

TONY CUBBIN

A history of Richards Bay 1497-1970's
in *Zululand Annals Vol. iii*. Richards Bay, 1997.

R40 (available from the author)

and

ALBERT VAN JAARVELD

Mtunzini: A history, from earliest times to 1995 (Volume 1)

Mtunzini, 1998

R65 (available from the author)

Local history remains a dynamic meeting place between the man on the street and the discipline of history. The popularity of this field and its potential for academic enterprise has been exploited by numerous researchers at South African universities as well as the Human Sciences Research Council. The spin-offs are now beginning to gain momentum. Since 1985 the historiography of the northern urban areas of what is currently Kwa Zulu Natal has grown substantially. Amongst the pioneering

works were those of Anthony Minnaar which dealt with the history of Richards Bay (1985) and Empangeni (1989). The field has now been enhanced with two contributions by academic historians, Albert van Jaarsveld and Tony Cubbin, both of the University of Zululand.

Albert van Jaarsveld's *Mtunzini: A history, from earliest times to 1995 (Volume 1)* is the story of a Northern Zululand hamlet which evolved from a trading centre with a resident magistrate to a sought after holiday resort and place of residence for many people working in the more bustling urban centres of Zululand.

The second work, *A history of Richard's Bay 1497-1970's* by Prof. Tony Cubbin, is the third in a series published in the *Zululand Annals* of the Zululand History Society. It is a popular history aimed at telling the story of how industrial activity played a role in the growth of a seaside village which acquired its name, following the April-May 1879 visit of Admiral Frederick Richards at the helm of *H.M.S. Forester* to provide assistance to Norwegian missionaries near eShowe at the time of the Anglo Zulu War (1879).

Both works contain substantial information on a wide variety of themes.

In Van Jaarsveld's study, the accent is on growth from an indigenous perspective. Considerably detailed descriptions are given of the physical environment and how this influenced the process of human settlement from the Stone Age to the present. But there is more to the story. Mtunzini, a residence of the legendary John Dunn, was also a trading centre. Its growth in the twentieth century, before it acquired a more upmarket status as exclusive coastal village, was influenced in no small way by the growth of the local sugar industry.

From an infrastructural perspective *Mtunzini* provides valuable information to the reader on how basic facilities were provided to the white settlers who moved into the region in the twentieth century. Of particular interest is the architectural history of local buildings such as the magistrate's residence, the gaol, town hall and the educational facilities. It is however also a valuable narrative on how a local authority took the initiative in providing certain services to the community. In this respect *Mtunzini* could be of great value as a guide to town planners attempting to determine how it is possible to go about at establishing viable urban communities in the environment of what may affectionally be called the 'real' Zululand.

Van Jaarsveld's work is the result of thorough academic research which has been conducted over a period of many years. It is also a narrative which is accessible to the ordinary reader, who is merely interested in finding out a little more about the region. The promise of a second volume on the same topic augers well for the future.

Tony Cubbin's *Richards Bay* is ostensibly aimed at providing a popular yet scientific narrative of Zululand. An outstanding feature of the work is that it is written with a strong colonial *ambience*. The era of romance in which the hunters and missionaries - ranging from King, Fynn, and Isaacs to Delegorgue, Struthers and Grout - played a role, is presented in a highly readable manner.

Reviews

Of interest is the fact that Richards Bay was already earmarked as a centre for coal export in the nineteenth century. By the twentieth century this potential would be developed to the maximum. The town's phenomenal growth has subsequently been one of the major dynamos for development in the region.

Cubbin's narrative shows in a readable way how a pristine ecological environment was cultivated in order to provide for the needs of a rapidly growing industrial society. The impressive and valuable photographic illustrations in the text provide a sound visual record of what Richard's Bay used to be in the 'good old days'.

It was somewhat of a sleepy hollow until 1965 when the first plans were set in motion for the development of a railway line linking the harbour to the interior of the country. Within the space of five years the popular holiday resort was transformed into a bustling town with 3 000 residents. So, if there is a sense of nostalgia in Cubbin's narrative for the days gone by, it is a result of the fact that the memories of the past are vividly recalled by the industrial pioneering generation still alive and resident locally at the present point in time.

In conclusion: Both works have substantial merit. Van Jaarsveld's addresses conservational and environmental issues in a laid back, yet dedicated manner. It addresses the story of an environment which is dedicated to a very specific lifestyle along the South African coast in an era of political and social transition. Cubbin's work tells the story of rapid urban and industrial development in one of the lesser developed regions of South Africa. Perceived in concert these works represent a substantial contribution towards a very interesting region of the greater Kwa Zulu Natal.

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