

### **Klein Windhoek:**

Looking out over the Klein Windhoek valley, one notices the upmarket suburban houses surrounding St Paul's College and its sports fields and the students walking jauntily down the road after a typical school day. What few people may realise however is that the valley, verdant in mid-summer bounty, was once covered by the sprawling vineyards of the Roman Catholic Mission.

Long before St Paul's College was established, the Roman Catholic Mission stood on the grounds of this leafy residential neighbourhood dubbed the "pearl of Windhoek". When Curt von François, considered to be the European founder of Windhoek, arrived in **1890**, he realised that Klein Windhoek's many fountains made it an ideal place to grow vegetables for the Schutztruppe (military troops). It soon became apparent however that there was only sufficient water on the northern slopes, the so-called Waterberg ("water mountain") of Klein Windhoek. It was here that the Rhenish Mission had been established in the late 1800s. The missionaries planted a large garden with two thousand vines and a hundred citrus trees. They fled the area and abandoned the station when they were confronted by the warring parties of **Jan Jonker and Maherero**. The garden was vandalised and fell into neglect. When the German founder arrived, he ordered soldiers to see what could be salvaged and began to plant vegetables for his men, eventually handing over the gardening to the settlers.

In July 1899, the Roman Catholic Mission bought the initial three hectares of land from the settler community and built a chapel. They bought more and more land over time until they owned an area of seven hectares. At the turn of the twentieth century there were approximately 43 European settlers in the Klein Windhoek/Avis area and 200 indigenous people. **The fountains provided 670 cubic metres of water a day and by 1901/1902 the valley boasted 2000 vines for wine production.** More were planted at the mission over the years and in the private vineyards surrounding the mission grounds.

The expense involved in importing Communion wine to the country, either by oxwagon or by ship from the Cape Colony or Europe, initiated the production of wine by the Roman Catholic Mission of Klein Windhoek. **The range was soon extended to include a dry white natural wine, a semi-sweet wine and brandy.** Twenty-eight mission stations in the north were supplied from the vineyards and the surplus was sold at bottle stores and hotels throughout the country. Many prominent local personalities, politicians, consuls, administrators and members of parliament visited the vineyards and its cool cellars to sample the wines.

**In the 1960s the vines under cultivation included Riesling, Barbarossa, Burgundy, Muscadel, Hanepoort and Crystal. The Barbarossa, Crystal and Hanepoort grapes were also used for table consumption.** There was never much profit from the brandy- and wine-making, however, because of the high overheads. **Brandy production varied annually from between eight hundred to a thousand bottles and the total production was about two thousand gallons a year.** Many of the large oak casks used were imported from Germany and Czechoslovakia.

Initially the grapes produced at the mission were of poor quality but this situation was rectified over the years culminating in a prize awarded at the agricultural show in Windhoek in 1914.

When Dr Mossolow visited the Mission in 1960 to buy twelve bottles of their renowned Riesling, he was received by a long-bearded Brother, the cellar master, who showed him around and explained the production process of the wine maturing in the large oak vats. He insisted that the doctor first taste the product before completing the sale, which was presumably not too much of a hardship. As he sipped on the Riesling and looked down over the vineyards, the Brother related the history of the wine cellar, much of which was unknown at the time and Dr Mossolow later recorded it.

A boys' hostel overlooking the vineyards at the Catholic Mission was established in 1945 and in 1962 St Paul's College opened its doors. A portion of the land was cleared for the soccer field and as the school grew, more land was required for the school buildings. **The mission eventually stopped producing wine in the 1980s because of an improved transport system that allowed for the importation of Communion wine at reasonable prices. The decreasing water table exacerbated by the drought of the 1980s and the ever-expanding school grounds also played a role in the closing of the vineyards.**

As St Paul's celebrated its fiftieth birthday in 2012 and remembered its history, the forgotten wine cellar of Klein Windhoek and its well-known winemakers, Ziegenfuss (nicknamed "Bokkiebein") and Morgenschweis, amongst others, were also remembered. Looking out over the valley, it is easy to imagine, especially during the rainy season, a lush valley of vines nesting peacefully in the rolling Windhoek hills.

Ex Informanté

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