

THE LOCAL HISTORIAN AND THE PRESS*

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INTRODUCTION

Historical perspective

A degree of relaxation of restrictive legislation, technical advances in printing and paper making, and the increasing availability of education to the masses resulted in a proliferation of newspapers in both North America and Western Europe during the nineteenth century. This movement was echoed in the remote Cape Colony. Following the passing of the so-called "Freedom Ordinance" (No. 60 of 1829) a number of newspapers were established in Cape Town and Grahamstown. Some of these ran for only a few editions, while others have survived in one form or another to the present day. Gradually other centres in the Colony began the production of their own weeklies or monthlies and by the middle of the nineteenth century there were 30 such publications in the Cape alone. By the end of the nineteenth century even the smaller centres could boast of a locally published newspaper.¹

Aim

This paper may be considered as a presentation of some ideas that have arisen out of a preliminary investigation into the usefulness of country town newspapers as a source to the local historian. The scope of this work was confined in time to the nineteenth century and in space to selected towns of the Eastern Cape Frontier. A complete discussion of the numerous newspapers which were published in this region during the last century lies beyond the scope of this paper, although it is hoped that the present effort may eventually lead to such a survey.

Historians writing on topics which are either directly or indirectly concerned with the local history of the Eastern Cape have already made extensive use of local publication, and in some cases they have commented critically on the value of these journalistic sources.² The present effort should not be regarded as an attempt to collate their findings, but rather as an independent investigation into a few of the many aspects of the local press as an historical source.

Definitions

For our present purpose the terms "country town" and "newspaper" have been rather loosely defined. By contemporary Colonial standards the inhabitants of nineteenth century Grahamstown obviously considered themselves to be something more than rural gentry. Grahamstown was, after all, considered the second town of the Colony which had successfully countered Uitenhage's claim to be the leading settlement of the eastern districts. In his attempt to publicize those districts, J.C. Chase compiled his well-known work *The Cape of Good Hope and the Eastern Province, Algoa Bay* which he published in 1843. Chase lists 544 "English housekeepers" of Grahamstown³ and in addition draws attention to the "substantial military establishment" quartered in the town.⁴ He describes that town as follows: "Graham's Town is the emporium of the eastern frontier districts, and its main streets present a scene of incessant commercial activity while almost every article, whether of utility or of ornament, may be readily obtained as in

most provincial towns of the mother country."⁵

In spite of Chase's possible objections, Grahamstown is considered along with King William's Town, Alice, Fort Beaufort and Adelaide, as a country town for purposes of this paper. The larger of these settlements differed from the smaller only in size and not with regard to their essential characteristics. They were all established and grew to a degree of regional prominence during the nineteenth century and had some or all of the following features in common:

- * an initial military function,
- * the later or simultaneous establishment of a civilian community,
- * the rendering of services to the surrounding farming community,
- * the provision of a market for local produce,
- * the presence of colonial administrative and judicial officials in the persons of civil commissioners and resident magistrates,
- * the development of organs of local government,
- * the development of a vital cultural, social and sporting life,
- * the publication of at least one local newspaper.

¹ T.E.G. CUTTEN, *A history of the press in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1935), pp. 21-29.

² Examples of such works are A.L. HARRINGTON, *The Graham's Town Journal and the Great Trek, 1834-1843*, *Archives Year Book for South African History* 32(2), 1969; C.G. HENNING, *Graaff-Reinet: a cultural history, 1786-1886* (Cape Town, 1975); G.S. HOFMEYR, *King William's Town and the Xhosa, 1841-1816* (M.A., UCT, 1981); K.S. HUNT, *The development of municipal government in the Eastern Province of the Cape of Good Hope, with special reference to Grahamstown (1827-1862)*, *Archives Year Book for South African History* 24, 1969; B.A. LE CORDEUR, *The politics of Eastern Cape separatism, 1820-1854* (Cape Town, 1981), and — Robert Godlonton as architect of frontier opinion, 1850-1857, *Archives Year Book for South African History* 22(2), 1959; A.C.M. WEBB, *The agricultural development of the 1820 settlement down to 1846* (M.A., RhU, 1975).

³ Facsimile reprint of the 1843 edition: *Africana Collectanea* Series No. 25, Cape Town, 1967, pp. 287-294.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 295-296.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

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The term newspaper has also been used with a certain degree of license to include not only weeklies and bi-weeklies, but also monthlies, such as the *Kaffir Express*, which could be more accurately described as periodicals. This has been done in order to extend the survey over as broad a spectrum of the literate population as possible.

Practical considerations

It may be noted at this point that the local historian working in the Eastern Cape finds himself somewhat isolated from his archival sources. The Cape Archives Depot, which houses such sources as the documents of the various branches of the Colonial Government, the records of the divisional and town councils, and the court records, is approximately 900 kilometres distant. Thus for practical and financial reasons the historian living and working in the Eastern Cape is forced to undertake a thorough preliminary survey of the non-archival sources, so that he may spend his time in the archives as productively as possible.

Certain obvious sources such as the records of private schools, cultural and sporting organizations, congregations of the smaller religious denominations, farmers' associations and charitable organizations have either not survived, or where they have survived there are various problems of access.⁶ Likewise, personal documents such as diaries and letters tend to be difficult to come by.

The local newspaper which is usually readily accessible, locally as well as in repositories such as the Cory Library at Rhodes University and the South African Library, provides a unique contemporary record in a single source of many facets of life in the rural communities. Although established researchers have found the standard of Victorian reporting to be reasonably good, they mention certain limitations,

such as the effects of rivalry between different publications serving the same community.⁷ In spite of these shortcomings, the local newspaper provides the local historian who is compelled to work in relative isolation with a very useful mine of information for the conduct of his initial research. If local history can be regarded as a reversal of the usual practice of constructing history from above, if it can be regarded as a recreation of the past from the local angle, that is from the perspective of the ordinary citizen with his involvement in the political, social, economic and cultural life of his community, the usefulness of the newspaper becomes increasingly apparent.⁸

Method

The present study poses two major questions with regard to the rural newspapers of the nineteenth century frontier: — how reliable is the information found in the local newspapers, and

— what type of information do they contain which is of use to the local historian?

The newspapers of the above-mentioned towns were considered with regard to reliability and usefulness of content in two stages:

— an analysis of the editorial policies of the various publications, as proclaimed in the editorial columns of first issues, and

⁶ C.G. HENNING, Some notes on regional history research, *Contree* 1, January 1977, p. 23.

⁷ HARRINGTON, *op. cit.*, pp. 5, 11-12 and 17-18.

⁸ *Contree* 1, January 1977, p. 3 (Editorial by Dr C.M. Bakkes); cf. also A.G. OBERHOLSTER, Streekgeskiedenis en die historikus, *Contree* 6, July 1979, pp. 29-31.

<p>ROYAL HOTEL, ALICE, KNOWN AS DEVELING'S HOTEL.</p> <p>THE Undersigned begs to notify to the Travelling Public and surrounding Districts that he has Re-Opened the above Hotel, after having effected certain important alterations in it. Good accommodation for man and horse is guaranteed, also Good Liquors and a Smart Groom. The advertiser thanks the Public for the support previously given to him, and requests a continuance.</p> <p>MICHAEL O'HARA.</p>	<p>Ostrich Feathers.</p> <p>John Daverin & Co., Produce and General Commission Agents PORT ELIZABETH.</p> <p>BEING among the largest sellers of Ostrich Feathers on the Port Elizabeth Market, and having made the preparation and sale of Ostrich Feathers a SPECIALITY, we have succeeded in getting the</p> <p>Highest Market Rates For Ostrich Feathers consigned to our care.</p>	<p>wood are preferred. The cutter be put in the ground until was planting any time up to the September.</p> <p><i>Kitchen Garden.</i>—In this ment little can be done in plant sowing in dry soils. All vacu table ground should be turned c good depth every third or four giving a plentiful suply of By trenching, the moisture is in the soil. Copious rains descend next month, therefore should be got in readiness for and sowing. Where the g moist, or capable of being under irrigation—cabbage, ca saroy, kohi-kohi, turnip, and l be planted out, but only the that are raised from European successional crops of impor Peas and broad beans may and strawberry planting s finished without delay.</p> <p><i>Flower Garden.</i>—Cinerarias larias, and mimulus should b into larger pots as they r Never allow calcularias to want of water; the compos never become dry, and except plants are growing rapidly, often watered. There is sold eient attention paid to this operation, on which succs depends. Some of the es fuschias are now making strot and ought to be pinched back graceful and even growth. Th shoots of pelargoniums may ped off. Roses may now and planted. See that r hyacinths, &c., do not suffer of water in dry weather. E lantans, abutilons, &c., sho cut back. Genesiras and ty out of bloom should get li and be allowed to dry off Some of the hardier kinds c &c., may be sown in boxes planting, such as clarkias, calliopeis, flox, drammou pink, schizanthus, pansy,</p>
<p>ROYAL HOTEL, MARKET SQUARE, FORT BEAUFORT.</p> <p>THE Undersigned having made the necessary arrangements for carrying on the above well-known Hotel in first-class style, begs to intimate that travellers and others may depend upon good accommodation, attention, and civility.</p> <p>BEST WINES AND SPIRITS KEPT. A. CULLEY.</p>	<p>MUSIC.</p> <p>E. MENDELSSOHN & Co. have a few sample Instruments on view at the Shop of Mr. ROCHAT, Fort Beaufort.</p> <p>Pianos, Orguinettes, New Music, &c. Low Prices and easy Terms.</p> <p>Apply to Mr. J. RICHARDS, Fort Beaufort.</p> <p>18th Dec. 1882.</p>	
<p>VICTORIA HOTEL, ALICE.</p> <p>THE Undersigned having purchased the above Hotel and appointments, and having had the same thoroughly renovated, he is now able to offer to Travellers, Farmers, and others, every comfort that is to be found in a WELL CONDUCTED HOTEL, and hopes by attention and civility to his customers, to meet with a fair share of support</p> <p>Only the best and choicest LIQUORS will be kept in Stock and by offering these at a small profit, hopes to make</p>	<p>M. A. ROCHAT, CHRONOMETER,</p>	

Fort Beaufort Advocate, 27.7.1883.*

* All photographs by D.M. Moore.

an identification of certain categories of information in the newspapers and a commentary on their usefulness and reliability.

PROCLAIMED EDITORIAL POLICY

In his work *The Graham's Town Journal and the Great Trek*, A.L. Harington has pointed out that a proper appreciation of the content of a newspaper depends upon one's knowledge of such details as the circumstances of its founding, the founder's motives, the character and views of the editor, the nature of the society which supported it, and the influence and attitudes of the local and colonial officials.⁹ It is obviously difficult to generalize about the above circumstances surrounding the founding and publication of a group of newspapers in a particular region, but certain aspects can be found in the all important matter of editorial policy.

Local political and economic interests

The Colonial Government and the eastern press

An analysis of the editorial policies of various Eastern Cape newspapers as proclaimed in their first issues reveals that the editors subscribed to certain common ideas as to the role of the press in a democratic society. Some editors also proclaimed a specific interest in matters such as representative government, eastern separatism, or the representation of certain sectarian viewpoints. Most frequently encountered is the statement of the close link between successful constitutional government and an effective press. The manner in which this relationship was perceived by the various editors was influenced by the stage of constitutional development that the Cape Colony had reached when their papers were founded. The essential message, however, remained the same: the press was the means by which a dialogue could be conducted between the government and the governed. In the absence of alternative media this function of the press was far more important a hundred years ago than it is today.

As early as 1831 the editor of the *Graham's Town Journal*, saw the establishment of his paper as the opening of a channel of communication to the government in Cape Town so as to inform its members of the opinions of the inhabitants of the eastern districts on a wide range of matters. This publication was to grow from a purely local weekly to virtually assume the status of a national bi-weekly, which could have been considered to have achieved a standard equal to that of the provincial press in Europe and America at the time.¹⁰ The two prevailing circumstances which encouraged the youthful L.H. Meurant and T.C. White to promote their publication were the absence of eastern representatives on the Legislative Council at the time, and the "one-sided" views on frontier matters presented by John Farbairn in the columns of the *Commercial Advertiser*.¹¹

Nearly twenty years later, shortly after the Queen had issued Letters Patent instructing the Cape Legislative Council to investigate the feasibility of self-government for the Colony, another Grahamstown editor, Frederick Barr of the *Cape Colonist*, stated that the coming of representative government required the establishment of organs for the expression of public opinion.¹²

Six years after the introduction of constitutional government at the Cape, the editor of the *Fort Beaufort Advocate*

and *General Advertiser* (later *Adelaide Opinion*) gave a very lucid description of his idea of the role of the press in a self-governing British colony. He wrote:

"Under constitutional government only, can the press be properly viewed as the 'fourth estate', and only under such circumstances does it exercise that influence on a nation's destiny which has earned for it this significant appellation."¹³

He continued with an explanation of the special role of the press in a "British" community:

"The press, in fact, is necessary to allow full scope to the genius of a community of British subjects. It is indispensable to their onward progress. It disseminates useful and necessary knowledge — keeps the people informed of passing events in the world without as well as at home — is an educator. It evokes the patriotism essential to the wellbeing of the body politic; and finally it is the best safeguard to that liberty and fair play, which is beyond price in the estimation of a British people."¹⁴

These ideas were unoriginal and imported, but it is significant that they were expressed so strongly in the Eastern Cape during the mid-nineteenth century. As the introduction of the British cabinet system to the Cape approached, the theme of the "fourth estate" was once more taken up by the editor of the missionary journal, the *Kaffir Express*. He considered a newspaper to be a forum for the expression of public opinion, and thus it could be termed the "fourth estate", after the Monarch, the Lords and the Commons.¹⁵ The *Eastern Star*, first published in Grahamstown in January 1871, was even more explicit:

"The voiceless Parliament of the Press is always in session, and although its members are anonymous, and elected by no popular suffrage, yet the Newspaper Editor's Office is a true People's House of Commons, where albeit no binding laws can be framed the debates themselves are at least sure of being listened to if they are fairly, honestly and worthily conducted."¹⁶

This theme was also taken up by the *Cape Mercury* (King William's Town, June 1875) in a rather verbose manner. The editor pledged his paper to the task of reflecting popular reaction to proclaimed policy with the motto "Air and light", promising "ventilation and illumination".¹⁷ J.T. Jabavu, the editor of *Imvo Zabantsundu* ("Native/Black Opinion"), a weekly first published in King William's Town in November 1884, likewise saw his paper as a means of communication between the authorities and the people, but in this case he emphasized the need to publicize the views of the "aboriginal population".¹⁸

This perception by the editors of their newspapers as a channel of communication between the government and

⁹ HARINGTON, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Graham's Town Journal*, 30.12.1831; Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown (CL), MS7464: SABC broadcasts on "Early journalism in the Eastern Cape" by Prof. W.A. Maxwell (Talk No. 1: *Some famous editors and how they collected the news*, 2.11.1958); Talk No. 2: *Robert Godlonton*, 16.11.1958).

¹¹ HARINGTON, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14; LE CORDEUR, *The politics of Eastern Cape separatism* . . . , p. 43.

¹² *Cape Colonist*, 7.12.1850.

¹³ *Fort Beaufort Advocate*, 16.7.1859.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Kaffir Express*, 1.11.1870.

¹⁶ *Eastern Star*, 6.1.1871.

¹⁷ *Cape Mercury*, 21.6.1875.

¹⁸ *Imvo Zabantsundu*, 3.11.1884.

the governed, does not detract from their usefulness to the local historian. The matters on which the editors, their reporters and correspondents tended to air their views were not confined to matters of imperial or colonial policy. The local press frequently reflected the reaction of the community to the local effects, political, social and economic, of the implementation of broader policy. Local interest groups habitually resorted to the columns of the local press to arouse popular opinion and by so doing to exert pressure upon, as well as to convey their message to the authorities. Local opinion and attitudes towards the perceived shortcomings of the imperial and colonial administration and policy were frequently expressed far more clearly, and definitely more vehemently, in the columns of the rural press than in the carefully phrased official reports of the civil commissioners and resident magistrates.

The "impartiality" of the eastern press

The impartiality of the nineteenth century frontier publications must be assessed in the light of a general editorial tendency towards the upholding of various contemporary "liberal" values. The *Great Eastern* which was first published in 1863 in anticipation of the meeting of the Legislative Assembly in Grahamstown the following year, took it upon itself to:

"... secure to all parties the freest possible expression of opinion on every question of the day — whether political or religious, local or general, foreign of domestic."¹⁹

The editor accused the other Grahamstown papers of serving narrow and sectarian interests, while he undertook to be impartial in his commentary on political affairs. The *Kaffrarian Watchman* likewise announced that its columns would be open to all and that its editorial policy would be influenced by none.²⁰ The *Alice Times* (1874) stated that all correspondents were welcome "... irrespective of creed, colour or political opinion", while *Imvo Zabantsundu* (1884) also protested its political impartiality.²¹

In addition to the commitment to impartiality, some editors saw themselves as unofficial ombudsmen, dedicated to the exposing of abuses and the championing of the cause of the downtrodden. The *Kaffrarian Watchman* (1865) expressed its determination to expose abuses without "fear, favour or prejudice".²²

Such an independent approach had been seen before in the press of the eastern districts. As early as 1840, Dr A.G. Campbell, the eccentric editor, printer, publisher and sole proprietor of Grahamstown's *Colonial Times* showed such militancy in opposing what he saw to be "abuses" that he found himself in conflict with numerous of the influential townfolk, including the editor of the rival *Graham's Town Journal*. Matters finally came to a head after the publication of the sixteenth number of the *Colonial Times*, on 15 April 1840. Campbell attacked the *Graham's Town Journal* for what he considered to be its partiality in its reporting of the proceedings of a case of alleged ill-treatment of a 14 year old orphan girl, Harriet Pollack. The defendants were Lt and Mrs Peshall.²³ The resultant furore saw a new editor stating in the issue of 29 April 1840 that:

"An equally unflinching exposure of public abuses, a like willing and gratuitous defence of the weak and the oppressed ... will stay ... but 'rude speech' will be moderated ..."²⁴

Eventually the paper was sold to the new editor and reappeared on 6 May 1840 as the *Cape Frontier Times*. The new management pledged the use of more moderate language and discretion in the selection of its articles. Placatory re-

marks were made towards the editor of the *Graham's Town Journal*.²⁵

The case of the fiery Dr Campbell and his *Colonial Times* clearly illustrates that the newspapers of the eastern districts were expected to uphold the interests and values of the eastern establishment, which consisted of the merchants, the more successful farmers, and the senior and middle-level government servants. Any persistent tendency to further the interests of the lower classes, or to reflect views other than those that were considered as "respectable", rapidly resulted in the demise of the journal concerned.²⁶



Military Museum and the Martello Tower, Fort Beaufort, both national monuments.

Further practical considerations made it necessary for the editors to keep their ears and their pens finely tuned to the ideas prevailing in the circles of the local elite. When it was first published in 1831 a subscription to the *Graham's Town Journal* cost 6/6 per quarter, or 6d per copy. That same 6d could have bought four pounds of good quality beef. In 1875 the *Alice Times*, which was published every Friday, asked its subscribers for 3/- per quarter. Advertisements cost 2/- per inch single column and 4/- per inch double column, with repetitions at half price. During the 1880s subscription rates to the *Fort Beaufort Advocate* were 5/- per quarter in town and 6/3 in the country. If a subscription were taken out for a whole year a reduction of 2/- was offered.²⁷ An idea of the contemporary value of 5/- can be gained if it is noted that in 1883 local market prices for some everyday items were:

Tobacco	6d	to	7d	per lb
Butter	1/9	to	3/4	per lb
Eggs	10d	to	1/1	per dozen.

In the same year the annual salary of the Town Clerk of Fort Beaufort was £100 and that of the Market Master £144.²⁸ It can thus be safely concluded that the actual purchase of a newspaper, and more particularly the taking out of a subscription, would be confined to the members of the more prosperous middle class although the actual readership may have been somewhat wider.

¹⁹ *Great Eastern*, 2.2.1863.

²⁰ *Precursor to the Kaffrarian Watchman*, 11.12.1865.

²¹ *Alice Times*, 7.3.1874; *Imvo Zabantsundu*, 3.11.1884.

²² *Precursor to the Kaffrarian Watchman*, 11.12.1865.

²³ *Colonial Times*, 15.14.1840.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.4.1840.

²⁵ *Cape Frontier Times*, 6.5.1840.

²⁶ LE CORDEUR, *The politics of Eastern Cape separatism* . . . , pp. 43 and 103-104.

²⁷ *Alice Times*, 19.3.1875; *Fort Beaufort Advocate*, 10.9.1880; CL, MS7464: Talk No. 1 . . .

²⁸ *Fort Beaufort Advocate*, 27.7.1883.

Under these circumstances the editors and publishers relied heavily upon subscriptions and advertisements for a steady income. Before he launched the *Graham's Town Journal* in 1831 the youthful L.H. Meurant assured himself that at least 250 signatures had been placed on the subscription list that had been left with two Grahamstown traders.²⁹ Basil le Cordeur actually points out very clearly how the dependence of the *Graham's Town Journal* for its income upon advertisers was closely linked to the manner in which Robert Godlonton, effectively editor since 1834; used the paper to further the interests of the commercial sector.³⁰

It was not only the need to keep the subscribers and advertisers happy which would have inclined editors to reflect or affect the values and attitudes of the more affluent members of colonial society, but also the manner in which the news was collected. In her radio talk on early Eastern Cape journalism entitled *Some famous editors and how they collected the news* (2 November 1958) Prof. Maxwell illustrated the kind of link that existed between the economically active sector of the community and the press. She showed how, in the case of Godlonton and the *Graham's Town Journal*, a bookshop formed a sound base for the running of a newspaper:

"But running a shop not only gave financial security: it was an easy way to gather news and views from the hundreds who came in from the country districts for trade. At the time, the shop-counter was the next best thing to the editor's telephone of today."³¹

It thus becomes apparent that if we are looking for information concerning the attitudes and interests of the commercially active middle class the local newspaper is a reliable source, but if we are concerned about obtaining a balanced picture of the total society, we will have to look beyond the columns of such publications as the *Graham's Town Journal* and the *Fort Beaufort Advocate*.

Specific segments of rural society

Another aspect of editorial policy which the local historian must take into account is the existence of certain newspapers and periodicals which were specifically established in order to serve the interests of particular groups, religious, cultural or ethnic.

Sectarian influences

The strong Wesleyan influence over the *Graham's Town Journal* was seriously challenged by John George Fanklin when he took over the *Colonial Times* and changed its name to the *Frontier Times*. Franklin and the *Frontier Times* drew support from the Anglican members of the community.³² The sectarian nature of mid-nineteenth century Grahamstown is further reflected in the first editorial of the "Catholic" paper, the *Cape Colonist* (later the *Colonist*). The editor Fredrick Barr, proclaimed that in matters of religion the paper would be "... anti-Socialist, anti-Latitudinarian, Christian and Catholic". He was determined to combat "error by just and honest means"; he further pledged that he would be careful to deal fairly and impartially with opponents and would "induce Christians to hate each other with less intensity, and to lay aside many of their foolish prejudices".³³

The Dutch-speaking community

In 1844 Louis Henri Meurant established his second newspaper, *Het Kaapsche Grensblad*, to serve the Dutch-speaking community who had settled to the north and north-east of Grahamstown. He observed that although two English language papers appeared in Grahamstown each week there was no "Hollandschnieuwsblad". *Het Kaapsche Grensblad* was intended to fill this gap and to reach out to the Dutch-speaking colonists in order to arouse their avarice by publishing useful and amusing information ("... gierigheid op te wekken onder onze landgenotten, door het verspreiden van nuttige en vermakilyke kennis").³⁴

In the early numbers of this paper prominence was given to the concern felt by the farming community north of Grahamstown with regard to the safety of their persons and property in the uncertain frontier situation. Typical of its reporting was the account given of a public meeting held on the Koonap farm of Gert Els early in August 1844. Numerous resolutions were passed which attacked the Treaty System as useless, deplored the failure to punish raiders from Xhosaland, and denounced the arms trade with the Xhosa.³⁵ Along with security matters *Het Kaapsche Grensblad* also served its readers by providing information relating to organized agriculture, stock and produce fairs, and current market prices.

The African intellectual élite

During the second half of the nineteenth century missionaries and members of the educated black élite made an effort to communicate with the literate section of the African population through the medium of publications intended to serve their special interests. These newspapers and periodicals are of particular value to the local historian as they provide a perspective which is only rarely found in the "white" papers of the eastern districts.

During October 1870 the first number of the monthly, the *Kaffir Express* (from 1876 the *Christian Express*), came off the press at Lovedale. After commenting that the missionary and the missionary schoolmaster had been around for about forty years, the editor saw his monthly as a "gauge of their success". He stated that the paper was chiefly intended for the native villages, mission stations and towns of the Colony. In order to accommodate the inhabitants of the towns certain sections were translated from the original Xhosa into English. He saw the *Kaffir Express* as unsectarian in character, but representative of the cause of the missions in general. Although the paper was intended to have an educational function it was not aimed primarily at the African masses. The editor wrote, somewhat haughtily:

"The paper will be addressed to the intelligent people of the native community who are able to read, or have

²⁹ HARRINGTON, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³⁰ LE CORDEUR, *The politics of Eastern Cape separatism* . . . , pp. 103-104.

³¹ CL, MS7464: Talk No. 1

³² LE CORDEUR, *The politics of Eastern Cape separatism* . . . , pp. 43 and 65.

³³ *Cape Colonist*, 7.12.1850.

³⁴ *Het Kaapsche Grensblad*, 1.7.1844.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.8.1844.

an interest in what is going on in the world beyond their own dwellings. To make its contents suitable to those who are utterly uneducated would be a mistake, even though the paper could be read to them."³⁶

Fourteen years later, the dilemma of the educated black elite hinted at by the editor of the *Kaffir Express*, found forthright expression in the first editorial of *Imvo Zabantsundu*. The editor, John Tengo Jabavu, stated the nature of this dilemma when he described the black intellectual group as "... despised by its former friends of the heathen state, and misunderstood by the representatives of civilization in this country." He saw his paper as a means by which a rope could be tied "... between the mass of reclaimed Natives and those who are on the shore of civilization." This could be best achieved by presenting *Imvo Zabantsundu* as "... a medium of communication between the vast masses of the aboriginal population of this country and the ruling power which hails from Great Britain."³⁷

It is clear that, in spite of their protestations of impartiality and non-sectarianism, many of the country town newspapers of the eastern districts of the Cape Colony were established, either with the express purpose of furthering the interests of a particular group, or gradually became closely associated with a particular section of the population. The historian must therefore be guided in his use of the local newspaper by a sound knowledge of the structure of — and conflicting interest within — the community from which it stemmed and which it served.

THE CONTENT OF A TYPICAL COUNTRY TOWN NEWSPAPER

In spite of its very obvious limitations, the typical country town newspaper provides us with a window through which we can view many of the facets of the day-to-day lives of the rural people of more than one hundred years ago. In no other source do we find so much information about so many aspects of life collected into a single document. A thorough analysis of the content of even a single rural newspaper would be most useful and enlightening, but lies beyond the scope of this paper. For our present purposes only a few matters of strictly local importance will be considered. These are the affairs of the boards of civil commissioners and town councils, the administration of justice, incidence of crime and associated social problems, economic development, and the racial attitudes of the colonists in relation to fears for the security of their persons and their stock.

Adequate, and frequently more reliable, information on all these aspects of rural life can be found in the official documents and the accessions housed in the various archives depots. The newspaper report or comment, however, remains important in that it provides a perspective other than the official opinion on a specific matter. In particular, the letters to the editor often prove valuable as an indication of popular reaction to official policies and actions, and of the attitudes of various pressure groups within the community to certain issues.

Boards of civil commissioners and town councils

Prior to the establishment of town councils, Grahamstown, Fort Beaufort, Adelaide and Alice were governed by boards of civil commissioners with limited powers.³⁸ The records of these local authorities, including council and committee minute books, letter books, ledgers and various registers and

records of returns, are supposed to be available to researchers at the Cape Archives Depot. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons which do not exclude some rather haphazard record keeping in the first instance and careless storage of records in the second place, the staff of the Archives Depot are faced with a difficult task when attempting to assemble complete collections of civic records.³⁹ Local newspapers generally give accurate accounts of municipal elections and summaries of the proceedings of the weekly meetings, information which can often be verified by referring to available official records. The local press also provides background information on personalities and decisions which often appear only sketchily in incomplete official records if at all.

The following example illustrates the usefulness of the newspaper as a source to the historian of local government. Following the incorporation of the Grahamstown Municipality in terms of Act No. 29 of 1861 the necessity arose for a new set of municipal regulations. From March until September 1863 a regular and carefully debated item on the agendas of the weekly meetings of the Grahamstown Town Council was a draft of proposed general regulations. All this is recorded in detail in the minutes of the Grahamstown Council.⁴⁰ At times the debate on the regulations became heated. During the meeting on 27 March councillors D. Penn, N. Birkenruth, J. Roberts, and J. Ayliff protested against the draft regulations relating to "Licenses for trades" in terms of which it was proposed to subject "certain trades and mercantile callings" (wholesale merchants) to a "tax on license". The four councillors stated that they foresaw difficulties in the transfer of monies between the Corporation and the Colonial Government. More significantly they mentioned the list of trades did not allow for "an equitable spread of tax".⁴¹

The researcher is led to question the disinterestedness of the four protesting councillors. At this stage the newspapers become a useful source, complementary to the official records. Perusal of the columns and advertisements of the *Graham's Town Journal* yields the following relevant information. The original motion that tradesmen and wholesale merchants be taxed by the municipality came from councillor B.M. Shepperson, whose business was primarily retail, although he did have a wholesale section. The leader of the group objecting to the license fees was councillor N. Birkenruth who ran a large wholesale concern. After much delay and debate the new municipal regulations were approved by the Council on 10 July 1863, but only after the controversial licensing clause had been expunged. These regulations were duly published in the *Government Gazette* of 15 September 1863 and in the *Graham's Town Journal* of 9 October 1863. Not a single word of protest appeared in either the editorials or the correspondence columns until a lone farmer raised an indirect objection on 6 November 1863. He complained of the heavy taxes set by the Market Committee (2% of the selling price of all produce — except wool where 1% was levied), which bled the farmer "to stuff

³⁶ *Kaffir Express*, 1.10.1870.

³⁷ *Imvo Zabantsundu*, 3.11.1884.

³⁸ HUNT, *op. cit.*, p. 281.

³⁹ *Transactions of the Seventy-Seventh Annual Congress of the Cape Provincial Municipal Association*, 30 April - 3 May 1984. (Address delivered by Dr E.J. Prins of the Cape Archives Depot).

⁴⁰ Cape Archives Depot, Cape Town (CA), 3/GHT, 1/1/1/7 Grahamstown Town Council: Council minutes, 13.3.1863 — 18.9.1863.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*: Council minutes, 27.3.1863; *Graham's Town Journal*, 31.3.1863.

FORT BEAUFORT TURF CLUB.
SPRING RACE MEETING.
1884

FIRST DAY—TUESDAY, APRIL 15.

1. MAIDEN PLATE. VALUE £35.

One mile race. Open to Horses of all ages which have never won public money. Weight for age. Winner to be sold for £60; if not to be sold, to carry 14 lbs extra; if to be sold for £50, allowed 7 lbs; if for £40, 14 lbs; if for £30, 21 lbs; if for £20, 28 lbs. Entrance £3 10s.

2. LADIES PURSE.

A Purse subscribed by the Ladies of the town and district, which the Stewards guarantee to contain not less than £20. Welter Weights. One mile heats. Winner to be sold for £40; if for £30, allowed 7 lbs; if for £25, 10 lbs; if for £20, 14 lbs. Entrance £2 2s.

3. PONY PLATE. VALUE £15.

Half-mile heats. Catch Weights not under 8 stone. For ponies not exceeding 14 hands. Post entrance. Winner to be sold for £25; if for £20, allowed 5 lbs; if for £15, 10 lbs. Entrance 30s.

4. DISTRICT PLATE. VALUE £75.

One mile and a half race. Weight for age. Winner to be sold for £80; if for £70, allowed 5 lbs; if for £60, 10 lbs; if for £50, 15 lbs; if for £40, 20 lbs; if for £30, 25 lbs; if for £20, 30 lbs. Entrance £7 10s. To close on Thursday, 10th April, at 10 a.m. Half forfeit if declared on or before Saturday, 12th April. Horses to be the bona fide property of the owner from 1st January, 1884.

SECOND DAY—WEDNESDAY, APRIL 16.

1. LICENSED VICTUALERS PLATE. VALUE £30.

Half mile race. Weight for age. Winner to be sold for £50; if for £40, allowed 7 lbs; if for £30, 14 lbs; if for £20, 21 lbs. Entrance £3 3s.

³Fort Beaufort Advocate, 21 2.1883.

the Corporation".⁴²

It was evident that a critical use of the local newspaper as a source can give a better understanding of the processes of, and the influences that are brought to bear upon, the institutions of local government. In the above example it is clear that in a case where the interests of the commercial sector of the town came into conflict with those of the farmers, the opinion of the former prevailed. This use of the local press as a supplementary source to rather complete municipal records is acknowledged by Prof. K.S. Hunt in his *The development of municipal government in the Eastern Province of the Cape of Good Hope with special reference to Grahamstown, 1837-1862*. If the local newspapers are useful where complete records have been preserved, they are very much more useful where the records are incomplete or have been lost.

The second example deals with a case where the municipal records have not yet been deposited in the Archives Depot. On 30 June 1882 a new Municipal Act, known officially as the "Act to consolidate and amend the Law relating to Municipalities" (Act No. 45 of 1882) was signed into law. Amongst other provisions the Act laid down the procedure whereby towns which had hitherto been governed by boards of civil commissioners could apply for full municipal status.

Fort Beaufort was one of the first of the smaller towns in the Cape Colony to make use of the new legislation and

application was made early in 1883 for the establishment of a town council. The *Fort Beaufort Advocate and Adelaide Opinion* provides a step-by-step account of the whole procedure through its regular reports on civic affairs, official notices of elections and meetings, accounts of elections, correspondence columns and editorial comment. The last-mentioned yields an unfavourable comment on the colonial politicians and the officials that served them, hardly likely to have appeared in any official record. By 21 September 1883 the people of Fort Beaufort had received no reply from Cape Town to their application. The editor of the *Fort Beaufort Advocate* expressed his annoyance at the bureaucratic tardiness in the following terms:

"The Government has evidently too much to occupy its attention just now — too much to worry the members of the ministry, for have they not alternatively to twist and turn, to flatter and fawn, to concede and bully, in order to retain the emoluments of office — to pay any attention to the wants of any place smaller than a town; hence, probably, the application of this municipality lies snugly in a pigeon hole, and is altogether forgotten by the officials."⁴³

This editorial outburst tells us as much about the attitude of the Fort Beaufort gentry towards colonial politicians and officials as it does about the alleged inefficiency of the latter.

Fort Beaufort's application was duly attended to and the election of councillors took place on 4 December 1883. Eleven candidates stood for election, of which nine were elected as the town's first councillors. The first meeting of the Fort Beaufort Town Council was held shortly after the election results had been announced. A veteran of the Board of Commissioners, Mr Charles Jonson, was elected chairman and the various committees set up. These formalities over, the new council used its extended authority to deal with the first matter, ways and means of collecting the dog-tax.⁴⁴

The administration of justice, incidence of crime and associated social problems

The local historian who wishes to focus his attention on the social aspects of life in the rural town of the nineteenth century Eastern Cape will find abundant material in the archives of the various magistrates. Such documents as the Records of Proceedings of Criminal Cases and the more concise Criminal Record Books are fairly complete and reliable and even lend themselves to fashionable quantitative analysis. In spite of these advantages they only testify to the prevalence of particular types of crime and their associated social problems. They do not throw much light on the possible causes of these social ills, or upon the attitude of society towards their existence. This latter type of information is best sought in the columns of the local press.

A look at the towns of Fort Beaufort and Alice during 1875 is enlightening. An examination of that year's Criminal Record Books yields information which can be tabulated as follows:

⁴² *Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette*, 15.9.1863 (Proclamation No. 32 of 1863); *Graham's Town Journal*, 24 and 31.3.1863, 14.7.1863, 22.9.1863, 9.10.1863 and 6.11.1863.

⁴³ *Fort Beaufort Advocate*, 21.9.1883.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.12.1883.

INCIDENCE OF CRIME IN THE FORT BEAUFORT AND ALICE DISTRICTS, 1875⁴⁵

CHARGE	FORT BEAUFORT		ALICE	
	Number of persons convicted	Percentage of total	Number of persons convicted	Percentage of total
Group A Major crime: murder, rape	1	0,24	1	0,73
Group B "Lying down drunk"	25	6,04	22	16,06
Breach of the peace	47	11,35	17	12,41
Assault	41	9,90	29	21,17
Group C Housebreaking, theft	22	5,31	15	10,95
Stocktheft	38	9,18	14	10,22
Group D Desertion (Act 18 of 1873)	38	9,18	11	8,02
Trespass	120	28,99	3	2,19
Pass offences (Act 22 of 1867)	51	12,32	3	2,19
Escape from custody	2	0,48	1	0,73
Other minor crimes	29	7,01	21	15,33
TOTAL	414	100,00	137	100,00

Numerous tentative deductions can be made from the above table. The incidence of major crime is remarkably low. The incidence of Group D or Statutory (politically related) crime is higher in the Fort Beaufort district than in the Alice district. There is a significantly high incidence of Group B (alcohol related) crime in both districts. The last two observations raise interesting questions concerning the attitude of the newspaper editors and their readers towards these socio-political problems. The *Fort Beaufort Advocate* and the *Alice Times* throw some light on both matters. Practical limitations only allow for comment on the attitudes towards alcoholism and related crimes as portrayed in the local press.

The established and respectable white citizens appear to have been concerned with the problem of alcoholism and its associated social problems. A closer examination of opinion expressed in the press reveals, however, that their complaints usually related to the manner in which the indiscriminate sale and consumption of alcohol touched their own lives.⁴⁶

Other than the routine factual reports in the column headed "Magistrate's Court", there is little in the press of either Fort Beaufort or Alice which indicates the extent of the alcohol problem. Considerable publicity was given to the activities of the temperance organization, the Good Templars. The meetings of the Victoria Lodge (No. 21) in Alice and the Olive Branch Lodge (No. 22) in Fort Beaufort were well reported. These gatherings appear to have generated much discussion but little action.⁴⁷ The only actions reported on were related to attempts to make alcoholic drinks less available to the public. Good Templars and others objected to the granting of certain licenses at the quarterly meetings of the licensing boards. The objections were based upon the inconvenience caused by the ready

availability of alcohol to "the coloured classes". Complaints usually centred round undesirable street scenes, the reduction of servants' and labourers' productivity, and the rise in the incidence of assault and theft, the latter being seen as a means of financing the purchase of liquor. Such complaints were clearly well founded, and like their fellow citizens, the Good Templars expressed little concern for the moral and physical welfare of the habitual drinkers.⁴⁸

Economic development

The local press is both relatively reliable and comprehensive as a source of information concerning the various aspects of economic development in rural communities. For the purpose of this paper only two aspects are commented on, viz. agricultural development, and the establishment of a communications infrastructure.

Agricultural development

As has already been noted the various editors committed themselves to furthering a variety of interests through the medium of their publications. There appears to have been general agreement that one of the newspapers' important tasks was to provide the farmer with the information necessary to conduct an efficient operation and to improve his methods. In his work *The agricultural development of the*

⁴⁵ CA, 1/FBF, 1/2/6 - 1/2/7: Fort Beaufort and Alice Criminal Record Books, September 1871 - December 1878.

⁴⁶ Cf. various copies of the *Fort Beaufort Advocate* and *Alice Times* during 1875.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Fort Beaufort Advocate*, 16.3.1875 and 25.6.1875; *Alice Times*, 12 and 19.2.1875, 2 and 19.4.1875 and 5.11.1875.

1820 Settlement down to 1846, Dr A.C.M. Webb has shown how useful a publication such as the *Graham's Town Journal* can be as a source of accurate and relevant information concerning agricultural development.⁴⁹ What is true for the *Graham's Town Journal*, and the settlement south of Grahamstown, also holds good for the other rural papers of the eastern districts and the communities that they served to the north.

In the first edition of *Het Kaapsche Grensblad* (1844) L.H. Meurant undertook to report generally on local happenings with regard to commerce and agriculture, and specifically on market prices.⁵⁰

The *Fort Beaufort Advocate*, on being founded in a town which was gaining increasing importance as a commercial centre serving the surrounding farming community, was positively enthusiastic about its role as a source of information to the agriculturalist. On 16 July 1859, the first edition proclaimed inter alia:

"We shall deem it our duty, from time to time, to give prominence to everything connected with the promotions of Agriculture in this district; and we invite farmers and others interested in the products of the soil to avail themselves freely of our columns for the discussions of any matters under this head."⁵¹

This undertaking to serve agricultural interests was still to be found in the editorials of newspapers founded during the last quarter of the century. The *Alice Times* (1874) promised a regular column devoted to items of interest to farmers.⁵² The editor of the *Cape Mercury* (King William's Town, 1875) emphasised the link between the development of natural resources, agriculture, pastoral farming, and trade. In his enthusiasm he even predicted that the capital of a federated South Africa would not be very far from King William's Town.⁵³ When John Jabavu founded *Imvo Zabantsundu*, he mentioned that, among the other services offered to his readers, his paper would serve to stimulate industry and the application of scientific farming methods.⁵⁴

The official documents, originating in both divisional and town council chambers, which throw light on agricultural activities can be supplemented by reference to the local press. In fact, it is only there that information on the following matters can be found in a single document:

- reports of meetings of agricultural societies,
- market prices — both local and at the ports,
- news items on matters of interest to the farmer, including labour problems and stock theft,
- government notices and reports on legislation affecting the farmer,
- the reaction of farmers to certain legislation, regulations, and situations,
- news of technical and veterinary advances,
- the extent and effects of droughts and floods,
- advertisement telling of the availability of equipment, seed, wagons and other essential requirements,
- auction and sale announcements indicating the location, size, degree of development, stocking capacity and prices of farms, and
- availability of labour and schemes to import labour from both overseas and neighbouring territories.

By consulting the press the local historian frequently gains a clear indication of what to look for in the official documents which are housed in a particular archives depot. Preliminary work with the newspapers thus enables the student of local history to plan his search while on a visit to the archives. This can be of great practical value in terms of time

and money. The following example clearly illustrates the point.

A critical point in the history of Fort Beaufort was the establishment of a market at what, up to that stage, had been a settlement of military importance. The *Graham's Town Journal* of 29 October 1835 carried the official notice announcing the establishment of the market. This notice can be traced in the archives depot with relative ease, but the significance of this development is spelt out in the following terms by the editor of the *Graham's Town Journal*:

"Our readers will observe, on reference to our front page, that a Public Market is to be forthwith established at Fort Beaufort, — a measure that will doubtless tend much to the convenience of the inhabitants of that part of the frontier. Fort Beaufort has only hitherto been known as a military post; but it is questionably a situation which possesses very rare capabilities for the site of a populous town or village; perhaps there are none superior to it in this respect, except it be 'The Blinkwater' . . . which is understood to be reserved for a similar purpose.

It is in the heart of the most beautiful and fertile country, and has the finest stream on the frontier flowing through the centre of it, and close to the military post and proposed village. The Kat River Settlement is in its immediate neighbourhood — and also the Kafir tribes under Macomo and Tyalie (sic). It will be extremely convenient to the grain farmers of the Winterberg should it be firmly established, it being very little more than a day's journey with a wagon from that district."⁵⁵

Although the writer obviously presents Fort Beaufort in an extremely favourable light, essential factual information is given on a number of salient points. Armed with this information the researcher will be able to direct his archival search far more effectively.

Development of a communications infrastructure

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the development of the Cape railway system became a central political issue. The various ports, both major and minor, lobbied for the completion of those lines which they hoped would increase their share of the trade with the interior. Commercial and agricultural interests in the inland areas also sought easy access to both the ports and the interior markets through the construction of various junction and branch lines which would connect them with the expanding network. One of the early proposals was a junction line to join Cookhouse on the "Eastern" line (Port Elizabeth, Cradock, Middelburg) with King William's Town and so to the "Border" line (East London, Cathcart, Queenstown). It was pointed out that such a line would pass through areas of great agricultural potential in the districts of Bedford, Adelaide, Fort Beaufort and Alice. Later this proposed line became part of the Grand Junction Plan which envisaged a line linking Mossel Bay to King William's Town via Oudtshoorn and Cookhouse.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ WEBB, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ *Het Kaapsche Grensblad*, 1.7.1844.

⁵¹ *Fort Beaufort Advocate*, 16.7.1859.

⁵² *Alice Times*, 7.3.1874.

⁵³ *Cape Mercury*, 21.6.1875.

⁵⁴ *Imvo Zabantsundu*, 3.11.1884.

⁵⁵ *Graham's Town Journal*, 29.10.1835.

⁵⁶ A. MABIN, "The course of economic development in the Cape Colony, 1854-1899: a case in truncated transition". (Paper presented to the Third Biennial Conference of the Economic History Society of Southern Africa, University of Natal, Durban, 17-20 July 1984, pp. 26-31).

Evidence of a concerted effort by the communities concerned can be found in the minutes of the municipal councils of Adelaide and King William's Town. At a meeting held on 24 February 1880 the councillors of King William's Town sought to expedite the building of the railway line by forming a special committee consisting of the mayor and four others. This committee was instructed to take immediate action in pressing for a survey of the line between King William's Town and Fort Beaufort.⁵⁷ The mayor and his advisors decided to use the forum which was most likely to produce a decisive expression of public opinion on the matter, and on 5 March they convened a public meeting. It is significant, when considering the local press as an historical source, to note that an account of the proceedings of this public meeting was clipped from the press and pasted into the minute book of the Council to form part of the official record. The citizens of King William's Town decided to entrust the matter to a further committee led by Messrs. Schermbucker, Baker and Malcomess.⁵⁸

This railway committee did not waste any time and within three weeks they were able to report that they had visited Alice, Adelaide, East London, and Stockenstrom. In addition, arrangements were in hand for an interview with the commissioner of Public Works.⁵⁹ A further public meeting held on 3 July again urged the construction of the Alice-Fort Beaufort-Adelaide railway link.⁶⁰

The minutes of the Adelaide Board of Municipal Commissioners reveal that the activity of the King William's Town railway enthusiasts was paralleled in Adelaide. During their meeting of the 25 February the Municipal Commissioners of Adelaide considered ways and means of presenting their case during the forthcoming parliamentary session.⁶¹ The following month it was decided to liaise with the railway committee of King William's Town in order to approach the commissioner of Public Works who was due to hold a meeting in Fort Beaufort.⁶² Finally, on 15 September 1880 a telegram from the King William's Town Railway Committee was tabled at the meeting of the Adelaide Municipal Commissioners informing them that a survey of the proposed line was about to be undertaken.⁶³

The details of the various negotiations can be found in the official sources. However, it is in the local press that we find evidence of just how intensely the above-mentioned communities put the case for the Cookhouse-King William's Town link. Accounts of the various public meetings, letters to the editor, and the editorials themselves all testify to great diligence in the face of competition from all over the Colony for the limited funds available for the expansion of the railway system.⁶⁴

The efforts of the advocates of railway expansion in the eastern districts took years to bear fruit. It was only in 1895 that the Cape Parliament agreed to a proposal to subsidize by 40% two sections of the Grand Junction Railway: from Mossel Bay to the Midlands system, and from Somerset East to King William's Town.⁶⁵ Another nine years were to elapse before this junction line became a reality. Finally, the link was opened by the governor in October 1904. An account of the colourful proceedings is to be found in the *Fort Beaufort Advocate*.⁶⁶

Racial attitudes of the colonists

The racial attitudes of the colonists in the rural areas of the eastern districts were closely linked to the degree to which they perceived members of other races as a threat to their lives and property. The authorities were thus placed under a great deal of pressure to frame laws and regulation to deal

with such matters as vagrancy, squatting, and stock-theft in a manner satisfactory to the colonists. The measures advocated by aggrieved farmers were frequently punitive and far more extreme than the legislation which was eventually framed.⁶⁷ It was through the columns of the local press that the stock owners stated their points of view and aired their dissatisfaction with the existing situation.

During the second half of 1872 feelings were running high in the districts of Fort Beaufort and Alice. The *Fort Beaufort Advocate* of 17 August 1872 carried a report that Mr William Ayliff, MLA for Fort Beaufort, had lost 600 sheep while attending Parliament during the preceding two months. While it was conceded that severe weather and neglect had accounted for some of his loss, the greater portion of the blame was placed on squatters, "... who live in idleness in the neighbouring location and are industrious only when they have a chance to steal."⁶⁸

The incident, however, that really raised the ire of the frontier colonists took place on the farm Honey Dale near Alice, in the first week of August 1872. During the previous three months the farmer, Mr R.H. Humphreys, claimed to have lost 80-90 Angora goats and a number of sheep. In an attempt to curb these losses he decided to place an armed guard at his small stock kraal during the hours of darkness. His younger brother, 17 year old Edward Ames Humphreys, duly took his turn. One night the young guard shot and killed one Mingeys whom he had heard tampering with the stock. The young man duly appeared before the resident magistrate of Alice, Mr P. Nightingale, and was charged with culpable homicide. On receiving the record of the preliminary examination the acting Solicitor-General changed the charge to one of murder and directed that bail be refused. The news of this ruling brought forth an indignant reaction from the local farming community. On reporting the matter the *Fort Beaufort Advocate* made no secret of where its sympathies lay. It announced that a farmers' meeting would be held in Alice on 13 August to see what arrangements could be made for the lad's defence and "... to consider the best means to prevent the increasing evil of stealing goats and selling the skins to purchase brandy".⁶⁹ It also stated that the Government's decision "... will have an injurious influence on the natives" and was not likely to deter them from stealing.⁷⁰

Typically, the separationists also capitalized on the wave of popular indignation. In a letter to the editor dated 12 August 1872, William Rogers of Eland's Post did not hesitate to use highly emotive language in linking the plight of young Humphreys to "lack of separation". He stated: "A change is needed in our native policy. No effective change will ever take place so long as we have the slightest Western element in Parliament." He also elaborated on the envisaged change:

⁵⁷ CA, 3/KWT, 1/1/1/9 King William's Town Municipal Council: Council minutes, 24.2.1880.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*: Council minutes, 5.3.1880.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*: Council minutes, 23.3.1880.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*: Council minutes, 6.7.1880.

⁶¹ CA, 3/ADE, 1/1/1/1 Adelaide Board of Municipal Commissioners: Council minutes, 25.2.1880.

⁶² *Ibid.*: Council minutes, 24.3.1880.

⁶³ *Ibid.*: Council minutes, 15.9.1880.

⁶⁴ *Fort Beaufort Advocate*, 13.2.1880, 5.3.1880, 2 and 9.4.1880, 13.8.1880, and 1 and 8.10.1880.

⁶⁵ MABIN, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁶⁶ *Fort Beaufort Advocate*, 21.10.1904.

⁶⁷ Act No. 23 of 1879 ("Act for the Prevention of Vagrancy and Squatting").

⁶⁸ *Fort Beaufort Advocate*, 17.8.1872.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.8.1872.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.8.1872.

"The law we want on the Frontier is a law to strike terror into the thief, the sheep stealer, the goat skinner and the cattle lifter."⁷¹

In his editorial of 28 September 1872 the editor of the *Fort Beaufort Advocate* was less vindictive and rather more positive. He stated that the problems of labour shortage, vagrancy, and indolence could be ascribed to the local black population being satisfied with too little. He advocated a two phase remedy. Firstly, an increase of artificial wants and, secondly, an efficient vagrancy law. The first phase was to be realized by the simple expedient of requiring the inhabitants of the towns, villages and farms to be clothed. It was predicted that "morality, commerce, and industry would all be benefitted to some degree by this simple regulation."⁷²

Humphreys was brought to trial before the Circuit Court sitting in Fort Beaufort during October 1872. Prior to the commencement of the trial the charge of murder was changed back to one of culpable homicide. The *Fort Beaufort Advocate* reported at length on proceedings which included the district surgeon's evidence that Mingey had been shot in the posterior and could thus not have been threatening Humphreys when the latter fired the fatal shot. He had apparently died from loss of blood owing to both the femoral and secondary arteries having been severed. The judge urged a verdict of guilty based on his interpretation of the existing law. The jury of nine returned a verdict of justifiable homicide based upon their interpretation of the general situation. The report on the trial concluded with the information that an association was to be formed "... to legalize the shooting of a thief caught in the act of breaking into any dwelling, yard, store or stable, under suspicion, between sunrise and sunset"⁷³

In this case the local press is a mirror of the attitude of the white farmers. The fact that vagrancy, squatting, labour shortage and stock-theft had become highly emotive issues is evident from the various editorials, reports and letters. In contrast, a contemporary official report on the same problems, although in substantial agreement with the press on the seriousness of the situation, is far less sanguine in both the language used and the remedies recommended.

In January 1873, the resident magistrate of Fort Beaufort, the newspaperman turned civil servant, the formidable and controversial Louis Henri Meurant, gave the official view of the situation in his comment upon a circular from the Colonial Government.⁷⁴ He pointed out that it was difficult to establish the exact extent of stock-theft as the farmers were reluctant to report such thefts for the following reasons: the legal proceedings (preliminary examination and a possible hearing before the Circuit Court) would require them to be absent from their farms and they would thus be exposed to further losses; the amount paid to witnesses was too small to cover expenses; and once a farmer had brought a stock-thief to court he suffered harassment in the form of labour boycotts and further raids on his flocks and herds. Meurant, however, did sympathize with the farming community and commented accordingly on their stock-theft problem.

"Indeed so crying is the evil, that I know of a considerable number of Farmers, Dutch and English, who have determined upon selling off, and removing to the Free State and Transvaal. If I were a Frontier Farmer, I would do the same as soon as possible."⁷⁵

As a deterrent he proposed transportation, in place of the more drastic colonist's demand that a thief be legally shot on suspicion. Meurant further pointed out that the "Pass Law" then in force (Act No. 22 of 1867) was virtually impos-

sible to enforce owing to the difficulty experienced by magistrates in determining whether or not an alleged offender was indeed a "Native foreigner". He suggested that a "Pass Law" be replaced by a far more general "Vagrant Law", applicable to all races, and enforced by an enlarged Frontier Armed and Mounted Police force.⁷⁶

Although both the official sources and the local press are in substantial agreement concerning the nature of the frontier problems it is by resorting to the newspaper columns that it is possible to gain an impression of the intensity of the colonists feelings and their punitive frame of mind.

CONCLUSION

Although it is not possible to generalize from the few editorial statements and examples presented in this paper, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions, the validity of which can be tested by further and deeper research.

In the case of the Easter Frontier of the nineteenth century the rural press does serve as a useful and, at times, reliable source. The advantages of using the country town newspapers as a source for local history include that:

- * They present abundant information concerning a variety of topics in a single document.
- * Their accessibility makes it possible for the historian to use them for his initial research, enabling him to conduct directed research in the archives depot, and thus save time and money.
- * They provide evidence of the attitudes of the rural gentry towards a broad spectrum of matters, official and unofficial, which is not to be found to the same degree in official documents.

There are also disadvantages associated with the use of the rural newspapers as a source. Besides the more obvious limitations which are characteristic of newspapers as such, it would seem that little attention is given to the viewpoint of what the Victorians would have termed the "lower classes". The attitudes and opinions reflected in the newspapers tend to be those of the commercially active element of the rural towns and districts, and of the small professional class. Even the publications edited by Africans were meant more for the educated black elite than for the masses.

An appropriate concluding comment is to be found in an address made by C.L. Weicht to the Minnesota Historical Society as far back as 1932. He said:

"Whether all local historians are sufficiently experienced to make the best use of the press as a source may be questioned. That newspapers would contain exhaustive historical material on every subject is not to be expected. Yet surely they are worthy of examination, for they yield not only historical data of a definite character but also, to use the words of a member of the staff of this society, of 'the type of record invaluable in piecing together the story of the normal life of the past.'"⁷⁷

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 28.9.1872.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 12.10.1872.

⁷⁴ CA, NA170 Secretary of Native Affairs, letters from Civil Commissioners and Resident Magistrates in Colony: Report of the Civil Commissioner of Fort Beaufort upon Circular No. 28, 1872 (dated 25.9.1872), 22.1.1873, and Resident Magistrate Fort Beaufort — Colonial Secretary, 25.1.1873.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ C.L. WEICHT, The local historian and the newspaper, *Minnesota History* 13, 1932, p. 47.