

Threads of Love

Agnes Hill's grave at Holoog was always a mystery; the words 'Peace Perfect Peace' inscribed on the simple black dolomite headstone overlooking the dry, rocky land.

Mysteries often lie buried in mounds of historical facts and discovering the missing pieces that are the sinew of family history is like finding shining nuggets of gold. **Such a poignant story as this touches chords deep within, the parts of us that reach for threads of love that appear and disappear in our lifespan in fleeting moments of chance and destiny.**

The history of the Hill family from the Holoog/Groending Farm was especially interesting. Originating in Britain, the Hills made their way to the Cape Colony in 1820 as part of a settlement scheme. Their grandson, Charles Henry Hill, was born in Grahamstown and eventually trekked north to Namaqualand. There he met and married Susanna Rosina Wimmer of Steinkopf, daughter of Austrian missionary, Michael Wimmer, and Baster mother, Margaretha Beukes. (The Basters, descendants of Dutch settlers and indigenous people of the Cape, made their way northwards to avoid the racial prejudices of the south.)

Charles and his trading partner, Robert Duncan, had bought a section of land over the Orange/Gariep River in the region of the Klein Karas Mountains from Bondelswart kaptein, Willem Christian. Charles bought Duncan's share and moved with his family to the southern semi-arid land of German South West Africa. Charles and Susanna raised eight children, four boys and four girls. The sons remained to work on the farm and the daughters were sent to Britain to be educated.

Amongst the photographs in the family album were those of the well-educated Hill sisters who had all married European men **except for one, Agnes, an attractive dark-skinned woman who remained single her whole life.** Her photograph stared out questioningly from the timeworn pages as did several photographs of an unidentified male. The puzzle pieces recently merged into an intriguing and heart-wrenching story of their own.

The enigmatic stranger was a young German man, Max Kuno von Quitzow who hailed from an aristocratic family in Mecklenburg, Germany.

He traveled to German South West Africa in 1889 to join the Schutztruppe and was one of the first who arrived in the colony under command of Curt von François, the acknowledged European founder of Windhoek. Max resigned from the army in 1893, choosing civilian life. Over the years he had met, fallen in love with and become engaged to the beautiful Agnes Hill and while working on a sheep farm at Kubub, he visited the Hills several times. Around this time, the notorious Nama chief, Hendrik Witbooi, disputed the rights to the Kubub land and ransacked the farm, appropriating sheep, cattle and horses worth 60 000 German Reichsmark.

Max and his fellow workers fled to the desert coastal town of Lüderitz. This didn't deter Max from his wedding plans and from Lüderitz he informed the missionaries at Keetmanshoop of his intention to marry Agnes.

When the time drew near (March 1894), Agnes traveled up from Holoog and stayed with the well-known missionary Tobias Fenchel, awaiting her fiancé's arrival.

Max arranged to travel with a missionary returning to Keetmanshoop and enjoyed his final hours as a bachelor with friends.

One drink led to the next and when the departure time arrived, Max informed the missionary that he was a fast walker and would catch up with him at the Ukama waterhole.

When he did not arrive, the missionary sent a scout to search for him but he returned empty-handed. A few days later, a traveler's oxen became skittish along the route.

On investigation, Max's corpse was found, half-buried in the sand. It is assumed that he must have walked behind the missionary, fallen asleep and lost his way in the desert.

Realizing his dire predicament he eventually resorted to taking his own life.

He was only two kilometers from the waterhole.

In Keetmanshoop, Agnes and the Fenchels were sitting down to dinner when Anna Maria Fenchel heard knocking on the door and sensed that someone was outside trying to enter the house.

She stopped the conversation and went to have a look.

There was no-one there, except perhaps Max's spirit reaching out to his beloved as his life ebbed away on the Namib sands.

For years afterwards Anna Maria remained adamant that Max had come to say his farewells.

Agnes never married, staying true to her love for Max.

He was one of the first Europeans to be buried in the Nautilus cemetery in Lüderitz.

In the 1970s the old cemetery was relocated to Shark Island and a commemorative plaque was erected in his honour.

Agnes was to outlive him by forty years to the month, living on the Holoog farm inherited from her father, eking out a precarious existence and persevering through two wars, the depression and years of drought.

The words '**Peace Perfect Peace**' inscribed on her gravestone by her family expressed the hope that she would find the solace in death that was unattainable to her in life.

In the realm where spirits rest, the two could finally come together, joining in love and linking the threads that were too fragile for the vicissitudes of Earthly life.

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