

# Origins of Durban

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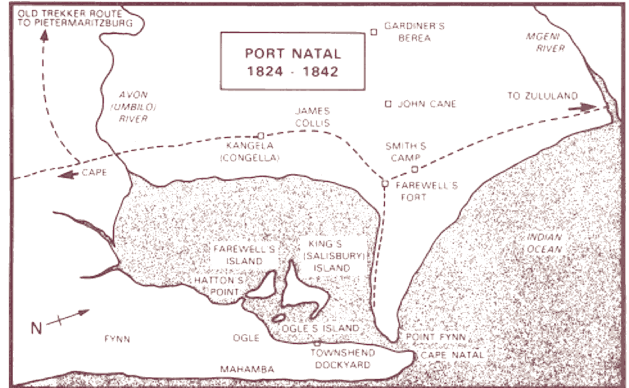
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THE fact that it had been decided to celebrate Durban's 150th anniversary in 1985, makes it interesting to re-examine the nascent years of that urban complex in order to ascertain the exact date of its establishment and who its founders were.

## FYNN'S ORIGINAL SETTLEMENT MAY 1824

Henry Francis Fynn<sup>1</sup> was the leader of the vanguard of Lieutenant Francis George Farewell's<sup>2</sup> trading and settling expedition to Port Natal. Fynn was the supercargo of a small sloop, *Julia*, which arrived at the bay of Port Natal from Cape Town during May 1824.<sup>3</sup> Fynn's arrival ahead of Farewell with the stores was primarily to establish what was to become the first permanent European settlement at Port Natal. With Lieutenant James Saunders King, Farewell had realized as a result of an expedition to the south-eastern shores of Africa the previous year that Port Natal was the only viable harbour for small vessels between Algoa Bay and Delagoa Bay.<sup>4</sup>

With Fynn came three 'mechanics': the Englishman Henry Ogle, the Prussian Carl August Zinke and an unknown Frenchman. He was also accompanied by a couple of indispensable servants, the Coloureds Jantyi (Jantjie?) and Michael, and Frederick, a Black interpreter from the Eastern Cape Frontier.<sup>5</sup>



One of Fynn's priorities was to meet the local inhabitants. With Frederick's assistance they managed to establish contact with the reluctant Mahamba (alias Matubane, alias Fica), regent of the amaTulini (later amaTuli) tribe of approximately 60 members who were inhabiting the fastness of isiBubungu (nowadays known as the Bluff).<sup>8</sup> These people were the destitute vassals of Shaka, King of the Zulu, eking out a precarious living on the Bluff. During this revolutionary time Shaka exercised active hegemony over the whole of Natal. The amaTuli then were the first inhabitants living in the area now known as Durban.

## ENTER FAREWELL : JULY 1824

In July 1824 Farewell and his other principals in the trading and settling venture, Johan Lodewyk Petersen (Farewell's father-in-law) and Josias Philippus Hoffman (the later State president of the Orange Free State) and their main party arrived at Port Natal in the *Antelope*. They soon set about erecting effective housing, storerooms and palisades. The settlement took on a domestic appearance, as illustrated in Hoffman's sketch<sup>9</sup> which one assumes was a relatively accurate reflection. This quaint drawing made of Farewell's settlement shows a kraal for cows, a hut for four Coloureds, a dwelling for Farewell and Petersen, a kraal for sheep, a



Left: H.F. Fynn (1803-1861).



Right: F.G. Farewell (1793-1829).

PHOTOGRAPH: NATAL ARCHIVES DEPOT, PIETERMARITZBURG

PHOTOGRAPH: LOCAL HISTORY MUSEUM, DURBAN

After his landing, Fynn selected the open Kangela (present Congella)<sup>6</sup> site on the western side of the bay for his first camp on Natal soil. It was to be an eventful night with little rest; first a tropical midnight storm drenched them after which marauding wolves (?) gave the newcomers to Port Natal an anxious time. This inhospitable experience determined Fynn to look for a more suitable site on which to establish the settlement. He decided on a spot approximately 180 metres in front of the present St Paul's Anglican Church near to which the old market and station were built.<sup>7</sup> A strong fence was soon erected and the 'mechanics', assisted by some of the crew of the *Julia*, began building the first European habitation at Port Natal. Henry Fynn marked out the 3,65m<sup>2</sup> wattle and daub residence. The obvious advantage of this site was the proximity of the anchorage in the bay, the openness and flatness of the Mngeni plain which would be suitable for defence. From the beginning mercantile trading was to be the mainspring of Durban's development. The availability of fresh water was also an important factor.

<sup>1</sup> See A.E. CUBBIN, *Origins of the British settlement at Port Natal, May 1824 - July 1842* (Ph.D., UOFS, 1983), p.2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>5</sup> J. STUART and D.M. MALCOLM (eds.), *The diary of Henry Francis Fynn* (Pietermaritzburg, 1969), pp.58-68.

<sup>6</sup> A.T. BRYANT, *Olden times in Zululand and Natal* (London, 1929), p.504. So named after Shaka's Kangela regiment who guarded the King's cattle which grazed in that area.

<sup>7</sup> STUART and MALCOLM, *Diary Fynn*, pp.60-61; also Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban, KCM23404, File 9, Item 16 : James Stuart's interview with John Ogle.

<sup>8</sup> BRYANT, *Olden times*, pp.500-507. It is interesting to note that in Daniel Toohey's evidence before the Native Commission of 1852 he stated that Mnini, chief of the amaTuli tribe, had thirteen kraals on the Bluff. See CUBBIN, *Origins British settlement*, p.7.

house for Hoffman and his son, a guard tent, a hut for Carl Zinke, a pantry, a kitchen and, finally, a hut for Jon and Wili his dog! This was the nucleus of the city of Durban.

Farewell lost no time getting his settlement at Port Natal legalized. On 8 August 1824 he got Shaka and his chiefs to sign a land cession purporting to give "Farewell and Company" the coast of Natal 16 km south of the bay to 40 km above Gungelote (presumably the Umdhloti River).<sup>10</sup> Of course, in Shaka's view this cession probably amounted to no more than the right to occupy the land, as the alienation of tribal land was foreign to Zulu society.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, in accepting his chieftainship at the hands of Shaka, Farewell recognized the legitimacy of Zulu rule and the military dominance of Zulu power. Being beyond effective British authority, Farewell was prepared to accept a role of subservience to Zulu political authority in return for security and trading privileges.<sup>12</sup>

As a result of a storm the brig *Mary* became wrecked on the outer northern beach at Port Natal on 1 October 1825. James Saunders King, Nathaniel Isaacs and John Ross came ashore with great difficulty. They were ushered towards Farewell's settlement where Rachel, a Coloured woman, presided over Farewell's servants. Farewell was absent on a visit to Shaka.<sup>13</sup> Isaacs describes the scene:

The place selected by Mr. Farewell for his residence had a singular appearance, from the peculiar construction of the several edifices. His house was not unlike an ordinary barn made of wattle, and plastered with clay, without windows, and with only one door composed of reeds. It had a thatched roof, but otherwise was not remarkable either for the elegance of its structure, or the capacity of its interior. The house of cane was contiguous to that of Mr. Farewell, and about twenty yards from it, while that of Ogle ... had the appearance of the roof of a house placed designedly (sic) on the ground, the gable end of which being left open served as a door. Opposite Mr. Farewell's house was a native's hut, in the shape of a beehive, about twenty one feet in circumference, and six feet high, built of small sticks and supported by a pole in the centre. It was thatched with grass, and had an aperture about eighteen inches square, through which the owner crept into his mansion, when he was disposed to enjoy the sweets of repose.<sup>14</sup>

It can be presumed that this settlement was the development of that originally erected by Fynn, Farewell and Hoffman in 1824. Farewell would then had been living in the same house that he built in 1824. In the burgeoning settlement, however, things never remained static for long. Isaacs pointed out that Farewell had begun building what the latter called Fort Farewell :

This is situated on the flat, nearer, [possibly to the Bay] by about quarter of a mile, than his temporary habitation. It will cover a surface of about two hundred square yards, and is to be constructed in the form of a triangle. A ditch by which it will be encompassed was in progress; and palisades were being planted. To the house, which is to consist of one floor, and its dimensions to be about sixty feet by twenty, will be attached a store. A mud fort had been commenced, at each angle designed to mount three 12-pound carronades, which were lying there dismantled, with carpenter's tools, and other things, all indicating that something had been begun, but nothing completed. Near the ditch was a cattle-pound, partly finished, and at a distance of two hundred yards, a native kraal in a similar state, enclosing an elevated space of ground of about as many yards in circumference. The outer fence of this kraal was constructed of the mimosa tree; the inner of wattle, being designed for the security of the cattle. The streets were built between the two fences; and opposite the entrance a place was partitioned off for calves, a measure of precaution against wild animals which abound in this vicinity.<sup>15</sup>

These graphic descriptions of the development of Fare-

well's residences are quoted at length because these buildings were a significant development of the settlement at Port Natal. It was here that in later years the commercial hub of Durban was to develop. Farewell clearly showed enterprising qualities that were so necessary in this pioneer period. It is therefore appropriate that the following memorial appears in Farewell Square to commemorate the city's centenary in 1924:

In this vicinity Lieutenant F G Farewell and other original settlers resided in 1824.

The stranded traders decided to use the wreck of the *Mary* to build a ship in which they hoped to return to the Cape. Port Natal's first shipyard was situated on the Bluff. It was called Townshend after King's patron, Lord James Townshend of the Admiralty.<sup>16</sup> The site was well sheltered and possessed an abundance of timber suitable for shipbuilding.

## ISAACS TRIES TO ESTABLISH A TOWN

The credit for the first attempt to establish a so-called town in the Port Natal area belongs to the enterprising Jew, Nathaniel Isaacs, and Henry Fynn.

In October 1830 Isaacs wrote that they had long designed to erect a town that would enclose all their natives for their comfort, their general defence against predatory tribes and for political purposes. Isaacs and Fynn therefore sought out a suitable site. The one they found was elevated and had abundant fertile soil. It was particularly suitable for defence and had sufficient water; in fact Isaacs believed it could be made impregnable against native tribes. They intended making an early beginning on the development of the site.<sup>17</sup>

Regrettably this attempt was abortive and no evidence exists that anything came of this contemplation. There is also no real indication as to its location. One should, however, be hesitant when dealing with Isaacs' record because he was writing to impress prospective colonists.<sup>18</sup> There is evidence that Isaacs was an ambitious businessman but he was to find the whims of Dingane, Shaka's successor, more than he could cope with.

## GARDINER NAMES DURBAN

Captain Allen Francis Gardiner of the Royal Navy was a dignified, dedicated, far-sighted and devout Christian who was always in a hurry from the day he landed at Port Natal on 29 January 1835. Welcomed initially both by the traders and by Dingane, Gardiner was invited by the traders to found a church at Port Natal at a spot he called Berea. Shortly

<sup>9</sup> This drawing is kept in the Local History Museum, Durban.

<sup>10</sup> Cape Archives Depot, Cape Town (CA), Colonial Office (CO)211 : F.G. Farewell — Lord Charles Somerset, 6.9.1824, pp.650-659.

<sup>11</sup> A.E. CUBBIN, *A study in objectivity : the death of Piet Retief* (M.A., UOFS, 1980), pp.75-77 and 91-94.

<sup>12</sup> C.C. BALLARD, *The transfrontierman : the career of John Dunn* (Ph.D., UN, 1980), pp.50-51.

<sup>13</sup> L. HERRMAN (ed.), *Travels and adventures in Eastern Africa by Nathaniel Isaacs, I* (Van Riebeeck Society 16, Cape Town, 1936), pp.1, 3 and 18-19.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.21-22.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.25-26.

<sup>16</sup> CA, Government House (GH)1/39 : J.S. King — Earl of Bathurst, 10.7.1824, pp.39-59.

<sup>17</sup> HERMANN, *Travels and adventures, II* (Van Riebeeck Society 17, Cape Town, 1937), p.90.

<sup>18</sup> Natal Archives Depot, Pietermaritzburg (NA), Fynn Papers : Notes and memorials from the Eastern Frontier, 1834-1848. (Apparently written between 1832 and 1834).



Captain A.F. Gardiner (1794-1851).

PHOTOGRAPH: LOCAL HISTORY MUSEUM, DURBAN

before he left for the Cape to press for a British presence at Port Natal he initiated a happy and memorable event in the history of Port Natal.<sup>19</sup> On the afternoon of 23 June 1835 a meeting was held to decide on the selection of a site for a town. The decision was spontaneous and unanimous and the enthusiastic settlers set off, some on an open wagon while others walked alongside. There was an unusually large number of hunters who had returned to the home comforts of Port Natal and wished to create a more comfortable and settled life. The atmosphere was cordial and decisions were made democratically and effectively. According to Gardiner it was in this "impromptu manner that the town of D'Urban was named — its situation fixed — (and) the township and church lands appropriated".<sup>20</sup>

Port Natal, June 1835.

PHOTOGRAPH: From A.F. GARDINER, *Narrative of a journey to the Zoolu country in South Africa* (London, 1835)



This story of the second attempt to establish a town at Port Natal is truly a delightful gem. But there is a need to query its spontaneity. As with Isaacs, Gardiner had the development of the place in mind and was aware of the effect that this published description would have on the British audience. On 18 July 1835 Gardiner had come to the conclusion that it was his duty to communicate with the Governor of the Cape, Sir Benjamin D'Urban, concerning the founding of Durban and to request him to send an officer to enforce the treaty between Dingane and the settlement.<sup>21</sup> It should also be borne in mind that on the same day altogether 25 detailed regulations were decided upon by these founding fathers of the city of Durban. At this meeting, attended by Gardiner, J. Collis, H. Ogle, J. Cane, C. Pickman, R. Wood, P. Kew, T. Carden, J. Francis, R. King, J. Mouncey, J. Pierce, G. Cyrus, C. Toohey and C. Adams, it was decided to call the proposed town D'Urban, presumably to secure the Governor's and Britain's patronage. The pioneers also forbade the construction of "Kafir huts" in the area demarcated and sold the plots for 7s.6d. each. A Church of England church, a free school and a public hospital were provided while a burial ground for Blacks was not forgotten. The meeting agreed further to clear the bush for the establishment of D'Urban. Subscriptions amounting to almost £60 were recorded while almost £155 was collected to endow the church building. Sir Benjamin D'Urban's later contribution of £50 is significant because it indicated that Gardiner had been successful in securing the Governor's patronage of his enterprise.<sup>22</sup>

The first recorded town committee consisted of Gardiner, Collis, FJ. Berkin (in absentia), John Cane and Henry Ogle. This committee was to have an unpropitious beginning because Gardiner was to leave on 20 July, James Collis, the leading commercial agent at Port Natal, was blown to smithereens on 25 September 1835 when the powder in his store ignited,<sup>23</sup> and Berkin had left Port Natal on the *Circe* on 19 March 1835 never to return.<sup>24</sup>

What is particularly significant about these recorded pro-

<sup>19</sup> CUBBIN, *Origins British settlement*, p.80.

<sup>20</sup> A.F. GARDINER, *Narrative of a journey to the Zoolu country in South Africa* (London, 1835), pp.220-221.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.187-188.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.339-404. See also *Graham's Town Journal*, 3.12.1835.

<sup>23</sup> GARDINER, *Narrative*, p.306.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.83 and 370; *South African Commercial Advertiser*, 12.9.1835; *Graham's Town Journal*, 3.12.1835; Local History Museum, Durban, 581c; G.C. Cato's *History of Natal*, p.10; *Natal Mercury*, 15.1.1884.



ceedings is that this was the first occasion that Port Natal had actually been called D'Urban. Hitherto the official Cape hierarchy, merchantmen and the local traders had always referred to the settlement as Port Natal. Despite the change in nomenclature on 23 June, the name of Port Natal was to remain in use for many more years before Durban became common and official usage from approximately 1856 when the town received borough status.<sup>25</sup>

Another vital point about this particular scheme to found Durban is that the site was decided on after "a minute survey" and a journey only described as "at length". The site unanimously decided on was "eligible and commodious" and situated between the Avon River and the Buffalo Spring, near Berkin's residence. Furthermore, lands were conceded by Berkin, Ogle and Collis "to the town and township"<sup>26</sup> and were to extend six kilometres inland, including Salisbury Island.

Despite all this window-dressing nothing came of this particular scheme to found Durban. George Champion, an American missionary, only six months later on 27 December 1835 recorded:

This morning our walk led us to the spot selected for a town to be called D'Urban in honour of His Excellency of the Colony. We inquired of a native for the spot and he from mere good will come to show us. We followed a path which led us thro' grass much above our heads and into a thick wood on the side of a hill not far distant from the west extreme of the bay... Only a small place is yet cleared in the bush for the streets of the proposed village.<sup>27</sup>

George Cato, the first mayor of Durban, was a little more specific as to the location of Gardiner's Durban, stating that it lay between Congella and J. Brickhill's residence near the Umbilo River.<sup>28</sup> Charles Brownlee in 1836 remembered that "the European settlers marked out the site at the head of the Natal Bay near to where the Umbilo falls into it. The township is named Durban."<sup>29</sup>

After examining these accounts it becomes clear that Gardiner's D'Urban was situated near to the mouth of the Umbilo River on the side of a hill which is situated on the western side of the bay. *Gardiner's scheme therefore was not the nucleus of the modern city of Durban*, and it would be difficult to ascertain with any certainty the present location of Gardiner's abortive scheme.

On his journey to Cape Town during 1835, Gardiner took with him a petition of the "householders of the town of D'Urban, Port Natal" to the Governor of the Cape Colony, requesting him to forward it to the British government, "soliciting the protection of the British flag in favour of the infant colony of Victoria, Port Natal".<sup>30</sup> It is indeed interesting and regrettable that on this journey Gardiner lost a manuscript he had written that might have shed additional light on the early history of Durban.<sup>31</sup>

## THE VOORTREKKER CONTRIBUTION

On 16 May 1838 the Voortrekker Commandant Karel Pieter Landman took possession of Port Natal on behalf of the Natal Volksraad at Pietermaritzburg. The trekkers established themselves at Congella, a site with the advantages of elevation, an excellent view of the bay, cooler air and a relatively healthy climate. It was on the direct route from the Cape, and also the old 'trekker's road' en route to Pietermaritzburg via Sea View. By September 1838 Henry Ogle reported that 300 farmers were living in the Port Natal area.<sup>32</sup> Major Samuel Charters and Theophilus Shepstone in December 1838 found the condition of the trekkers at Congella deplorable.<sup>33</sup> In fact, there were not many of them living in the Port Natal area at that stage although there was room for

optimism about its development<sup>34</sup> once the military campaign against the Zulus had been successfully completed.

Efforts to lay out a township began on 1 July 1839 when J.P. Moolman and S. van Breda, probably with the help of George Cato, set out large plots between the Mngeni and the bay. The town was divided into twelve blocks, each subdivided into six plots, and was to be named Paarlager or Brandeberg. They also mooted the building of a fort, mounted with cannon, to protect the bay.<sup>35</sup> In June 1840 the Voortrekkers sold 60 plots at the bay and 63 at Congella. In July 1841 they sold even more plots.<sup>36</sup> The demand was such that on 12 August 1841 the Volksraad had to consider a request from the landdrost at Port Natal to make more plots available. But in reality these plots were not developed and there were probably many absentee landlords as the Frenchman Louis-Adulphé Delegorgue and the German Carl Behrens pointed out. Congella was a fairly unimpressive village in 1842.<sup>37</sup>

Today Congella remains as a significant Afrikaans cultural enclave in Durban. Both high and primary schools, churches, the Durban Teachers' Training College, and the monument commemorating the Battle of Congella are proud reminders of Voortrekker hegemony at Port Natal between 1838 and 1842. The originally English name Port Natal has also been perpetuated by the Afrikaners (for example Port Natal High School).

## EPITOME

Although Fynn and Farewell found Mahamba's amaTuli tribe living on the Bluff when they arrived in 1824, they established the first permanent White settlement at Port Natal near to the present City Gardens. Because of its strategic situation, near to the commercial activities associated with the harbour, this particular settlement developed over the years into the important port of Durban. Nothing came of Isaacs' (1830) and Gardiner's (1835) abortive schemes to found townships. The trekkers (1839) created a separate nucleus at Congella that enjoyed an uncertain existence.

Hopefully Henry Francis Fynn and Francis George Farewell will be accorded the credit by the city fathers and burgesses for founding the original settlement in 1824 that later was to become the city of Durban.□

<sup>25</sup> J. BIRD (ed.), *The annals of Natal 1495 to 1845, I* (Pietermaritzburg, 1888), pp.652-657; *Graham's Town Journal*, 9.9.1841.

<sup>26</sup> GARDINER, *Narrative*, p.399.

<sup>27</sup> A.R. BOOTH (ed.), *Journal of the Rev. George Champion, American missionary in Zululand 1835-1839* (Cape Town, 1967), pp.6-7.

<sup>28</sup> South African Public Library, Cape Town, MSB117 : G.C. Cato, 1814-1893; History of Natal; Local History Museum, Durban, 581 : The Tinker General's history of the Admiralty Reserve, p.1.

<sup>29</sup> C.P. BROWNLEE, *Reminiscences of Kafir life and history* (Lovedale, 1916), pp.100-101.

<sup>30</sup> GARDINER, *Narrative*, pp.402-403.

<sup>31</sup> CUBBIN, *Origins British settlement*, p.153.

<sup>32</sup> *Mediator*, 19.10.1839 (News via the *Mary*).

<sup>33</sup> Parliamentary Library, Cape Town, Mendelssohn Collection, 5023 cl : *United Services Journal*, October 1839, p.175; NA, Shepstone Papers, Vol. 1, 1835-1849 : Wednesday, 19.12.1838.

<sup>34</sup> *De Ware Afrikaan*, 30.5.1839; *De Zuid Afrikaan*, 6.9.1839; CA, GH48/13: Edward Parker — Major Samuel Charters, 16.8.1838 (enclosure 58/1838).

<sup>35</sup> *De Zuid Afrikaan*, 6.9.1839; Local History Museum, Durban, 581 : The Tinker General's history of the Admiralty Reserve, pp.1-2; *Natal Mercury*, 12.12.1882.

<sup>36</sup> NA, Surveyor General's Office (SGO) 5/6 : Voortrekker period register certificate. J.H. BREYTENBACH (ed.), *Suid-Afrikaanse argiefstukke, Natal, 1 : Notule van die Natalse Volksraad, 1838-1845* (Cape Town, 1958), pp.44-45.

<sup>37</sup> L.-A.-J. DELEGORGUE, *Voyage dans L'Afrique australe notamment dans le territoire de Natal*, 2 (Paris, 1847), pp.59-68; NA, Kit Bird Collection 14, p.19; G.S. PRELLER, *Voortrekkermense, V* (Cape Town, 1938), pp.7-9.