement see: B M du Toit, *Colonia Boer, An Afrikaner Settlement in Chubut, Argentina* (The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, 1995)

38 The *El Paso Herald* of 25 May 1903 states that Joubert had received a cablegram from The Hague from "Commandant Bressler, Commandant Conkrie and Gen. Latukom". The last two names are not Afrikaans last names and were most likely phonetically transcribed by the newspaper reporter. I would suggest they refer to Commandant Cronjé, and Gen. Lategan.

39 PLSHM: R F Pettigrew - M Butler, 1 September 1903

40 As the names "Bresler" and "Bressler" were confusing, I asked the personnel at the War Museum of the Boer Republics whether there were two persons or whether different spellings referred to the same person. I received two replies: One read "There was only one Comd Bressler [sic] in the war" (Personal communication: Johan Hattingh, War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein, 15 August 2003); the second "There was only one Commandant DM Bresler [sic]" (Personal communication: E M Wessels, Senior Researcher, War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein, 20 August 2003).

41 Cape Town Archives Repository (hereafter CAR): S181/Z, 7 September 1905. Note that this government document also refers to "Bressler" and the person who wrote to Pettigrew was "Bressler".

42 E M Wessels, Senior Researcher at the War Museum of the Boer Republics states: "There was only one Commandant D M Bresler who traveled to the Netherlands after the war accompanied by generals Conroy and Lategan" (Personal communication, 20 August 2003).

The second major document is titled: “*Boer Contract*” dated 6-27-03⁴³. Here appears once again the name of “Henry B. Wall of the City of Mexico, Mexico, party of the first part, and Asst. Genl. G.D. Joubert, Capt. W.S. O’Donnell and associates as may join them by signing below, parties of the second part ...”

Butler must have informed Pettigrew that he would be returning home, because on 7 July 1903, Pettigrew sent a letter to Butler at the Hotel Baron in Monterey, Mexico. He commented:

All the documents have arrived and I have been reading them over this morning I do not understand the clause in the Boer contract which says that ‘we shall have the first right to purchase from the Boers any timber they may have to sell’ That seems to imply that they could take timber land, and I see no reason why timber land might not be grazing or agricultural, at least, but I presume it was distinctly understood that they were to take lands that were not chiefly valuable for timber I hope you will get a concession for a railroad from Tampico to the Texas line, because I think it will be of value to us⁴⁴

Here, after the legal work had been done by H. B. Wall, perhaps because he was practicing law in Mexico City or at least was familiar with the Mexican legal system, together Marion Butler and R.F. Pettigrew attempted to organize the Boer settlement. It will be recalled that a number of the Boers, including Ben Viljoen, W.D. Snyman, Kritzinger and Joubert (and the Irishman O’Donnell) had been in Mexico City. Mr. Wall, serving as agent for “The Boer Colonization and Improvement Company”, sent two letters to the latter three gentlemen. Both letters are dated 27 June 1903.

FIRST LETTER

Mexico, June 27th, 1903

Gen'l P H Kritzinger,
Gen'l G D Joubert,
Cap't W S O'Donnell

Gentlemen:-

Realizing that it will be advisable for you to have the assistance of other Boer officers in the carrying out of your contract of even date, relative to a Boer Colony in Tamaulipas, Mexico, I hereby agree, to deliver good and sufficient deeds to a total amount of land not to exceed 2,000 acres, to such officers as may join you in signing the contract herein referred to It being understood and agreed, that all land so deeded, shall be the full consideration for all time, influence, services, etc , to the parties signing the contract and receiving their proportion of the free deed land

[on the back of this letter is typed]

- 2,000 - acre agreement

Wall - Boers

June 27th, 1903

43 UNCCCHA: 114 Marion Butler Series 3 2, file 790

44 PLSHM: R F Pettigrew – M Butler, 7 July 1903 As has become clear throughout the negotiations and planning, these people were set on making a profit The sentimental altruism expressed later is tinged by a profit motive especially on the part of H B Wall and R F Pettigrew

SECOND LETTER

Mexico, June 27th, 1903

Gen'l P H Kritzinger,
Gen'l G D Joubert,
Cap't W S O'Donnell,

Gentlemen:-

For and in full consideration of your time, expenses and services in connection with the Boer Colony in Tamaulipas, Mexico

I hereby agree that upon your carrying out your contract of even date, relative to the locating of 100 families upon the lands mentioned in said contract, to deliver to each of you a good sufficient deed free of all charge for 1,000- acres of land, said land being a part of the Hacienda San Jose de las Rucias

[on the back of the letter is typed]

- 1,000 - acre agreement⁴⁵

Wall - Boers - K, J & O'D

June 27th 1903

Thus, it seems that though Wall had sold or transferred his part of the contract to Pettigrew, he still was very much involved in the activities and negotiations of the Company. The Boer representatives had good reason to deliver on their part since each would receive the deed to one thousand acres. The question that must have been nagging their thoughts and plans was whether they could find a hundred families able to sail for the New World, able to settle this new frontier and to find the cash to pay for the land. Kritzinger may have been part of this planning only in name. He is not mentioned as one of the major players. Joubert was thinking about recruiting Boer families in South Africa and possibly Dutch settlers from the Netherlands, while O'Donnell recalled the major Irish emigration to New York and planned to recruit settlers in his native country. On the same day this flurry of correspondence was taking place, Joubert and O'Donnell wrote to ex-President Steyn of the Orange Free State:

Reply to Hon R F Pettigrew,
32 Broadway,
New York City, N Y ,
U S A

Mexico, June 27, 1903

Hon President M Steyn
Hague, Holland

Dear President:-

We are pleased to learn through the press of the United States that you have nearly recovered your health, and we further hope that it will continue. It is with pleasure that we inform you that we have secured one hundred thousand acres of land in the State of Tamaulipas, in the Republic of Mexico, intended for a "Boer" and an "Irish" colony, as our people are leaving the country daily, and getting scattered in all corners of the world, so, when we had this great opportunity presented to us, we thought, as citizens of the Orange Free State, that it was nothing but our duty to secure this tract of land for our people, who are emigrating daily out

45 At first typing this read - 2,000 - acre but the "2" had twice been over typed by "1"

of our country We enclose herewith the contract that we have made with the New York Co some of whom are the most prominent people in New York City, such as Senator Butler and Senator Pettigrew

We think this is a very much better scheme, that is to have the people together in a mass in a free country like the Republic of Mexico, than to have them scattered all over the world There are a great many of our people scattered all over the United States, and we intend to bring them all together and get them located in this state of Tamaulipas

We would very much like to have a line from you at our address as given above
(Signed) G D Joubert - W S O'Donnell -

P S It would be a great aid to us if you would write to Senator Pettigrew direct, at the address given above, saying all you can of your approval, and in encouragement of our enterprise, and you [sic] opinion of how the very favorable arrangements we have made for our people will impress them; in other words get into communication with Senator Pettigrew and thereby help us all you can Senator Pettigrew was one of the best and most honest friends our people had during our great struggle, even to the extent of sending his son to fight with us

The planning and contractual arrangements for a settlement or settlements in Mexico frequently contradict each other. Thus Pettigrew wrote to Wall about receiving a telegram and informed him that "Slyman" had been to his office and was prepared to sign "the contract." Now it was well-known that General Snyman was not interested in the Tamaulipas colony and had already set his plans in motion to bring Boer families to Chihuahua. Pettigrew continues: "I have talked with Gen. Joubert and he does not think it is best for Slyman to have anything to do with our enterprise in Tamaulipas."⁴⁶ A week later, Pettigrew followed up with another letter, repeating Joubert's sentiments regarding the signing of "the contract" and stating that "we will make a new one with him involving the acquisition of another tract of land. Joubert and O'Donnell do not feel very friendly toward Snyman on account of an interview he published at El Paso ..."⁴⁷

It should be kept in mind that while initial financial outlays involved private funds, Pettigrew (and Butler) were attempting to raise large sums for the purchase of the Mexican *hacienda*. The stock exchange was not stable, causing the investors to be nervous and thus not very forthcoming. On the other hand, Joubert and O'Donnell seemed ready to get down to final arrangements. Once again we find Pettigrew informing Butler, who was still in Monterey, about investors who had backed out. He explained: "... I will let Gen. Joubert and the Irishman start on a lecture tour until the first of January, or until December, then they can go to South Africa for the Colony."⁴⁸

In the meantime, Pettigrew was attempting to interest investors in the land deal in Mexico. Information was publicized concerning the great potential of the land, its rich timber, and the mineral rights, but few people were interested. The contract of purchase was based on a sixty day contingency, and the time was fast running out. On 8 August 1903 there was clear concern in two telegrams sent to Marion Butler. One reads "Can't raise a cent. Everybody scared. Better not go unless you can get extension without payment." The second simply states: "Better not go unless extension can be had without payment. Can't raise a cent."⁴⁹

It is not clear what happened to "The Boer Colonization and Improvement Company of Mexico". The title may have been too clumsy, the financial arrangement too complex, or the *hacienda* owner may have become directly involved. All of these may have resulted

46 PLSHM: R F Pettigrew – H B Wall, 22 July 1903

47 PLSHM: R F Pettigrew – H B Wall, 28 July 1903 This interview is quoted above from the *El Paso Herald*, 26 June 1903

48 PLSHM: R F Pettigrew – M Butler, 7 August 1903

49 PLSHM: R F Pettigrew – M Butler, 8 August 1903

in a lack of investment support. In any case, exactly two months after drawing up the former document with all its elaborate plans and formal legal foundation, H.B. Wall wrote to Marion Butler from Mexico City. He referred to letters Butler had written to Don Antonio (the owner of the *hacienda*?) and Lic. J. Burchard (legal representative of Don Antonio?). It seems that Wall had received copies of these letters. Wall stated it was strange that Don Antonio was not willing to share certain documents with him, "... but on the contrary was desirous of carrying on further negotiations directly with you ... Don Antonio has a great deal of pride, and now that he thinks the business is going to proceed successfully he does not care to share the credits, of bringing about the purchase and sale with me ..."⁵⁰ Wall continued: "... and I trust ... that you and Senator Pettigrew are as determined as ever to put through the Tamaulipas business ... [and] everything indicates to me that we should push this business energetically without further delay ... and this brings up immediately the idea of the bond plan ..."⁵¹ Wall sent Butler a prospectus of the "Chartered Company of Lower California" that was very successful, but which had not changed or adapted,

whereas we have a new fresh idea to submit, namely: the philanthropic purpose of aiding a deserving people and the assurance of success based upon the sturdy, sterling qualities of the same people, who have not only never failed as agriculturalists, but have built up a nation entirely by the efforts of their own strength. Therefore, my plan would be that within 24 hours after you read my letter, you have written out, an application for a charter for a company to particularly handle this business. Name the Company, for instance, "THE NEW BOER COLONY COMPANY" or any other name that would appeal to you, only that it is advisable to have the name "Boer" on all bonds, stock stationary, etc., and as the name "old Colony" always seemed attractive to me a combination of the words "Boer and Colony" seem good, adding the word "New" indicates that this affair is for their new home and country, also the name "New Boer Colony Company" is neither very long nor very hard to say or remember, and a bond with the words "The New Boer Colony Company Bond" printed across its face would attract one favorably."⁵²

Wall continued, suggesting that the Company be capitalized at \$2 000 000 gold, and that bonds be issued for \$1 000 000 gold. The Company should be organized with the very strongest Board of Directors, "... not less than 9 well known prominent men and also secure for the trusteeship some unquestionable, well known, strong institution ... and do all this before you ask for or request another cent of money from any one."⁵³ Wall may have experienced unfortunate legal problems before, or he might just have been a very shrewd businessman. He concluded his letter to Butler:

But the thing to do at once is to get these bonds into existence so that you can go to a man and sell him two or three or fifty, or any amount he will take, sell them at once giving him the bonds and taking his check while he is in the notion, in this way you are in a position to take advantage of good days in the stock market without the danger of a man backing out and withdrawing his subscription when bad days in the market occur.⁵⁴

On 1 September 1903 Pettigrew once again wrote to Butler. This letter is on the letter-head of The California King Gold Mines Company of which Pettigrew was Vice-President and Chairman of the Executive Committee. He stated:

I have prepared the articles of incorporation which I forwarded to you, and I think I have written you about what I am trying to do. Joubert is lecturing in the West, as per programme laid out, until December, and is getting at the rate of \$1000 a month, and I don't think he is very anxious to go to South Africa. Bressler cabled him from Holland⁵⁵ that he and others

50 UNCCCHA: Marion Butler papers: H B Wall – M Butler, 26 August 1903, p 1
51 UNCCCHA: Marion Butler papers: H B Wall – M Butler, 26 August 1903, pp 1-2
52 UNCCCHA: Marion Butler papers: H B Wall – M Butler, 26 August 1903, pp 2-3
53 UNCCCHA: Marion Butler papers: H B Wall – M Butler, 26 August 1903, p 4
54 UNCCCHA: Marion Butler papers: H B Wall – M Butler, 26 August 1903, p 8
55 See discussion above

would join in the scheme and asked Joubert to come over at once I have no reply from Joubert as to what he will do I have received a copy of the contract from Wall, and I wrote you a short letter commenting upon it I have also forwarded to you some of Mr Wall's letters that I did not open The conditions are such in South Africa that there will be no trouble in getting a colony, if it is attended to I do not know what Gen Joubert intends to do, but I hope to hear from him very soon and arrange some plan with regard to the matter One thing is certain - some one ought to go to South Africa at once

Filljune is on the way to this country with forty families,⁵⁶ and as he and Snyman want to sign a contract⁵⁷ I am in favor of making a new contract with them for another 100,000 acres ...⁵⁸

Included with his letter, Pettigrew also sent a map "which I had made up" [see Map 2]. It shows the proposed extension of the Southern Pacific railway line, one of the developments promised in the contract presented to the Boers.

Either Pettigrew had received some investment funds or he had decided that the deal was too good to pass up. At the beginning of September 1903, in a somewhat relaxed mood, he wrote to Butler, expressing pleasure that Mrs Butler was recovering from a serious illness, and then continuing:

I have made up my mind to go on and incorporate the company to take over the Mexican land, and get out the bonds as soon as possible, and proceed to sell them, because under your contract we are obliged to make the second payment in three months from the time the contract was made⁵⁹

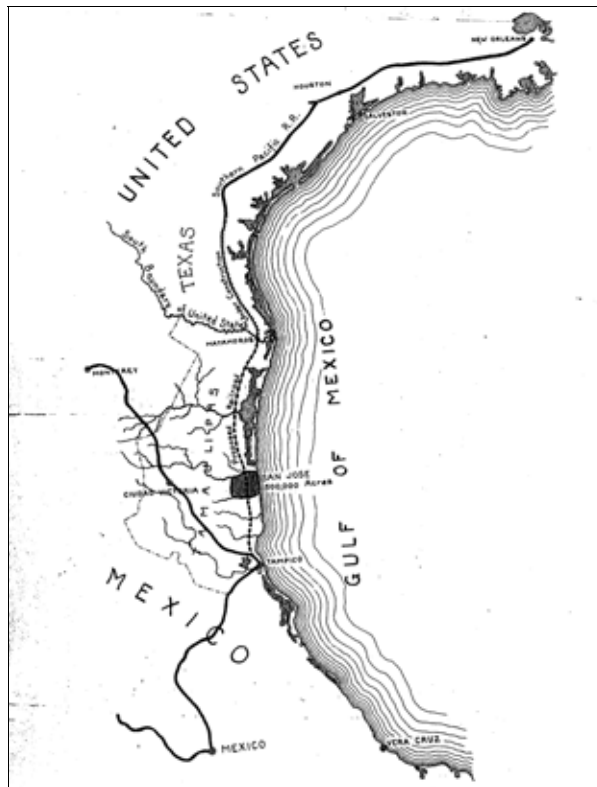
On the same day he wrote to "My Dear Friend" (Marion Butler) to report some competitive plans by other colony organizers and an attempt to undercut their scheme:

McDonald is just in and says he has an option on the land north of ours in Mexico, which runs until the 15th of October; he is in the market to raise money to pay for the Land He is getting out maps and prospectus Of course he is conflicting with our plans because he has gone to Gen Pearson, who is over at Scranton, Pa , and got a contract with him, by which Pearson agrees to buy 100,000 acres at \$4 00 per acre, and locate a large Boer colony upon the property Of course this whole thing is a fake and a fraud Pearson can not get a Boer colony and McDonald knows it and so does Pearson, but they use it to conflict with us Now, what I want you to do is to write to Hernandez, or who-ever you think best, and have them cancel the option McDonald has got, on the 15th day of October - if he has got such an option - and quit him entirely, for he is nothing than a faker and a fraud⁶⁰

Wall felt that their enterprise was going to succeed and that all the Boer leaders were going to sign the contract for the Tamaulipas colony. On September 15 he cabled Pettigrew (Mexico via Galveston) as follows⁶¹

... Snyman just left my office I go Chihuahua within ten days secure all signatures We want Snyman, Viljoen, Fouche and the others to further insure bond sales Promised Snyman I would go Africa which more than pleased him He is with us heart and soul He will go New York or anywhere needed I will keep Joubert all right proper time O'Donnell welcome also but if refuses stay in on account Snyman O'Donnell will be the loser Push organization and get out bonds quick

- 56 This refers to Viljoen, most likely Gen Ben Viljoen who organized a settlement in Texas/New Mexico See B M du Toit, "Boer Settler in the Southwest", *Southwest Studies*, 101, 1995
- 57 Pettigrew's letter is dated 1 September 1903 Reports appearing as early as 22 May 1903 refer to "the colony started by General Snyman near Santa Rosalia, in Chihuahua" and Viljoen was talking of either joining Snyman (married to Viljoen's father's sister) or settling in Texas But, it is entirely possible that they were still fishing for the best deal
- 58 UNCCHA: Marion Butler Papers: R F Pettigrew – M Butler, 1 September 1903
- 59 PLSHM: R F Pettigrew – M Butler, 3 September 1903
- 60 PLSHM: R F Pettigrew – M Butler, 3 September 1903
- 61 Cable from H B Wall – R F Pettigrew The Western Union Telegraph Company, 15 September 1903



Map 2: The map which Pettigrew had “made up” and sent to Butler on 1 September 1903
From: University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Archives: Marion Butler Papers

This cable suggests a strange time line. Back on 26 June 1903, General W.D. Snyman had stated that the settlement he was organizing in Chihuahua was developing as planned and that “the colony will be open to all Boers from South Africa, including General Joubert and Captain O’Donnell”⁶², though he did make it very clear that he was not interested in their plans for Tamaulipas. This cable makes an interesting insinuation, namely that there was a strained relationship between Snyman and O’Donnell.

The Boer settlement in limbo

As October 1903 came, new and significant developments were taking place, none of them favourable for the development of a Boer colony in Tamaulipas. A letter written on the first day of the month is from Pettigrew to Wall in Mexico City. It confirmed that Wall’s suggested title was acceptable, and that they were getting a prospectus out. As compared to the cordial greeting and address Butler enjoyed, this letter read as follows:

62 *El Paso Herald*, 26 June 1903

Dear Sir:-

We have organized a company with a capital of \$1,000,000 We propose to issue \$400,000 in bonds drawing six per cent interest, running ten years We have put into this corporation 500,000 acres, but in order to sell our bonds we have agreed with some parties to divide among them 100,000 acres, as a sort of promoters bonus I take \$100,000 of these bonds; with every bond I get double the amount of stock Do you want any of it on this basis That is, I get for \$100,000 of bonds 200,000 of stock Then I sell my bonds as best I can, or keep them if I choose Whatever land there is over 600,000 acres will of course go to you, Butler and myself We will have to jointly settle with Hernandes

Mr Latergang [sic] and Mr Venter are here; just arrived from Holland, and they want another 100,000 acres, and they want to see the property; they start for Monterey tomorrow Butler has telegraphed you for you to meet them and go with them, which I hope will do The Board of Directors of the company have not been fully determined yet but some of them will be Senator Butler, Gen Joubert, and yourself, if you desire to be a Director and take some of the stock and bonds The name of the company is The Boer Colonization and Improvement Company of Mexico⁶³

The arrival of the new Boer “representatives” spelled trouble. A few days later Pettigrew informed Wall (this time addressed as “My Dear Mr. Wall”) that “O’Donnell, Lategan and Venter will leave Chicago on Friday and come to El Paso. There is no quarantine [sic] against El Paso, and they can enter Mexico at once and go to Monterey. You had better arrange to meet them even if you do not go with them to the property, O’Donnell I think can do that.”⁶⁴

At this time, things seemed to have become strained among the leading persons. Above we already saw that Wall was peeved by what he suspected to be the strained attitude of Don Antonio. Now Wall became the one to feel that after all his hours of labor and financial investment he might not be getting his share of the potential profit. Thus he wrote to Marion Butler:⁶⁵

Dear Senator:-

To sum up what I am driving at in my letter to Senator Pettigrew there is plenty of margin and we are getting the Tamaulipas property cheap enough for all of us to make considerable money out of the enterprize In addition to this personally I have worked hard enough over this property for the past few years, have taken enough chances and have neglected my other business to such an extent that it is only right and justice that I should receive some large profits from the eventual success of the enterprise

You know very well that I have not been troublesome for little about these negotiations I have turned all this business over to you and Senator Pettigrew both morally and legally by virtue of the assignments and new contracts that have been made and you can still depend on my personal best efforts and support in the matter at least until you have the enterprize well on its feet, but if I am to invest any more money even comparatively small amounts such as the expenses of trips to see the property, etc , I must see more profit in the future than there would be in a division of what land will be left after putting, into the company

..... 500,000 - acres
Selling to the Boers 100,000 - acres
and distributing among some of your parties... 100,000 - acres

Yet these figures are exactly in accordance with Senator Pettigrew’s letter to me of October 1st Of course in the same letter of Oct 1st Senator Pettigrew offers me stock and bonds at the same rate that I understand he is offering to any other stranger or new man he may come in contact with but this does not appeal to me under the circumstances, in connection with an affair that has been brought up to its present status more by my efforts than those of any other one man

63 PLSHM: R F Pettigrew – H B Wall, 1 October 1903 In spite of a favorable response to Wall’s suggestions, we note here the retention of the original name for the Boer colony
64 PLSHM: R F Pettigrew – H B Wall, 6 October 1903 The reference here to “quarantine” does not identify cause, but it spells trouble for the planners of the new settlement
65 UNCCCHA: Marion Butler Papers: H B Wall –M Butler, 15 October 1903

Now please understand that I am not writing this with any hard feelings and when I say that you can still have my personal aid, support and influence I mean exactly what I say, but regard you and Senator Pettigrew as extremely foolish if you handle this affair in the way I understand from Senator Pettigrew's letter, you are proposing to do

Let me urge you both to come on here to Mexico City and I will submit a programme that will insure the success of the enterprize and make us some money besides

It should be kept in mind that by this time the first two (small) treks had already arrived in Argentina. More people were planning to leave South Africa, and it was critical to spread favourable information regarding potential settlement sites. In ideal conditions it was also desirable for representatives to visit potential sites, thus carrying back information regarding land, requirements, conditions, and impressions. During October 1903, while H. B. Wall was complaining about not getting his rightful share of potential profits, some visitors (representatives) from South Africa came to inspect the site of the planned settlement. It seems that Captain O'Donnell took these two gentlemen, Mr Venter and Mr Lategan, to Tamaulipas, but matters started to unravel. Thus on 21 October 1903, Joubert wrote to Butler and Pettigrew from McCoy's European Hotel and Café in Chicago:⁶⁶

Dear Sirs:-

I have the pleasure to inform you that I have received five letters from the Captain since he left

No 1 From St Louis, not very important

No 2 From Morellos Mex , stating as follows viz:- we are stopped here by fever,⁶⁷ we don't know if we shall have to go by San Luis Portisi or Victoria

No 3 From C Pofirio Diaz, Coah, dated the 10th which I enclose, he seems to have lost a lot of courage

No 4 From same place dated the 13th, stating as follows viz:- I am sorry to say that the fever is holding us up here, I hope we can get there, if we cannot get there it will be bad for our scheme, & Mr Venter will return with a bad opinion of the property At present they are quite all right because everyone they have asked about the property gives a splendid account of the land, so this enterprise will go big if they sign the contract & without any more inconvenience to us this trip will cost a lot of money, I think we shall have to round San Luis Potosi, I am glad to say the tract of land has got a great name here

No 5 Aguascalientes dated the 17th, I have got so far as here, we will leave for San Luis tonight we will be in Tampico tomorrow at 8 30 Now the question if we can get coaches, Mr Venter says that he must return to South Africa in a short time, I have a hard job, a job I would not like to take on again, although with all the difficulties I see a chance to be back by the 8th of next month, I will run short of money for this trip around here will cost a lot & it will be a big expense of getting horses in Tampico, when you receive this letter inform Senator Pettigrew as how I am getting on, now I am doing my best for if these men cannot get to see the land, it will be a big loss to the company as well as to us

The letter is signed by G. D. Joubert who added a handwritten postscript:

I have also received a letter from Komt Bresler, dated London 10th Oct stating that he is on his way to Africa & he is sending over Capt O J Hindon to join our army Please send me Breslers letter I left with you ⁶⁸

66 It seems that Joubert was living in a very modern but modestly priced hotel The letterhead advertises that it is "Equipped with electric lights, steam heat and running water in each room Rates 75 cents Per Day and Up"

67 It is not clear from this letter whether O'Donnell had the fever, whether one of the visitors was afflicted, or whether there was a general fever outbreak in the region, however, see letter from Pettigrew to Wall (6 October 1903) above, which comments on "quarantine"

68 UNCCCHA: Marion Butler Papers: G D Joubert - "Sirs", presumably Senator M Butler and Senator R F Pettigrew, 21 October 1903

It is important to look closely at the dates and the wording of these letters. On 21 October 1903 Joubert referred to a letter “dated London 10th Oct.” Was Bresler already “on his way”, in which case a third party mailed his letter? Was it mailed promptly? Joubert certainly thought so since he stated in a later letter, dated 10 November 1903, to Marion Butler (*vide* below): “I have written Comdt. Bresler ...” The letter dated 19 November 1903 from Hindon to Butler and Pettigrew (*vide* below) states that he, O.J. Hindon, arrived in Holland on 23 February, heard about Reitz’s colonization plans and when these fell through “I met Comdt Bresler at the Reiz’s house ... then Bresler sailed for Cape Town ...” We know that Bresler left Cape Town on board the *Cornwall* on 3 September 1903, that he negotiated with the Argentinian government for a colony (which failed), and that he was visited in Ruicachoroy (Argentina) by the Reverend Jacobs in 1906.⁶⁹

On 5 November 1903, Joubert was still in Chicago. He seemed to have been perturbed about a telegram he had received regarding the long drawn-out attempt to visit the Tamaulipas site. Thus he cabled Senator Butler:

Odonnell houton [sic] texas wire this morning arrive chicago saturday guests dissatisfied stop sending particulars express mail
(Signed) Joudert [sic]⁷⁰

The correspondence between the parties henceforth took on an urgency unseen before and the letters convey concern if not panic. Joubert’s letter, this time from the Grand Hotel,⁷¹ was obviously hastily written by hand:

My Dear Friend

Your two letters of the 6th & 7th inst to hand also the prospectus

I hope you have received my last letter of the 7th also the letter from O’Donnell regarding Venter & Lategan who promised to call on you on there [sic] arrival in your city

I hope you gave them a good talking too for in my opinion they deserved one I met them for a few minutes before I left for this place, & all that O’Donnell had written me, was confirmed by them

I have written Comdt Bresler⁷² about these two so that he will know how to answer their prejudiced views The colony no doubt does not suit Mr Venters private speculative views but I am sure that many of our suffering countrymen will be glad to come over, & settle down Captain Hindon is willing to proceed there as soon as it can be arranged, & he is certain many will follow him Hindon informs me that there are many of our people still prisoners of war, 600 in India ⁷³ [at this point Joubert’s pen runs dry and the copy of his writing becomes illegible] the men in Bermuda have been turned loose to wander around the Island one of these men arrived in Holland just before Hindons departure from there, a movement was spoken of to try to get them away I enclose cutting from Johannesburg Star of Oct 3rd If you think it advisable we could send a cable to these men & inquire if they would not go to the Colony instead of remaining prisoners under the British, they are free to leave the islands at their own expenses but cannot return to the late Republics before signing the declarations & that they have sworn they wont do Some time ago Major Pretorius was sent over to try and persuade them, & they gave him five minutes to clear out of their camp, & it is probable that Gen Botha & De la Rey will be just as unsuccessful

69 Du Toit, *Colonia Boer*, pp 106-108 and pp 142-146

70 UNCCHA: Marion Butler Papers: G D Joubert – M Butler The errors in format and spelling might be the result of an inattentive employee of the Telegraph Company or a panicking Joubert Unfortunately the full text of O’Donnell’s report which was sent by express mail to Butler could not be located among the archive papers

71 Either he came into some money or he borrowed the writing paper The Grand Hotel which was situated in the same building as the Opera House advertised rooms for \$2 00 per day- with bath \$2 50

72 Did Joubert in fact write to Bressler or Bresler?

73 In 1903 there were still nine hundred overseas prisoners of war who refused the sign the oath They were in fact in a self-imposed exile B M du Toit, “Boer Settlers in the Southwest”, *Southwestern Studies*, 101, 1995

We believe that those prisoners will be glad to come over, besides it will be a great advertisement for our Colony even if they wont come for it will prove conclusively that we have our people's welfare at heart Hindon proposes to first wire to Holland to the Editor of the "Nieuw Rotterdamsche Courant" who is a friend of his & an Ex-editor of a Boer organ in Pretoria & ask him for the necessary information, the cable be published in Holland & South Africa & do us a lot of good

What you say about the fever is quite true, but that wont frighten Boers who want a home in many parts of the Transvaal we have districts infested with Malarial fever, but it does not drive our people away from their farms O'Donnell, Hindon & I will be in Chicago on Sunday & will go over the prospectus together, after which we shall write you ⁷⁴

While these three were planning to advertise and carry through on establishing the Boer colony in Tamaulipas, Venter and Lategan should not be forgotten. They had apparently also returned to Chicago, and were not saying nice things about the prospective colony. It will be recalled that on their trip south they had encountered all kinds of delays, the most noteworthy caused by fever. Now they were visiting drinking establishments in Chicago and speaking out concerning their experiences and impressions of the Tamaulipas lands. O'Donnell frantically sent to telegram to Senator Butler: "Boers runs down lands in public bars in Chicago bad lot."⁷⁵

There must have been a telegram from Butler to O'Donnell posing certain questions, because on the same day O'Donnell replied: "None what ever there trip was business Will be here until Friday will return Sunday letter mailed" One must assume a variety of errors on the part of the telegraph personnel, especially as this telegram is from "Capt ODowell".⁷⁶

Earlier Joubert had mentioned to Butler that Hindon had in fact joined them in Chicago. With rumours and accusations flying and panic setting in among the organizers of the Boer colony, Hindon entered into the discussion. He wrote a long letter, by hand, to Senators Marion Butler & R.F. Pettigrew:

Dear Sirs

I hope you will pardon the liberty I take in addressing you, but you have no doubt heard from Gen Joubert & Captain O'Donnell that I am interested in your colonization scheme To make myself known to you both, I will acquaint [sic] you with the following facts - In February last, nine months after the signing of Peace, when I saw that the British Government were arresting burghers of the late Republics in defiance of the Peace terms, I decided to seek a home elsewhere & and left suddenly on the 23rd Feb & landed safely in Holland with my young wife, my intention was to immigrate to Argentine, but I was so strongly advised by some men I met in Holland, against the Argentine that I gave up the idea of going there, & as numerous ex burghers of my commando has requested me to inform them of how I found things in Argentine I wrote an open letter to the principal Boer paper in Pretoria giving them the same Information as I had received, but advising the intending immigrants to try Texas where Mr F W Reitz, our late Secretary of State, was trying to obtain ground for my people Shortly after I had sent off my letter Mr Reitz told me that his plan had fallen through, at the same time I met Comdt Bresler at Mr Reitz's house Bresler then informed me of your plan to form a Boer Colony in Mexico Then Bresler sailed for Cape Town, when he arrived there some Cape Africanders were on the point of immigrating to the Argentine just at that time my letter was published, & Bresler informed the people about your proposition in Mexico The result was that the intending immigrants postponed [sic] their intended trip & decided first to send delegates to both Mexico and the Argentine A Mr Venter was sent, or came to report on Mexico, but much against his will, for when I met him in Holland, he was

74 UNCCCHA: Marion Butler Papers: G D Joubert – M Butler, 10 November 1903

75 UNCCCHA: Marion Butler Papers: Telegram Capt W S O'Donnell – M Butler, 10 November 1903 We must assume, in the light of information offered below, that this "bad lot" refers to Venter and Lategan

76 UNCCCHA: Marion Butler Papers: Telegram Capt W S O'Donnell – M Butler, 10 November 1903

annoyed at me for having written to the "Volkstem" warning my friends about Argentine I could see then that he was prejudiced against Mexico Comdt Bresler proposed that I should accompany him Venter to look at the proposed Colony This Venter objected to & persuaded Bresler to send Comdt Lategan instead⁷⁷ I felt convinced then that Venter would make a very bad report about Mexico, & he has done so, because he never intended settling there, no matter how promising it seemed, he was against it from the first In any case Venter will not settle down anywhere out of the Cape Colony his plan is to make money, so his wife informed me after his departure for Mexico & he has no doubt seen how to do so in Argentine

Mr Venter may be known & listened to in the Cape Colony, but in the Transvaal he is not known & where, there are many, who would be only to willing to leave that now miserable country & settle down in Mexico

Many of my friends and relations would, if they knew of your plan be ready to immigrate & if are you [sic] prepared to help over those families who have been made poor by War I am certain I could get as many as you could colonize I enclose for your information a letter from the late Auditor General of the Transvaal A P Brugmann which I have just received from him, during the last few months I have had many letters asking for particulars of your plan, but have not been able to send them since I knew but very little untill [sic] quite recently

I have a proposition to make but before doing so I will first explain my position Like many more I found myself ruined at the conclusion of the War, as I sacrificed the little I had for my country

I, like all the men who fought to the finish, have not received a cent compensation for my just claims, i e Transvaal Govt Notes & receipts & had to borrow the money from Comdt Bresler to bring me this far my intention was to go on a lecturing tour with Joubert & O'Donnell & where I had made enough money to bring over my wife & settle in Mexico Now to my sorrow I find that the interest the public take in hearing about how we fought etc is allmost [sic] nil I have been with Joubert & O'Donnell at three lectures & we have not paid expenses so I have given that up as a failure, & now Joubert tells me that you are thinking about giving up the colonization plan I shall be very sorry if you do so, for with all due respect to every one concerned, nothing has been done & the colony has never been heard of in the Transvaal & I can truthfully say that if you are prepared to bring over families who have not the means to get here I am certain you can get as many as you can place

To begin, I am ready to go there if you are willing to help me to get there, with my wife, & I am certain many will follow me here in Chicago are two of my late burghers (Irishmen) who fought to the finish I have spoken to them & they will go with me, they are both good, hardworking men & used to a rough life in a new country, & are the right sort of men to make colonists out of

I shall be pleased to hear from you, & know if my proposition is acceptable to you or not being unknown to you both I send enclosed a few letters just to show you that I am who I represent myself to be

Yours sincerely
O J Hindon

P S I send enclosed letters
No 1 from Gen Louis Botha
" 2 State Secretary Reitz
" 3 Foreign Minister Dr Leyds
" 4 T A P Kruger (head of Transvaal secret service)
" 5 A P Brugmann

I will be obliged if you will return these references with your answer⁷⁸

77 There were in fact nineteen males by the name of Venter who emigrated to Argentina, starting in 1905 In the absence of initials or first names it is impossible to trace Venter or Lategan Of extreme importance though is Hindon's statement that people in the Transvaal had never heard of Venter because he is from the Cape Colony Almost all the *emigres* to Argentina were in fact from the Cape Colony (see B M du Toit, "Boer Settlers in the Southwest", *Southwestern Studies*, 101, 1995) making it highly likely that Venter decamped to Argentina

78 UNCCCHA: Marion Butler Papers: O J Hindon -M Butler & R F Pettigrew, 19 November 1903

The Boer settlement aborted

Hindon was hoping either to travel to Transvaal to raise colonists, or at least to have his wife brought from Holland in order that they could move to Tamaulipas. But the harm had been done. Venter and Lategan had spread their negative information or opinions in an article (or newspaper report)⁷⁹ and during informal meetings and this was going to sour the waters for any potential settler. Senator Pettigrew was involved with his mining investments in California and may, at this point, have started to lose interest in the Tamaulipas venture in spite of Wall's suggestion that there was a lot of money for all of them. Thus he wrote a short note from Los Angeles to H. B. Wall:

My dear Sir:-

I am detained here for several days more then I must go to Sal Lake (sic) And can not meet you at El Paso The money can not now be raised in the U S to buy the Lopez land and the Yellow fever and the Article Venter and Lategan published in the U S have put it beyond our power We could go on with the oil lease if our title was without controversy I have written Butler about it⁸⁰

Here the correspondence concerning the proposed Boer colony in Tamaulipas, Mexico seems to dry up. One of the final references to the planned settlement comes in a letter Pettigrew sent Wall:

I now find that Prof Hill's report with regard to oil upon the Lopez Estate is a forgery Hill never visited the property Who got up this forgery I don't know We had two-thirds of the money raised to prospect for oil when Butler interviewed Prof Hill and found that we had been deceived this Mexican deal is certainly in bad shape now owing to the difficulty of raising money and the existence of yellow fever there last summer⁸¹

During November and December 1903 there is one more linking of the names of these three gentlemen, namely a brief reference to an effort to develop a water-supply for a very dry Mexico City.⁸² This plan also seems to have fizzled.

Conclusion

This study recounts what is known about an attempt to settle battle weary, impoverished Boers and their families on a colonial settlement in Mexico. While there is a fair amount of data in correspondence, critical letters or replies are missing. Also missing in many cases are names or initials by which to identify characters who appear in correspondence or in person. This is particularly true of Bresler/Bressler whose names appear in variations in "secret" Cape documents, reports from Argentina, as well as correspondence from Holland and London.

This study traced the convergence of men of power and men of need. It recorded elements of greed and elements of compassion. It found those who would do anything to make this a success and those who would do the same to see it fail. Strangely it brings us to the old cliché, "What if ...?"

Venter (and his henchman, Lategan) were obviously set on causing as much doubt about the Tamaulipas plan as they could. Support was expressed from Boers and others in

79 Unfortunately, in spite of a search of the archives and newspapers, I have been unable to retrieve this document We do know that it states that Tamaulipas is infested with Yellow Fever, and this might be based on their experience when they traveled south with O'Donnell

80 UNCCHA: Marion Butler Papers: R F Pettigrew – H B Wall, 29 November 1903

81 PLSHM: R F Pettigrew – H B Wall, 22 December 1903

82 Manuscripts Department, Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, "SOUTHERN HISTORICAL COLLECTION, #114 MARION BUTLER PAPERS Inventory" at <http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/b/Butler.Marion.html>

Holland and England, and certainly from those who wished to leave South Africa. One question which arises, concerns the two persons sent out to “inspect” the site. What would have happened if two neutral individuals visited the proposed colony? What would the outcome have been, had there not been an outbreak of fever accompanied by the quarantine which caused their detour? Would the developers have reacted differently if Professor Hill had not faked his report on the mineral potential of the colony? Might there have been a different outcome if Gideon Joubert and Willem Snyman were more congenial?

Abstract

During the later phases of the Boer War a number of leaders (and followers) were considering alternatives to living in South Africa under British rule. This gained momentum when the conditions of the Peace Treaty became known. The disenchanted from the Cape Province mostly emigrated to Argentina; Transvalers and people from the Orange Free State were involved in treks to East Africa; smaller groups explored setting in North America and Mexico. Two U.S. Senators, Marion Butler of North Carolina and Richard F. Pettigrew of South Dakota, with the assistance of Henry B. Wall in Mexico City, developed an elaborate colonization scheme to relocate a large number of Boers and their families. An overly critical visitor contributed to the demise of the project.

Opsomming

’n Boere-vestiging nooit gevestig: Tamaulipas, Mexico

Gedurende die laaste fases van die Anglo-Boereoorlog het ’n aantal leiers (en volgelinge) alternatiewe bo ’n lewe onder Britse bewind in Suid-Afrika oorweeg. Die beweging het momentum gekry toe die voorwaardes van die Vredesverdrag bekend geword het. Ontevredenes van die Kaapkolonie het hoofsaaklik na Argentinië geëmigreer. Transvalers en mense van die Oranje Vrystaat was betrokke by trekke na Oos-Afrika en kleiner groepe het moontlikhede om in Noord-Amerika en Meksiko te vestig, verken. Twee V.S. senatore, Marion Butler van Noord-Karolina en Richard F. Pettigrew van Suid-Dakota, het met die hulp van Henry B. Wall in Meksikostad, ’n uitgebreide kolonisasieskema ontwikkel ten einde groot getalle Boere en hulle families te hervestig. ’n Oordrewe kritiese besoeker het bygedra tot die mislukking van die projek.

Keywords

Anglo-Boer War, Boers, emigration, Mexico, settlement/colony, Joubert, O'Donnell.