

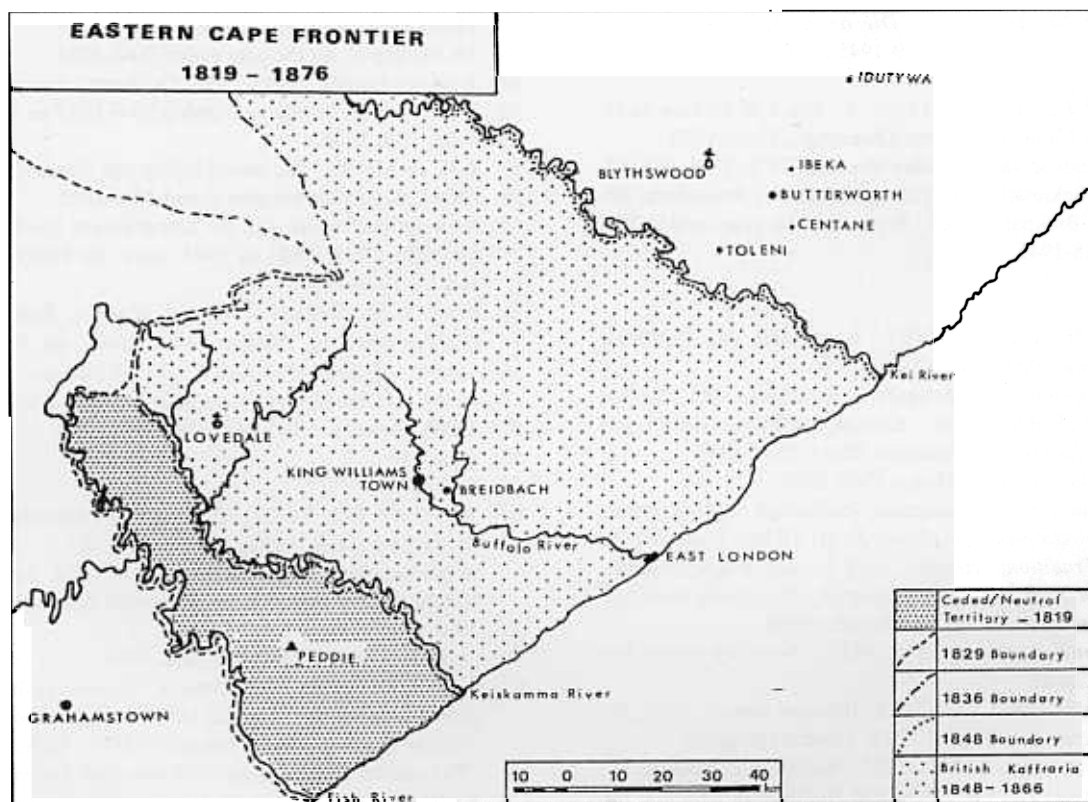
# “A vague vision of a legion of Mephistopheles”:

*The attitudes of four women to class and race on the Eastern Cape Frontier, 1843-1878*

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*This article forms part of a study which examines the influence of the frontier on the lives of four women. It is based within the tradition of frontier history but has a female perspective. The written records of Harriet Ward, Amelia Gropp, Jane Waterston and Helen Prichard, all of whom lived on the Cape Eastern frontier for short periods during the 19th century, have provided the material on which the study is based. These women were all from the middle-class and regarded themselves as ‘ladies’. They brought with them European attitudes to the female role within a rigid class structure as well as their racial prejudices. In this article the focus falls on their attitudes to class and race. It is argued that their frontier experience moderated their racial prejudice to some degree, but that there is no evidence to suggest that they would have been prepared to accept a more egalitarian society.*



## Strangers in a Strange Land: Four Ladies on the Eastern Cape Frontier: 1843-1878

*“There is our own happy land, no lions prowled in our neighbourhood, no panthers could we fancy glaring at us from the bush, no venomous reptiles awaited our feet as we stepped upon the green sod from the boat.”*

Harriet Ward, 1843.<sup>1</sup>

Harriet Ward (1808-1873) was the wife of a military officer in the 91st Regiment, which was doing duty on the Eastern Cape frontier. Between 1843 and 1845 she lived at Fort Peddie, some 20 km east of the Fish River. This was in the Ceded Territory, the frontier zone between the Fish and Keiskamma Rivers, which had been declared under the control of Britain at the end of the Sixth Frontier War in 1836. The War of the Axe broke out in

1846 and at that time Harriet Ward and her daughter were living in Grahamstown. Her work, *Five Years in Kaffirland*, was published in 1848 in two volumes. It first appeared in a series of chapters in the *United Services Magazine* between the years 1843 and 1848 and was intended for an audience of military men. Much of the work is a narrative of events, especially during the War of the Axe, but it incorporates her personal opinions and responses to the situation. She wrote with a view to influencing her readers towards her point of view so her work is very biased with often a stridently propagandist tone. As one of the first women who wrote about their experiences in Africa, let alone South Africa, and as one of the first English woman journalists, Harriet Ward has excited interest from both a literary and an historical point of view.

Amelia Gropp (1832-?) was the wife of a military officer in the British German Legion. Her husband, Alexander Gropp, accepted the offer made by the British Government to go to South Africa where he would be granted land in return for military service in the newly annexed colony of British Kaffraria. This colony, which lay between the Keiskamma and Kei Rivers, had been annexed in 1848 following the War of the Axe. The War of Mlanjeni (1850-1853) did not have a decisive result and, so unsettled were the British authorities that, in 1854, they retained 16 garrisoned forts and between 1856 and 1859 three new forts were erected.<sup>2</sup> In 1856 Sir George Grey, Governor of the Cape and High Commissioner for British Kaffraria, put forward a plan to integrate the Xhosa into a European type of society by settling groups of European settlers among the black communities. For his scheme, Grey was offered the military men of the British German Legion, who had been recruited for the Crimean War but had not seen service.<sup>3</sup> The German Military Settlers landed at East London between 9 January and 28 February, 1857. Their arrival co-incided with the final stages of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing, the event which finally broke the power of the Xhosa.<sup>4</sup>

Alexander Gropp was a Lieutenant in the 2nd Regiment which had its headquarters at Berlin, and one of two officers in charge of 66 men who were granted land at Breidbach, a newly-laid out village about 10 km from King William's Town.<sup>5</sup>

Amelia Gropp was one of 30 wives of the 39 officers of the Legion, and her child was one of 36 of the officers' children. Out of a total of 2 363 soldiers, there were only 361 wives and 195 children,<sup>6</sup> a very small number for a project which was supposed to establish stable farming communities. She lived at Breidbach from 1857 to 1860. Amelia Gropp wrote her memoirs in 1913 at the age of 81 for her grandchildren. A weakness of this work is that she did not draw on a journal or letters so her record lacks immediacy, is very selective and often inaccurate. She was not trying to influence a wider audience, but only trying to communicate her early experiences to her descendants. Her memoirs were published



*Amelia Gropp*  
By courtesy of the Kaffrarian Museum.

in the journal of the Border Historical Society, *The Coelacanth*, in 1981.

Jane Waterston (1843-1932) arrived on the Eastern Cape frontier in January, 1867 where she had been appointed as Superintendent of the proposed Girl's Institution at Lovedale Seminary. Lovedale Mission was situated near the village of Alice in British Kaffraria, which had been incorporated into the Cape Colony in 1866. The Seminary had been started by the Free Church of Scotland in 1841 with the Rev. William Govan as Principal. She spent six years on the frontier as a teacher, resigning in May 1873. She went to Britain where she managed to obtain a medical training with much difficulty being part of the first group of women who trained as doctors in Britain. After a short spell at Livingstonia Mission in Nyassaland (Malawi), she returned to Lovedale in 1880, where she ran a small medical department for three years. She then moved to Cape Town where she went into private practice as the first woman doctor in South Africa. Jane Waterston's records consists of the letters which she wrote to James Stewart, principal of Lovedale, between the years 1866 and 1905. Stewart was her mentor, supporter and friend and it was through his influence that she came to work at Lovedale. The letters were personal and largely about matters of common interest. They were edited by Lucy Bean and Elizabeth van Heyningen and published in 1983. As the first woman doctor in South Africa and as one of the first group of women trained in medicine



*Dr. Jane Waterston c 1894.*

in England, Jane Waterston's life has evoked much interest.

Helen Prichard, (dates unknown) came to the Transkei with her husband, an engineer, in 1877. By the time that she arrived, the Eastern Cape frontier zone had moved further east into the Transkei. Even though the Kei River was the boundary between the Cape Colony and Xhosaland, colonial magistrates had been sent east of the Kei to administer the area as early as 1864. Long-standing friction between the Gcaleka and the Mfengu broke out and a clash occurred in August 1877 (heralding the onset of the Ninth Frontier War), the same month that Helen Prichard arrived in Idutywa.

As Idutywa was on the main road between Butterworth and Umtata, she met many of the leading figures of the time, including Major Elliot, the Resident Magistrate and she entertained Gangelizwe, Chief of the Thembu, in her home. After the Gcaleka attack on Ibeka, Idutywa was not judged to be safe and she and her two children took refuge at Blythwood Seminary, together with other refugees from the area. Towards the end of the hostilities Helen Prichard decided to leave Blythwood and join her husband camping at Toleni as there was no immediate danger of an attack. In September 1879, after the peace, she and her husband left the Transkei to return to England. She wrote a book, *Friends and Foes in the Transkei*, which was published in 1880. In it she was at pains to show herself as a good wife and loyal British subject.

In going to the frontier, all four women were aware that they were participating in unusual and significant events. Harriet Ward and Helen Prichard went reluctantly but were determined to be dutiful wives. Both had travelled with their husbands before, Harriet Ward to St. Helena and Helen Prichard to Jamaica, but this was a 'frontier' experience and was different. They anticipated hardship and facing a wilderness far from civilisation. Harriet Ward wrote: "I had shaken off my unavailing regrets in a great degree, and was prepared to meet my destiny with a fortitude worthy of a soldier's wife."<sup>7</sup>

Prior to her departure, Helen Prichard confessed to anxiety over the rough frontier life which she anticipated facing. As she 'bid adieu to civilisation and commence our march towards the wilderness, I felt as the explorer feels ... braced for any hardship.'<sup>8</sup>

They both saw parallels between their own and the frontier experiences in America. Harriet Ward said that Peddie reminded her of Cooper's descriptions of groups of buildings erected by settlers in the prairies of America,<sup>9</sup> a reference to the novels of James Fenimore Cooper, such as *The Last of the Mohicans* (1823), and Helen Prichard used the terms 'pale-faces' and 'prairie'.<sup>10</sup>

Amelia Gropp faced her life on the frontier with wholly unrealistic expectations about both the situation and the support which they would receive from the authorities. She believed that somehow a fortune would be made: "The government had promised to keep us for seven years in pay, but nobody of us thought to stay there after that time. We all thought by that time, we would be quite rich, and would return triumphantly to our fatherland."<sup>11</sup>

The government had in fact, promised to keep them on half pay, and that for three years only. Sir George Gray had kept them on full pay, against considerable opposition, until March, 1858.<sup>12</sup>

Harriet Ward and Helen Prichard lived on the frontier during times of war and for both there were times when they felt very threatened. Amelia Gropp was part of a settlement scheme, but while she did not live with any threat of violence, she was involved in an economic struggle for survival. Jane Waterston lived in a relatively secure situation as a part of the missionary community. None anticipated living on the frontier all their lives, but they were more than passing travellers as they lived there long enough to participate meaningfully in the experience.

None of the four women saw the frontier as an extension of their home lives. It was a strange and often frightening experience and the conditions which they experienced played a part in divorcing them from their familiar home environments and set the scene for a relaxation of the traditional social codes.

### **The Importance of Class**

*"it was simply impossible to maintain the proper balance*

*of relative position that should exist between mistress and maid".<sup>13</sup>*

**Helen Prichard, 1877**

Class consciousness was a part of the 'cultural baggage' which these women brought to the frontier. Their social position, as they perceived it, defined their relationships with the people they met as well as the code of behaviour to which they were expected to adhere.

The definitions of class have been debated at length by historians, but a common perception is that it was the possession of wealth, which gave people the means to employ servants, which demarcated the respective positions between the middle and working classes.<sup>14</sup>

The class situation in the Cape in the mid-nineteenth century reflected that of Europe and the values of the middle class especially were adopted.<sup>15</sup> The difference was that life in the Cape was less formal, society was more egalitarian and there was more upward social mobility than in Europe.<sup>16</sup> With the unsettled conditions on the frontier and with a predominantly male population, class distinctions were less marked.<sup>17</sup>

Bradlow accepts a definition of the Cape Elite during the 1850's as consisting of members of a top social stratum<sup>18</sup> and includes military and professional men in this group with the influence of the military most important during times of frontier unrest. The possession of wealth was very important for determining status and influence.<sup>19</sup>

In a detailed analysis of the social structure of the frontier town of Grahamstown from 1832-1853, Scott worked out a classification for the period. She identified five classes, with army officers, merchants and gentlemen in the upper class, and with professionals included in the upper middle class.<sup>20</sup>

Harriet Ward was the daughter of a distinguished colonel. Of her three brothers, one became major-general,<sup>21</sup> one a captain<sup>22</sup> and the third, a lieutenant<sup>23</sup> and she married a military officer.

Army officers were by purchase at the time which argues that she was in comfortable financial circumstances. Her servants were drawn from the lower ranks of the army and she took it for granted that she should not do menial work.<sup>24</sup> According to Scott's and Bradlow's classifications, Harriet Ward would have become a part of the upper class establishment when she arrived on the frontier.

The occupation of Amelia Groppe's father is not known, but her uncle was a wealthy physician in Hannover and there was a degree of wealth in her own family as she inherited money on the deaths of her parents.<sup>25</sup> Amelia Groppe describes how, in her youth, she was only allowed to associate with selected companions and was very strictly chaperoned.<sup>26</sup> She married an officer of an elite Hannoverian cavalry regiment, but his transfer to the

British-German Legion lowered his status. She always had servants even during her time on the frontier when she lived in straitened financial circumstances.

Once on the frontier, her class position would not have been as clearly defined as in Europe. The German Military settlers were not readily accepted into frontier society with language difference and lack of wealth constituting a real barrier. On her arrival on the frontier, Amelia Groppe's class position was reduced to that of the lower middle class, but, as the wife of an officer, she would have had upper class status within the German military community.

Jane Waterston was the daughter of a wealthy bank manager, of a family which employed servants<sup>27</sup> and so she was by birth a member of the middle class. The occupation of Helen Prichard's father is not known, but here references indicate that he was of the wealthy middle class. She married a civil engineer, a professional man.<sup>28</sup> Helen Prichard always employed servants; a white nurse in Cape Town, another who accompanied her to the Transkei<sup>30</sup> and later she engaged black maid-servants.<sup>31</sup> According to Scott's model, a civil engineer was of the upper middle class, which places Helen Prichard into that class.<sup>32</sup>

In their own perceptions of their class status on the frontier these women all regarded themselves as 'ladies' and distinguished themselves from the 'women' of the lower classes. While on board the Abercrombie Robinson, during a tremendous storm in which the ship was wrecked in Table Bay, Harriet Ward saw her role as one of setting an example of courage for "the poor uneducated women".<sup>33</sup> Once on the frontier, she indicated that she had a place in society with appearances to maintain, unlike a "mere clerk". A white couple who were farming near Grahamstown addressed her as "Ma'am", a term used by people of a lower class when addressing a person of the upper class. Harriet Ward was part of the rigid authoritarian hierarchy of the military establishment where everyone knew his place. She believed that restraints "were necessary for the preservation of social order in all civilised communities".<sup>34</sup> In her opinion, the social order on the frontier had been upset by the abolition of slavery and the lower orders, which included the freed slaves, should be forced into service by establishing a Vagrancy Act.<sup>35</sup> She did not believe that they had any rights and was infuriated by instances of employers being summoned by a magistrate to answer to complaints laid against them by their ex-slaves, who were "worthless and misguided apprentices".<sup>36</sup> She felt that more working class people were needed in the colonies, 'great inconvenience arises from the want of servants' and that the Emigration Society should send out "this class of people".<sup>37</sup> She also felt that the black people could be drawn into the working class provided that "proper laws were framed for preserving order and discipline between master and man" and complained that in mission education, no effort was being made to fit the women for service.<sup>38</sup> Harriet Ward did not accept the social code which bound

her in its entirety. In her writing she complained of her subordinate feminine position and her experiences on the frontier enabled her to break away from many restrictive mores. However there is no evidence that this extended in any way to her attitudes to class. In fact it was her vision of a European model of a class-structured society which she sought to impose on the frontier.

Amelia Gropp made clear social distinctions between herself and the wives of the ordinary soldiers. When in Breidbach, she referred contemptuously to the soldiers' wives who were unable to help her during childbirth, "So I had to do with those women of the village, who went in and out of our house, at their sweet will".<sup>39</sup>

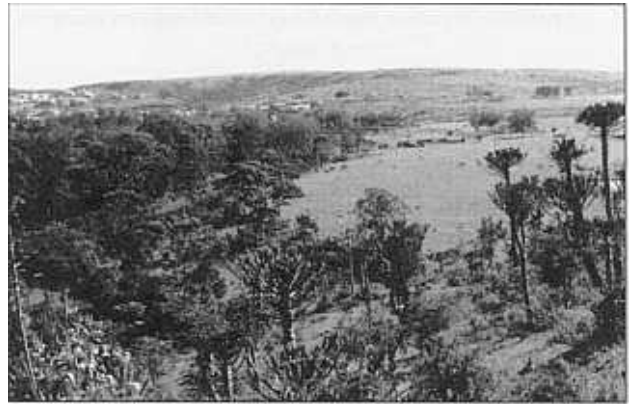
When Amelia Gropp's husband departed for America to fight in the Civil War, she lived with the Hitzeroth family of Uitenhage "my constant and faithful friends".<sup>40</sup> Johann Hitzeroth, of German extraction, was an affluent man who owned many properties, including the salt pans.<sup>41</sup> His wealth placed him in the upper middle class. It is clear that the family regarded Amelia Gropp as a woman of their own class, "the girls hanging with great love on mee [sic], and the old ones traiting [sic] one like a daughter".<sup>42</sup>

Unlike Harriet Ward, Amelia Gropp was not analytical about the society in which she found herself. She indicates that she accepted society in which upper middle class men were not expected to do any physical labour or engage in trade as she constantly excused her husband's inability to make an adequate living. She said that as a military man, he could not be expected to know how to work at anything else.<sup>43</sup> She herself was prepared to break the class barrier and seek paid employment while on the frontier, but still took it for granted that she should always have servants, even when times were extremely hard. However, on their return to Germany, she did not work and she and her family were supported by her brother. Of the four women, Amelia Gropp was the least concerned with class, but her record is slighter than the others and written at a greater distance from the actual events.

Jane Waterston regarded herself as a 'lady'. There is an awareness of class differentiation and a derogatory attitude towards the lower classes contained in a comment she made when she did not approve of new appointments at Lovedale: "such teachers of sewing as I have seen in the Normal School were far from ladies."<sup>44</sup>

Her idea of class was bound up with her religious prejudiced and she described a Baptist minister as being "terribly commonplace and common". When she arrived in Nyassaland [Malawi] she complained that "A little more decency and comfort might have been prepared for a lady coming all alone ... The artesans are all very pleasant."<sup>45</sup>

The class situation was not one which Jane Waterston addressed in her letters, other than how aspects of the acceptable mode of behaviour for a 'lady' were unacceptable to herself.<sup>46</sup>



*The Gropp farm at Breidbach. The present village of Breidbach is in the background.*

Photograph by Carl Vernon, 1991

Helen Prichard was extremely class conscious and certainly regarded herself as a lady, to the extent of being very snobbish. She prided herself on being what she called a "Member of Society"<sup>47</sup> Her class and race prejudices were inter-related and were not confined to the black/white relationship. This can be seen in her use of the differential terminology of 'dame' and 'lady' which indicates her perception of a lower class status being given to non-Englishwomen, "some Africander dame, very much overdressed ... after which one's eyes would be refreshed by the delightful vision of an English lady (probably the wife of some officer), in simple, becoming morning attire."<sup>48</sup>

When taking refuge in Blythswood during the war, she dreaded the association of the carpenter's children with her own. With the advent of another group of refugees, she determined to leave as she said "the whole tone of the place is changed, and Blythwood [sic] is no longer a fit place for a lady".<sup>49</sup>

The conditions at Blythswood were such that there was a breakdown of the class hierarchy. Helen Prichard complained that "The publicity of the life, ... and the association with persons of every class and type were all equally trying".<sup>50</sup>

Her relationship with her white maid, whom she called Johanna Gog, showed clearly that she was not prepared to make any concessions to a change in the mistress and maid relationship, even during the unusual conditions prevailing at Blythswood. When Helen Prichard first employed Johanna in Cape Town, she made it clear that she regarded her as being from the lower class, "the idea of anything so rough even touching my little Granville so inexpressibly ludicrous ... but rough people suited rough places and this hard-looking personage might make an invaluable cleaner or cook".<sup>51</sup>

On the trip to the Transkei, Johanna made herself indispensable and she became "a good creature, behaving nobly ... my brave and faithful white servant".<sup>52</sup> Once in Idutywa, Johanna met a wealthy trader and became engaged to him, a situation which did not immediately affect the

mistress/maid status quo. It was at Blythwood when the social order broke down, that the relationship failed. Helen Prichard said that "Very painful circumstances has made the dismissal of Mrs. Gog an imperative necessity".<sup>53</sup>

She attributed this situation to Johanna's engagement which made "anything like obedience distasteful".<sup>54</sup> However, the situation of a maid becoming engaged and leaving service was not an unusual one, this being the reason that her maid in Cape Town, had not accompanied her to the frontier. It is clear that the possibility of marriage gave Johanna Gog the means of escaping the drudgery of service, but this did not mean that she should suddenly become resentful of her status. The most likely reason was to be found in Helen Prichard's statement that there had been a breakdown of the social hierarchy, "Few ladies will wonder that, after the exciting nature of the scenes through which we had passed, and the close quarters in which we now found ourselves, it was simply impossible to maintain the proper balance of relative position that should exist between mistress and maid."<sup>55</sup>

In an effort to reimpose her vision of a rigid class structure on the frontier, Helen Prichard concluded her references to Johanna by saying that she wished her every happiness and would remember only her "faithful service in times of trouble".<sup>56</sup>

Helen Prichard's comments show no evidence that she inclined towards a more egalitarian social structure during her time on the frontier nor that she was prepared to accept any social mobility.

Bradlow and Scott maintain that there was a trend towards greater social mobility and that class distinctions were less rigid on the frontier. However, there is no evidence that these middle class women were prepared to accept this trend. Harriet Ward and Helen Prichard in particular, expressed strong feelings that the European class structure should be retained and strongly denounced any occurrences which disturbed what they understood to be the proper balance between mistress and maid.

### Perceptions of Race

*"I had conjured up a vague vision of a legion of Mephistopheles!! ... which used to terrify and yet fascinate me as a child".<sup>57</sup>*

**Helen Prichard, 1877**

An essential part of the experiences of these four women on the frontier was their response to the indigenous people whom they encountered. Bound up with their class ideologies were their racial prejudices which they brought with them as a part of their cultural baggage. The difference was that while they had participated in a class-structured society, contact with people of a different colour and race was a new experience altogether. It is argued that, within the framework of their conviction of their own racial superiority, they were more inclined to modify their racial than their class attitudes.

Harriet Ward's view of British cultural superiority coloured all her dealings with the indigenous people she encountered. She saw Britain as being the fueling power of the world having risen from her "original state of ignorance, insignificance and barbarism."<sup>58</sup> She believed that civilisation would follow British rule<sup>59</sup> and by following D'Urban's system, "the Kafir would be on the high road to civilisation."<sup>60</sup> Once on the frontier, Harriet Ward found that some of the black people were allies and should be supported, and some were enemies and should be denigrated. She was therefore at pains to describe the Mfengu, who were the allies, in glowing terms. They were, she said "a fine muscular race ... a cheerful race". By contrast, the Xhosa, who were the enemy, were "the heathen invader ... the dark minded savage" and "barbarous thieves ... 'a people thirsting for blood', "as well as having a nature of "cold blooded wickedness".<sup>61</sup>

In an effort to persuade her English readers of the ferocity of the Xhosa foe and thus justify the failure of the British troops to convincingly defeat them, she said that "he is like the wild best after the taste of blood and loses all the best attributes of humanity ... more resembling demons than men".<sup>62</sup>

In writing about the Xhosas she was endeavouring to justify the claims of the whites to the disputed territory, to excuse the failure of British fighting tactics and to incite a hatred of 'the enemy'. Her response to the Xhosa was coloured by this attitude and her attempt to persuade readers to her point of view.

In spite of the propagandist nature of her writing, Harriet Ward did reluctantly come to concede some attributes of the Xhosa which she felt were worthy of respect. The African, she said, had ingenuity and "though a savage, is a keen lawyer, and a narrow observer of human nature". They were natural logicians and would not do anything without good reasons.<sup>63</sup> She noted that they had their own social and political ideas of honourable principle, appreciated that they had a "steadiness to their own cause" and often commented on their pride and dignity.<sup>64</sup> She did have some insight into the fact that their response to European assumptions of superiority were not well received, "Our condescension in speaking kindly to them, ... they do not appreciate."<sup>65</sup>

She also had some perception that perhaps her idea of civilisation need not be a necessary goal for all. When she saw groups of Mfengu and Xhosa, happy and busy with their own concerns and able to obtain their housing, food, utensils and clothing from the earth, she commented that she could appreciate that they might not want or need to change. She continually makes blanket statements about the idleness of all the black people.<sup>66</sup> Although she sometimes broke with the group concept and looked at individuals, it was only to evaluate their 'progress' in terms of adapting to her idea of civilisation. She commented that those who had learned to read were diligent and had a thirst for knowledge.<sup>60</sup> Chief Khama, who had been converted to Christianity and was an ally,



was dealt with kindly as she said that his habits and demeanour were those of a gentleman.<sup>68</sup>

While Harriet Ward's contacts with black people were not confined to trade or servitude, they were affected by the fact that the Xhosa, in particular, were regarded in the light of an enemy.

The British German Legion was settled in British Kaffraria as a military force to be called out if necessary against the Xhosa. With this initial premise, and, as Amelia Gropp travelled to the frontier as part of a group, it is likely that she shared some of the violent anti-black sentiments of the members of that group. Gustav Stainbart, one of the legionaries, referred to the Xhosa as "cannibals"<sup>69</sup> and said that he did not know whether to pity or detest this strange race.<sup>70</sup>

Amelia Gropp's interactions with the blacks were limited to trade and service. Unlike Harriet Ward, whose husband had been involved in the fighting, it is clear that she did not view the Africans as enemies but that she did not regard them with much degree of friendship.

The nearest black settlement she said was an "evil neighbourhood".<sup>71</sup> This must have been a Xhosa settlement headed by the Christian chief, Dyani Tshatshu, of an Ndlambe clan.<sup>72</sup> He had been an unbeliever during the Cattle Killing, had co-operated with the local colonial officials and therefore would have had cattle to trade. He was probably the chief to whom she refers as coming to visit them to assure them of his goodwill and to offer to sell them cattle and fowls.<sup>73</sup> This was not a threatening approach and Amelia Gropp does not indicate that she found it so. She complained that the cattle which they purchased from him "found in a strange way their old home again",<sup>74</sup> but there is neither aggression nor fear to be found in her statements, which might have been expected from someone who, on arrival on the frontier, had been exposed to the idea that the black people were enemies.

Jane Waterston's view, when she arrived on the frontier, was coloured by her religious convictions and her sense of the superiority of European civilisation.

"an African mission should really be ... a *civilising*, and an *energising*, as well as a Christianising, Agent."<sup>75</sup>

Anything that was not Christian was roundly condemned

"The Religion of Christ is the only lever by which the besotted, brutal African can be raised and made a civilised, energetic man". The "heathen dances", the "savage heathen", "God's seed may not be choked by the flesh and the devil" and "the muck and mire of heathenism"<sup>76</sup> were the derogatory terms which she used.

She shared with James Stewart the passion for hard work and, in a similar manner to Harriet Ward, was condemnatory about "the accursed spirit of proud laziness which regard work as the lot of women and slaves."<sup>77</sup> Like most of the missionaries of the nineteenth century, she had little under-



*Helen Prichard's house in Idutywa*

Photo: H. Prichard:

*Friends and Foes in the Transkei*, p. 11

standing or tolerance of traditional ways and customs and she sought "to alter the whole tone of native life".<sup>78</sup> They lived in "pigsty houses" with bad habits, and "that accursed Intonjane going on".<sup>79</sup> However, once the Africans were converted to Christianity, living in clean square houses and doing steady manual labour, then she was prepared to accept them on an equal footing and there was no hint of racism in her attitude. For example, when she wrote of black people who had been converted to Christianity, such as Marth Kwatsha, who was educated in Glasgow in 1875-1876, there was no hint of patronage or racial distinction made in her letter. "Martha is much liked and has, I think, grown richer in thought in this country without losing her simple natural manner."

She regarded Lovedale people, white and black, as her friends, "Kindest regards to all my friends, white and black, not forgetting Knox, Isabella, Lambert and Antyi." Later in life she modified her initial harsh judgmental attitude.

When in Cape Town, she said that she was getting more black patients, "The feel, I think, that I treat them like human beings and not niggers as the term is here."<sup>80</sup>

When Helen Prichard arrived on the frontier she also brought her racial preconceptions with her. She said that she had "conjured up a vague vision of a legion of Mephistopheles!!... which used to terrify and yet fascinate me as a child".<sup>81</sup> However, when faced with the physical presence of the black people themselves, she was prepared to abandon some of her prejudices. When she first saw them she said that she found it difficult to believe that they were "of the same nature as ourselves endowed with immortality and capable of infinite development into good."<sup>82</sup> She then reflected that "we are all only clay and after all that I was simply looking at red clay instead of white."<sup>83</sup> She also found that they were not as repulsive looking as she had expected and in fact were rather agreeable.<sup>84</sup> She also discovered to her surprise, that she need have no fear of theft and that their good faith could be relied upon. Her response to

Gangelizwe, Paramount Chief of the Thembu, also indicated her willingness to abandon prejudice. She had heard dreadful stories about him which she found difficult to believe and far from being repulsive, she found him "handsome looking with a sweet gentle expression."<sup>85</sup>

She said that she did her best to treat him with the respect due to his rank and the fact that at that time, he was their ally.<sup>86</sup>

The race attitudes of these four women were bound up with class and religious prejudices. They all began with a conviction of European cultural superiority which they termed 'civilising' and which they set against the 'barbarian' and heathen. However once they had come into contact with the indigenous people they were prepared to modify their attitudes to some degree.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Harriet Ward, *Five Years in Kaffirland*, Vol. 1, (London, Henry Colburn, 1848), pp. 74-75.
2. Denver A. Webb, *The Fortifications of British Kaffraria*, (Grahamstown, Annals of the Cape Museums, 1989), pp. 229-241.
3. T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, (Johannesburg, Macmillan, 1977), p.101.
4. J.B. Peires, *The dead will arise*, (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1989), pp. 157-158.
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6. *Ibid.*, p.265.
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