

December 1976

1976

1976-12-1

Appendix IV.

The origins and the decline of the Roosboom Village and the struggle of its community for survival.

The story of the Roosboom Village goes back as far as the year 1907. In that year a black Christian Joseph Kumalo who was exempt from Native Law in Natal, secured a written lease from the farmer Boers of the farm Roosboom Lot 1, situated a few kilometers from Ladysmith on the road to Estcourt. At the same time he obtained an option to purchase the farm at £1/5s per acre. The size of the farm was 1,510 acres. Originally the option lasted only until the year 1908. Thereafter it was extended to 1913, the price per acre remaining unaltered.

Mr. Kumalo was anxious to buy the farm, but found it difficult to raise the necessary money. A surveyor by the name of Clement H. Stott of Pietermaritzburg helped him to secure the money for buying the farm. Mr. Kumalo then had to make arrangements for repaying the loan. He formed a syndicate of 48 black families. Each of these families acquired a piece of land on the farm at 25 shillings per acre. In addition Mr. Kumalo took care that two hundred one-half acre plots were set aside as township stands for people who wanted to settle in this area. These township stands were sold at R11.00 per half acre. Owners of the township stands were at the same time given the right to make use of a 200 acres commonage.

Strict rules were laid down for maintaining order in the village. Persons addicted to drinking were not allowed in the village. Witch doctors were not permitted to practice in the community. Fighting or roaming about of young people with concertinas was prohibited.

The farming activities of the original members of the syndicate were on the whole successful. The owners had good relations with neighbouring farmers. As a rule the children of the first generation received a solid school education. This had the result that many of the young people who had had a good schooling strove away from the country-side in order to find work in the towns or cities of the country. As a result of their leaving their home village other people moved in. They rented land from the original owners. This tended to give rise to overcrowding. A Board of Trustees was set up which had authority to maintain discipline in the settlement and to handle the administration of its affairs. The Methodists and the Anglican Church were allowed to erect church buildings. In addition provision was made for an interdenominational school.

Though the Land Act was passed in 1913 the Governor General of the Union of South Africa gave special permission to Mr. Kumalo to purchase the farm. The fear that the blacks might one day be deprived of the property rights was present nearly since the beginning of the settlement. In the 1920's the ICU had a number of adherents in the settlement. Their organisation argued that the whites had taken land from the blacks by force.

In the early days of the settlement several of the black farmers were able to compete economically with white farmers. Leading black people considered that the reason for land legislation for the government was motivated by the fear especially of white farmers that they would not be able to compete with black farmers

The legislation of the year 1936, outlining black and white areas in South Africa, increased the insecurity of the people at Roosboom. This had the effect of their initiative being weakened. Because of the insecurity of tenure they could on the long run not invest much money and energy on improvements. This insecurity had an effect on the spending habits of economically well to do black people. They often tended rather to spend their money on motor cars than on houses. On the whole white people showed little understanding for the insecurity of black people who had successfully adapted to the economic system of a white dominated free enterprise society. There were, however, several leading white persons who pleaded for justice to be accorded to the aspirations of these people. One of them was Senator Edgar Brookes.

The implementation of the law of 1936, was, delayed as a result of the outbreak of World War II. For a time attention in South Africa was diverted from the racial problem to other problems. It was only after World War II that the policy of separate development insisted on efforts to remove the so-called 'black spots' in white areas.

In the 1970's the election of Mr. Valentin Volker as member of Parliament for the Kliprivier electoral district is reported to have brought matters to a crisis for the people at Roosboom. Mr. Volker had been elected with only a slight majority. Meanwhile the Ladysmith Farmers' Association pressed for the removal of the people of Roosboom to a different area. The reasons they gave for their demands are said to have been the following:

Roosboom could be a place where terrorists could easily find refuge. For the sake of tourists the settlement should be removed away from the main road to a different place. It was felt that the ANC had numerous adherents in Roosboom.

Mr. Volker is reported to have given his support to the demands of the Farmers Association. This increased the support he obtained from his electoral district.

The plans for the new settlement at EZAKHENI have been carefully worked out in advance. They make a good impression, if seen on paper. However, the people of Roosboom were removed to Ezakheni long before these plans had been carried out. The Roosboom people were given the choice whether to build their own houses or whether to rent houses in the township. For houses in the township a rent was fixed of R6.10 per month. To many of the poorer people of the Roosboom village this rent seemed to be too high. The community decided that they would rather build their own wattle and daub houses.

When being removed to Ezakheni the people were deeply disappointed. They found that they had been given only very small plots of 15 x 20 metres. On each of these plots they found a so-called flatcraft hut, i.e. a corrugated iron room of 3.7 square metre. In addition they were given tents. Very soon however they had to find out that the soil at Ezakheni was completely unsuitable for wattle and daub houses. It was clay soil.

The families resettled from Roosboom had received some compensation for their property in their former settlement. Under the unsettled conditions in which they had to live for months and months they had to touch the money which they had received as compensation and to use it for their everyday needs. A considerable group of the Roosboom people was brought to Ezakheni towards the end of the year 1975 when the rainy season started. This caused great difficulty. The greatest hindrance at present is the fact that many of the people of Ezakheni have lost all hope and initiative.

The magistrate and several officials are sympathetic to the people who have been resettled in Ezakheni from Roosboom and would like to encourage them. The people, however, are suspicious, that houses, if they would erect them on their own, would later be rejected because of not complying with the specifications of the authorities. In reporting on Ezakheni the officials tend to point towards the future which has been planned for this settlement. They often overlook the fact that the people have to cope with extremely miserable conditions in the present and that they are suspicious of any promises for the future.

No exact details could be obtained about the wages of workers. A wage of R8-00 per week was mentioned as customary for an unskilled worker, of R18-00 per week for an experienced factory worker. Apart from the inadequate housing and a scanty income in wages, many families are hit by the fact that they have no opportunity for supplementing their income by gardening or farming, as was possible at Roosboom. The plots are too small. They cannot keep cattle.

It is difficult for a new feeling of community and fellowship to develop in the Ezakheni settlement. Families in the location live under very different conditions from the families who have been resettled on different terms from Roosboom. This easily gives rise to suspicions and tensions.

South African Churches and church organizations have tried to help the people of Ezakheni. Inter-Church Aid has contributed a grant of R20.000 for helping the widows to build houses. A suitable plan had been designed of a two roomed house. This two roomed house can at a later stage be extended into a fourroomed house and again at a later stage into a six roomed house. As far as can be foreseen at present it will be possible to erect 100 houses with the money received. One may hope that the beginning of the building activities will stimulate the people of Ezakheni who have lost their home in Roosboom and make them aware that something can be done to overcome their present miserable situation. One year after their removal the great majority of the families are still living in their flatcraft houses and in the tents. School facilities are extremely poor. About 500 children are crowded in corrugated iron buildings which are used as class rooms.

IDAMASA also has made a public appeal during the prayer week for Christian unity to help the people in Ezakheni. IDAMASA is aware that the dishing out of food and distribution of clothes is not an adequate form of help on the long run, though it is important during the emergency situation. They have notices that many children are not sent to school because the parents cannot afford to send them to school. IDAMASA intends to devote its attention to the educational problems of the community.

No answer can be found to the question why the people of Roosboom were removed or why they were removed before adequate arrangements for their resettlement in their new area had been made. The farm Roosboom Lot 1 which they once occupied is now lying unused as waste land. Heaps of stones scattered over a wide area indicate the places where once black families have lived together in a well ordered community to which they were deeply attached.

J & R 43
SACC
1st December, 1976.