

BOEKBESPREKINGS

D. CHILD. *A merchant family in early Natal. Diaries and letters of Joseph and Marianne Churchill, 1850 to 1880. (With a narrative of pioneering travels to Potchefstroom and the Soutpansberg)*. A.A. Balkema: Cape Town and Rotterdam, 1979. 198 pp. R15,00 (GST excluded)

In November 1850 a young English immigrant, Joseph Fleetwood Churchill, landed in Durban, so founding the South African branch of the Churchill family. Coming to South Africa for health reasons at the age of twenty-three, he joined Alfred Winter Evans in a trading partnership, and four years after his arrival persuaded his youngest sister, Marianne Julia Churchill, to join him in Natal. She kept house for him until 1857 when he married Emma Gillespie. Emma's brother Hugh Gillespie, a leading Durban businessman, later married Marianne.

Joseph kept a journal and Marianne a diary and both were conscientious letter-writers, mainly to their brother William and sister Isabella in England. These documents unfold the wide range of activities in which the Churchills were engaged, especially in Natal. Moreover, they contain useful information on social life in Victorian Durban, and describe the economic problems and practical hardships of a merchant and importer dependent upon wagon transport.

Among the highlights of this book are the detailed accounts Joseph Churchill gives of his travels to Mooi River Dorp (Potchefstroom), Pretoria, and the Soutpansberg in the 1850s. To the historian and those interested in the pioneering days of the undeveloped Transvaal, Churchill's vivid description of this region and its inhabitants will be of considerable importance. Marianne Churchill's contemporary water-colours and drawings, of which some twenty have been used as illustrations in the book, add to the aesthetic character and historical merit of the publication. They consist of houses, landscapes, farmyards, street scenes, and shops in the Transvaal and Natal. Also included is a copy she made of a water-colour which is believed to be the earliest painting of Pretoria.

Deeply interested in South African history, Daphne Child has selected and edited the diaries and letters in a competent way. Notes to verify people or to serve as a background for historical events are integrated with the text, either by means of square brackets or in italics. This, however, sometimes creates confusion (e.g. p.43) and interrupts the narrative. The book has an introduction, an index, and a list of illustrations but lacks a bibliography or any reference to sources used by the editor in compiling the footnotes. Nevertheless these remarks in no way detract from the historical value and importance of this book, for the diaries and letters of Joseph and Marianne Churchill are indeed a welcome contribution to the literature on local and regional history in South Africa.