

THE DROSTDY MUSE NEWS



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Editorial

The end of another year is upon us and Christmas festivities are the order of the day. The essential message of Christmas – peace and goodwill to all men – is one that touches all of us, no matter what our personal beliefs. The values of peace and goodwill to all men could be the credo of the Drostdy Museum. Daily, visitors from all over South Africa and the world are made to feel welcome and invited to enjoy the Drostdy experience. The Museum's public programmes are aimed at making it a place where all sectors of the local community, including the local children, are given an opportunity to use the facilities, to learn, and to share their cultural diversity. Not a bad thought that museums countrywide could regard themselves as ambassadors of goodwill to all men (and women, of course!)

Fun-filled learning at the Drostdy



One of the latest public programmes at the Drostdy is providing fun for youth and a valuable learning experience at the same time. The spacious tables at Zanddrift provide the perfect place for Grade 7 school children to put into practice what they have learned about the culture of the Khoikhoi, whose tribes lived in the Swellendam area not so very long ago.



Jomien Havenga leads the lesson in Khoikhoi culture, showing examples of rock art and other artefacts, and listing the tribes that lived here, especially in Bontebok Park. Then the children make paint brushes from crushed dekriet, use ostrich shells to mix their ochre paints, and then they paint stones with typical Khoikhoi designs. Some of the work is highly artistic and a very good replica of Khoikhoi rock art.

Not only do the children go home knowing a lot more about the Khoikhoi than ever before; they also go home smiling, and taking with them the stones they have painted. What a fun way to make learning meaningful, and what better venue than the Museum to which the children now relate with pleasure. Hats off to Jomien and local primary school teachers for this innovative programme, which will be ongoing in the New Year.

Drostdy hosts carols evening



What must go down as one of the most successful carols evenings ever held in Swellendam, took place in the Museum's lecture hall on 30 November. The venue was changed from the Trades Yard to the lecture hall owing to wet weather, but that by no means dampened the spirits of the participants and audience. Museum Manager, Tizzie Mangiagalli welcomed the expectant audience at the start of the programme.



This was a truly multi-cultural affair, in which the participants included Kosie Sefoor's youth orchestra with their wind instruments, choirs from the United Reform Church, the Apostolic Faith Mission and the New Apostolic Church. The audience was richly entertained, and solo items by little Mitchell Balelo, Dr Anwiek Lategan and Mr Nigel Adams were beautifully rendered.



There was a Xhosa dance item led by Erna Ntsabo of the lovely voice, and a gospel dance performance by St Luke's Youth Group. Local cop Nicky Alberts treated the crowd to his own gospel compositions for guitar and vocals, and DRC Dominee Rev. Tolla van der Merwe opened the proceedings in prayer. Master of ceremonies Joseph Dyantyi could not have been more lively. When Leslie Howard read the scriptures in English, Joseph translated into Xhosa in what became an impromptu praise song. Lusty ensemble singing in which the audience joined provided proof that a spirit of loving goodwill pervaded at this truly South African event. Well done, all, this will be a hard act to follow! Thanks to the organisers, and Dr Lategan in particular, who played an important role in ensuring the success of the evening. Maybe next year the weather will play ball, and an even bigger crowd will light their candles at the end of a wonderful evening.

Battle of Blaauwberg commemorations*



On the 8th January 2006, South Africa will commemorate the bicentenary of the Battle of Blaauwberg, with re-enactments at Melkbos Strand of the landing of the British and the subsequent defeat of General Janssens and his cosmopolitan Batavian forces. Historians believe that short as it was, the battle was a seminal event in the history and development of Southern and Central Africa. And Swellendam played a proud role in the battle. The Swellendam dragoons, along with the Hottentot Light Infantry and the Malay Artillery Corps distinguished themselves in the bravery of their defence of Cape soil, which they regarded as their native land under the governance of a democratic Batavian Republic.

The Drostdy Museum will participate in the commemorations by organising a display for visitors. ***Please visit us early in January to enjoy this special exhibition!***

What was it all about?

On 5th January 1806, the greatest fighting fleet ever seen in Cape waters – 63 British warships and transports under Vice-Admiral Sir Home Popham – sailed into Table Bay intent on landing a force that would secure the strategic and Dutch ruled Cape of Good Hope in British hands. This first amphibious landing on South African soil was a pivotal move during the Napoleonic Wars to ensure that the Cape would not fall into French hands. But what was the political environment at the time?

In 1795, after some brief battles on the Muizenberg shores, (which were fought against a small Dutch East India or VOC force, including some light dragoons from Swellendam), the British occupied the Cape in order to prevent a French invasion. This

sounded the death knell for the VOC in the Cape, whose fortunes were already faltering. When the British reluctantly left the Cape in December 1802 in terms of the Treaty of Amiens, they handed it over to the Batavian Republic.

Under the Republic, which supported the precepts of equality and liberty, the Cape could have become the first democratic country on the African continent. Under Governor-General JW Janssens and Commissioner De Mist, the Cape was governed and not merely managed as an outpost of the Dutch East India Company. The two governors were opposed to slavery and established a non-racial franchise. Government finances were open to the scrutiny of the people, and the Islamic faith was accorded equality before the law.

The population at the Cape had become truly cosmopolitan. There were the Dutch, the Khoikhoi, who had already inter-bred with European settlers, Africans from further afield and Indonesian slaves. There were some French too who supported the Batavian Republic rather than the Napoleonic forces. All of these people were willing to fight for their rights in the Cape. Many of them were Cape-born rather than settlers or expatriates and knew no other home. All opposed a British invasion, which was then imminent.

Janssens summoned his reserves from as far afield as Swellendam. It was the worst time of the year for such a call-up – the crops were ripening and needed to be harvested, and dragoons had to travel by night to avoid the heat of the day.

All he was able to muster was a small force of 2 000 soldiers. A welcome addition was a group of 238 sailors

and marines from two disabled French warships that happened to be at the Cape at the time.

On January 7th, in the shadows of Blaauwberg, a British force of 4 000 under Major-General Sir David Baird, fell on Janssens' troops. A fierce battle ensued, in which the Cape contingent, the Frenchmen and the Batavian Horse Artillery distinguished themselves for their brave stand. The Waldeckers, a mercenary regiment, turned tail and fled, much to their disgrace. The so-called 'free Javanese' and their gunners fought a brave battle alongside the Cape contingent, using the traditional Indonesian light-swivel cannon, and swearing an oath of loyalty to the 'Bataafsche Republiek', in the name of God and the Prophet Mohamet.

What did the heroes of Blaauwberg achieve?

The sacrifice of these combined forces delayed the British advance long enough to enable Janssens and his remaining troops to retreat to the Hottentots Mountains, take up new positions and negotiate terms of surrender. The transition of the Cape from a Batavian possession to a British colony took place smoothly and relatively painlessly as a result.

It is always interesting to look at historical facts with the wisdom of hindsight, but the question remains, what would have become of the Cape, Southern and Central Africa if the British invasion had never taken place. Food for thought, don't you think?

***(The editor gratefully acknowledges the writings of Willem P Steenkamp as the source for this article.)**

And at the end of a year of hard work, it is great to be able to include on of the many positive e-mails the Museum has received as a tribute to their work ...

'Many thanks for the Drostdy Muse News I have been receiving throughout the year.

It is interesting to note the interaction between Drostdy staff and members of the community at large, all of which revolve in and around an old building. But not any old building.

Architects and historians are quick to point out that continued use throughout the years, occupied by many generations of different people, result either in a building reaching the stage of fame and reverence, or it is demolished to make way for new developments.

No doubt the Drostdy withstood the test of time and firmly belongs in the former category. Intangible surety for many in an uncertain world – a reminder that problems can be solved and then become history (if you'll pardon the pun).

I hope that the oral history project is well supported and successful – the people's stories, via this project, will enable us and future generations to understand a small part of Africa's history.

A very peaceful Christmas to you and all the staff members of Drostdy and may 2006 be a blessed year.

Regards, Helen Brosens.

And just before we too wish you all a Merry Christmas, we thought you might enjoy the following snippet:

What's in a brand name?



Do you sleep on an Edblo mattress? Do you know what the brand famous? In the 1930's Bob Connolly, Rand Daily Mail cartoonist, created the character *Old Snoozer*. Old Snoozer had a bulbous nose, a flowing beard, and carried a candleholder, and spearheaded a campaign to show that Edblo mattresses provided and even sweeter sleep. In fact, the Edblo byline was 'sleeping sweeter with Old Snoozer'. Children believed there were a real Old Snoozer and flocked to furniture stores on Saturday mornings to meet him.

Len Edelstein and Barney Bloch, who joined the first letters of their surnames to form the brand name, founded the company in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. They started out making coir and kappok mattresses by hand and delivering them by handcart, but from these humble beginnings, Edblo became the largest bedding manufacturer in Southern Africa.

Sweet dreams!

The Editor of the Muse News and staff of the Drostdy Museum wish you all a peaceful and happy festive season, and a New Year full of promise.

And please, travel safely on our roads and arrive alive!

Until 2006 then, all the very best.

--ooOoo--

Die Redakteur van die Muse News en die personeel van die Drostdy Museum wil aan almal 'n vreugdevolle en geseënde feesgety toewens en mag die Nuwe Jaar vol beloftes en verrassings wees.

Bestuur versigtig op ons paaie en kom veilig by u bestemming aan!

--ooOoo--

AmaphuphaAMnandi

Umhleli Wephepha-Ndaba I-Muse News negqiza lezesebe logcino masiko nezi-thethe lwase – Drostdy Museum lininqwenelela ixesha elimnandi, nelinoxolo, ne-Krismesi emnandi, nonyaka omtsha ogcwele ngamathamsanqa, nezithembiso. Nincede niqaphele ezindleleni kwaye niqhube ngenyameko ukwenzela nibenohambo olukhuselekileyo.

Side sibonane kunyaka ka – 2006, Okuhle Kodwa.

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AWARD: BEST MUSEUM IN THE WESTERN CAPE 2004.