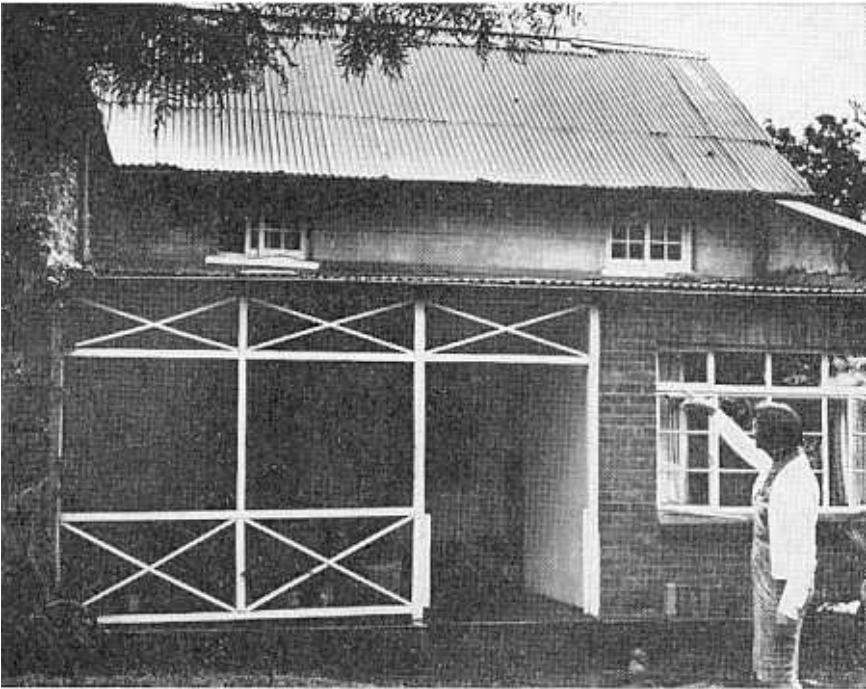


## THE WELVERDIENT HOMESTEAD OF GENERAL ANDRIES PRETORIUS

A favourite *dénouement* of fiction, and one which never fails to please, is the last-minute reprieve. In actuality an eleventh hour salvation is less common and, on that account, the more impressive. The nick-of-time saving by the *Historical Monuments Commission* of the homestead of General Andries Pretorius at Edendale, near Pietermaritzburg, is a particular case in point. The story, however, is best told from the beginning!

In the 1930s the then Archivist of the Natal Archives Depot, Martin Basson, assembled verbal evidence from persons of all race groups of the Edendale vicinity to the effect that the building then known as the "school-room" was the original homestead of the Voortrekker hero, Andries Pretorius. Lack of positive documentary proof and discrepancies in the evidence moved the *Historical Monuments Commission*, however, to reject the proposition, subsequent developments entirely supporting this rejection. For reasons unknown the matter was then laid to rest for almost three decades.



*The Pretorius Homestead at present. The room on the right is a modern addition. (Photo: The Daily News)*

In 1966 it was brought to the notice of the Natal *Historiese Genootskap* that the Department of Bantu Education, which had in the interim purchased a portion of the original farm of "Welverdiend" (and later renamed "Edendale" by the missionary, James Allison), wished to extend its vocational school. It appeared that this programme would involve the demolition of a certain house which, rumour had it, was the original residence of the Voortrekker leader. Such a development was viewed with great concern by the *Genootskap* and, through the courtesy of the appropriate authorities, a temporary reprieve was granted the building, at least until the matter had been fully investigated.

With time thus running out, a member of the *Genootskap* was deputed to seek documentary confirmation that this house was, in point of fact, the residence of the man who had done so much for Natal. The house stood on a prominent position overlooking the Umsindusi river which bisected the original farm given to Pretorius in gratitude for his work in Natal. The dwelling comprises two separate sections. The first appeared initially to be of British colonial design and structure, but the interior could possibly be of earlier construction. The other is corrugated-ironed but otherwise has definitely the appearance of Cape Dutch influence. The outer walls are from sixteen to twenty inches thick and the timberwork is of yellow-wood throughout. Access to two upstairs rooms is gained by a narrow yellow-wood staircase, the steps of which are approximately twelve inches high. In the upstairs rooms there are small Cape Dutch windows only a few inches above floor level and let into the structure of the roof. Downstairs and on the verandah are similar but larger windows. Close to the house are the ruins of two adjacent mills which are situated on the edge of a sharp escarpment of about fifty feet, which drops to a fairly wide level and then reaches the river. The older portion of the mill is constructed of uncut shale bound together with mud and the newer is made of cut sandstone and brick with cement.

This, indeed, was a likely proposition. On July 16th, 1846, Andries Pretorius wrote to the Natal Lieutenant Governor and complained of the depredations of natives on his farm, "Welverdiend" and, inter alia, stated that he had, prior to the arrival of the British troops laid the foundations of a ten-roomed double storey house and constructed a water furrow at considerable personal expense with which to feed his mill. Pretorius drew a sketch map of the position of his house for the Lieutenant Governor and this proved to be a starting point for the detailed investigations.<sup>1</sup>

The sketch indicated a relatively straight portion of river directly adjacent to the homestead and about half-way along the slightly bending portion of the Umsindusi. The configuration of the river was studied in detail and it was found that there was only one relatively straight portion and that the house under scrutiny occupied a position identical to that of the Pretorius house on its owner's map and was also close to the river. On his diagram Andries Pretorius indicated footpaths taken by the natives as they crossed his farm and these converged at three points and enclosed

the house in a large triangle, significantly avoiding the portion of the area which is occupied by the escarpment. Superimposed upon the actual position of the house being investigated these footpaths proved to be of great interest, for each apex led to a well-defined point of access for the natives. To the north one apex led directly to the Zwartkop location which was in existence at the time of the complaint of Pretorius, to the west an apex led up a narrow cleft up the hillside towards the present Henley dam and to the south-east a third apex led to a break in the hills which formed the boundary of "Welverdiend". The general placement of the house on the farm was confirmed by a sketch plan drawn by Field Cornet J. J. Scheepers in 1840 when "Welverdiend" was inspected on behalf of the Volksraad. The homestead was indicated approximately halfway on the east-west axis of the farm and in a similar position on the north-south axis, as well as being shown close to the Umsindusi river.<sup>2</sup> This tallied very well with the house under investigation by the *Historiese Genootskap*.

In the Pietermaritzburg Surveyor General's office a plan of 1846 was discovered, indicating what appeared to be a watercourse from below the Umsindusi (Edendale) waterfall and following a contour line for about three miles, finally proceeding back to the river at right angles to the escarpment. The house under investigation, significantly enough, stood almost directly on the supposed return line to the river. Of importance was the fact that on a map of 1860 this apparent water furrow was clearly marked as a "mill race". This watercourse rejoined the Umsindusi in the middle reaches of the only straight portion of the river as it wound its way across the farm of Andries Pretorius. An on-the-spot investigation revealed that the course of the mill race could still be traced throughout its whole length. Of particular interest was the fact that the old course of the water furrow led directly to the ruins of the mills previously described and immediately adjacent to the house under investigation. Parts of the old mill race are still marked on modern maps of the area.

From this geographical evidence it appeared that a *prima facie* case existed for the furtherance of the investigation to see whether actual documentary evidence would be forthcoming. Delving into the history of "Welverdiend" and its farm house in the records of the Natal Archives Depot, it appeared that the claim of Andries Pretorius to the farm had been recognised in November 1846 by Her Majesty's Commissioner Henry Cloete and that at that time it was stated that he (Pretorius) had lived there uninterruptedly since the year 1839 and had built a good dwelling house upon it and had extensive fields and gardens under cultivation.<sup>3</sup> In February 1849 Andries Pretorius was permitted to transfer ownership of "Welverdiend" to his son-in-law, J. D. O. Landsberg.<sup>4</sup> The latter sold the property in July 1851 to the Rev. Allison, an ex-Methodist missionary from Indaleni and who had brought some of his converts with him to set up a new mission near Pietermaritzburg.<sup>5</sup> The *Natal Mercury* of 30

1. C.S.O. 37, Part 1, p. 145.

2. S.G.O. III/12/2, folio no. 1. See also S.G.O. 1/3, No. 38.

July 1857 described the new Edendale mission in detail and remarked, inter alia, that "the residence of Mr. Allison is the original Dutch farm house, but contiguous to it is the chapel and schoolroom, 50 feet by 22, a strong, stone building, the result of native labour".<sup>6</sup> The occupancy was confirmed by Captain Garden who wrote in 1852 that "the house, a double storied one, and garden have been put aside as a dwelling in perpetuity for the missionary".<sup>7</sup>

In 1858, owing to accommodation difficulties, the Rev. Allison left the original mission house (the Dutch house of Andries Pretorius) and resided in Pietermaritzburg until a new mission house was erected, the "Dutch" house being given over to the mission's Industrial Schoolmaster.<sup>8</sup> In April 1861 certain portions of the Edendale property were transferred to the Wesleyan Mission Society. At this stage the property was described as follows: "The Edendale station has been transferred to the Society; the property consists of a house for the Industrial Schoolmaster, with a chapel land".<sup>9</sup> In 1863 the Society reported that "unfortunately we have only one building at Edendale for religious, ministerial and scholastic purposes and this has seriously retarded our success".<sup>10</sup> In November 1865 it was "proposed to erect a chapel at Edendale, 65 feet by 35 and 16 high of burned brick and thatch or tile roof".<sup>11</sup> This structure was completed in 1869 and still stands. In 1878 the new mission house (known as Edendale House) was enlarged and a schoolroom was built in 1880 and completed in 1882.<sup>12</sup> It was this latter building which was investigated by the *Historical Monuments Commission* in the 1930s.

From this general account it is possible to conjecture that the original "chapel and schoolroom", fifty feet by twenty-two feet and contiguous to the Dutch house, had proved too small and that, in stages, it had been replaced by the new chapel and the new schoolroom. It is apparent that this "chapel and schoolroom" was demolished in 1956 by the Department of Bantu Education and from those who supervised the demolition (who described the structure as a "barn") it was learned that it was, in fact, built of stone. Adjacent to the house under investigation the foundations of this structure still remain, and it is of importance that these measure roughly fifty feet by twenty-two feet. It was thus possible to build up a strong and almost incontrovertible connection between the original Dutch house, the house of the Industrial Schoolmaster and the house under

3. S.G.O. II/2, Claim No. 7.

4. Transfer No. 36/1849, Deeds Office, Pietermaritzburg.

5. Transfer No. 300/1855, Deeds Office, Pietermaritzburg.

6. *Natal Mercury*, 30.7.1857. The word "stone" is not included in an article which was published overseas and which was found in the Killie Campbell Library in Durban.

7. Garden papers, p. 797.

8. S.N.A. 1/1/10, unnumbered.

attached, a Minister's residence, workshop and five acres eight perches of

9. Wesleyan Missionary Papers, 1/1/1, p. 346, minutes.

10. *Ibid.*, 1/3/2, p. 158.

11. *Ibid.*, 1/1/1, p. 452.

12. *Ibid.*, 1/3/2, p. 158; *Ibid.*, 1/1/4, p. 148; *Ibid.*, p. 206; *Ibid.*, 1/1/5, p. 39; *Ibid.*, p. 90.

scrutiny, especially as it seemed highly unlikely that Andries Pretorius would attach a "barn" to his house. There is little doubt that the structure demolished in 1956 was, in fact, the "chapel and schoolroom" which the Rev. Allison had built.

All this documentary evidence served to confirm that the house being investigated was actually the original homestead on "Wolverdient", but the evidence was not yet absolutely conclusive. The missing part of the jigsaw puzzle was discovered in the Garden papers in the Natal Archives Depot. In July 1846 Andries Pretorius had written as follows: "Heef ik niet nog kort voordat U.E. den besluyd genoomen heef dat mijne plaats Wolverdient in eene kaffer Rijk sullen veranderen niet nog eyster en stenen ja selfz een groote waatervoor vormeert met groote kosten en tot den gad voor den moolen berijd welk moolen tot groot nut soo voor mij als voor den naabijhyd der Dorp soude sijn".<sup>13</sup> Six years later, after a visit to the site, Captain Garden penned the following: "A water course originally made by the Commandant having been repaired conducts water all over the station. It also turns a mill in the rear of the mission house which altho existing at the time of the purchase was out of repair and unfit for use. This the Rev. J. Allison has himself repaired and set in motion".<sup>14</sup> The geographical relationship between the mill and the house is thus firmly established, namely that the house of Andries Pretorius was close to the mill. The site of the mill is not in question, so the site of the house is established with certainty.

The authenticity of the house under investigation as that of Andries Pretorius has been accepted on this evidence by the *Historical Monuments Commission* and the imminent hammer of the demolishers has thus been spared. The significance of the discovery and proof of the house as being that of Andries Pretorius is undeniable. It is the only accepted existing house of any of the Voortrekker leaders and it is the first house of double storey structure to have been erected beyond the confines of the Cape Colony. As such the "Wolverdient" homestead of Andries Pretorius is unique and worthy of the attention of historians and antiquarians alike.

The *Historical Monuments Commission* is to be commended on its reaction to the representations of the Natal *Historiese Genootskap* and on account of its decisiveness in its acceptance of the documentary evidence which it had before it. Much remains to be done, however, if the "Wolverdient" home is to become a part of the cultural heritage of the Republic. Further research into the house is at present being conducted by the *Genootskap* and its future fate is also a matter for ultimate decision. It is certain that the house will be the centre of attraction in Pietermaritzburg and Natal for some time to come.

B. J. Leverton

13. C.S.O. 37, Part 1, p. 145.

14. Garden papers, p. 773.