

# The Martens of Doornhoek

*The 80-year-old homestead*

IN the year 1823, Jan Thomas Martens and Anne Coetzee got married. The bridegroom was a young man of 23 and his bride a girl a few weeks short of her 15th birthday. They were married at Graaff-Reinet, a town that had already made history by declaring the first South-African Republic. The pictures of Jan and Anne today hang in the Voortrekker museum.

Thirteen years later this couple, then already the parents of what would, today, be regarded as a large family, joined that great exodus of people from the Cape which was to take its place in South African history as The Great Trek. The Martens family settled at Maritzburg and, to the east of the town, under the lee of Table Mountain, Mr. Martens staked out his claim to 6,000 acres of ground—the Voortrekker's conception of a reasonably sized farm. They called it Doornhoek. Down in the valley, where the Umsindus River winds its tortuous way between the thorn-tree-covered and sometimes frightening hills, the Martens family built their home and started their farming operations. That house still stands today, occupied, though not by any member of the Martens family.

In 1853, the British Government made a grant of land to Bishop Colenso to be used for "the uplift of the Native," and there, adjoining Doornhoek, Bishop Colenso established his mission station—Ekukanyeni—meaning the place of light. Later, but nobody knows quite when, this name was changed to Bishopstowe and this entire area is known by that name today.

Between these two neighbours, the Martens and the Colensos, a firm friendship grew which was to last long after the Colensos had left the ill-fated mission station and, in the course of time, the Bishop was to play an important part in the life of that youngest Martens of them all.

## Accountant

In the meantime, there came to Natal from England, a family by the name of Magnus. Alexander Magnus was an accountant but the indoor work and the climate of England were playing havoc with his health. He was a keen gardener and the beauty of the Magnus garden was known far and wide. His doctor advised him to go to South Africa, where there was plenty of sunshine, and take up outdoor work. Knowing his penchant for gardening, he suggested that Mr. Magnus take a course in landscape gardening, which he did at Kew Gardens.

The family then came to Natal, where Mr. Magnus got a position as the first curator of Alexandra Park, which he laid out, and there, in a house still standing in the park and which was specially built for them, the Magnus family lived.

Also addressing the meeting, Mr. E. H. Gardener, Chairman N.F.U., Central Horticultural Committee, said he thought vegetable producers should not worry unduly about the prospects of European Free Trade because nobody really wanted free trade in agricultural products. Various Government Ministers would have to resign if they broke their promises.

## Fell in love

They had a daughter, Elizabeth. A gently nurtured girl. Some time, somewhere, nobody knows how, the young Dutchman, Hendrik Martens, who had had only the meagre education then available, and the cultured English girl, Elizabeth Magnus, met... and fell in love... and married. This is where Bishop Colenso

played his part, for he married them! Elizabeth's wedding dress was her riding habit and, after the ceremony, the young couple mounted their horses and rode out to their home, Doornhoek. The bridegroom spoke no English and the bride no Afrikaans, but theirs was a long and happy marriage. English became and has remained the home language of the Martens family.

Doornhoek seemed to go far to fulfil the Voortrekker ambition to be completely self-supporting. The Martens were, even to the extent of having their own still. They could grow such magnificent peaches and apricots in Natal in those days, so huge and so full of luscious juice, that the Martens family used them to make their own peach and apricot brandy. And the beautiful copper kettle in which they did this is now in the Voortrekker Museum.

The brides of Natal farmers today might get married in Paris gowns, but the farmers can no

longer grow these peaches and apricots!

As the years went by, the family decided to build another house, and this time it was high up on the hillside. It is built of stone, with walls three feet thick, and it took three years to build. But that house stands today just exactly as it was built. There has been no need to change it other than to put in electric light and a big white enamelled stove in the kitchen. Otherwise it remains the same. In the summer, its thick walls keep out the heat, and in the winter they retain it. It is 80 years old.

Hendrik and Elizabeth had a son, Alexander Phillip, who married Hedwig Meyer. Miss Meyer's parents were the first people to buy land when the Colenso estate, Bishopstowe, was cut up. Alexander Phillip died in 1950, and since then, one of their sons, Alexander Magnus, and his wife, formerly Norma Hacking, also of Natal, have lived together in that

house. Its walls carry the trophies of many a good hunt. Massive heads of buck no longer seen in Natal decorate the walls, and the gun racks, with the old-fashioned powder flasks and the machine to make their own bullets, all give testimony to the activities of these people. But young Mr. Martens, a civil servant, has no time to indulge the honoured pastime of his forebears and the guns hang idle in the racks.

## Serenity

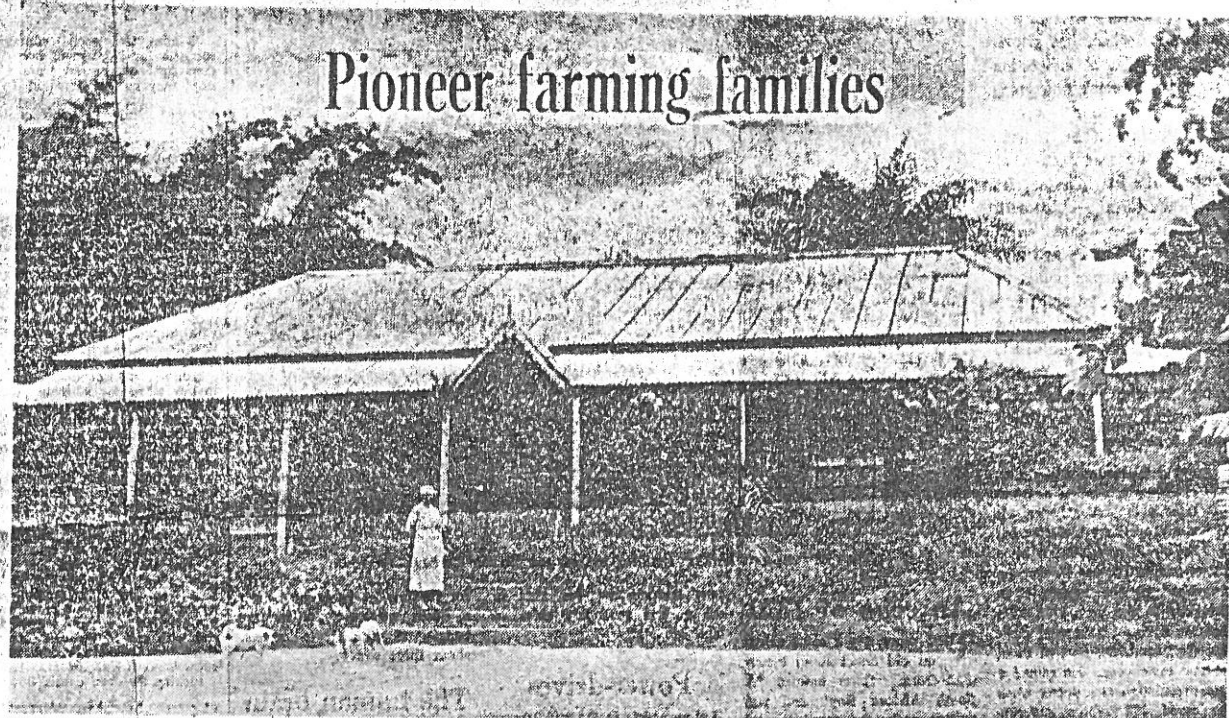
The garden of this house has a serenity that seemed to me to carry in the shadows the spirit of that long dead Elizabeth for whom the house was built. Did I detect, in the beauty of that garden, some inherited talent from her father, who gave to Pietermaritzburg its loveliest park? The trees are big and old. The lawns are green and neatly clipped. The Piet-my-vrou sends

out her endless call for a mate. Mrs. Martens, senior, wittily suggested she might be saying, "Piet maak gou."

## Example

Doornhoek is another example of the slow passing away of the once great farms of South Africa. The original Martens had 6,000 acres. His son had 3,000 acres, and when he died they were divided up, leaving his widow with 600 acres. And even one of these sub-divisions has been recently re-sold and re-divided, so that one gets the feeling that in another 100 years' time, even in what was once regarded as the limitless veld of South Africa, the man who owns six acres of ground will count himself rich.

But six acres... 600 acres... 6,000 acres... what do they matter as long as the house still dreams and the garden slumbers in the summer heat.



Pioneer farming families



My grandchildren, Larry and Sandra.

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## "Old Man" of Agriculture

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During the years 1930 to 1935 Lord Bledisloe was Governor-General of New Zealand. His innate friendliness and knowledge and experience of agriculture made a host of friends for him in that country.

In 1947, when in his 80th year, he carried out on behalf of the R.A.S.E. a goodwill mission to the seven Royal Agricultural Societies of Australia and New Zealand. Then in December of that year he left England again to pay a three months visit to farmers, agriculturalists and research workers in African countries.

Lord Bledisloe is still actively engaged in farming his own estate at Lydney Park in Gloucestershire and he is still to be seen and heard at farmers' meetings in London and at various shows and events in the country.

## 16 Babies

The Martens babies continued to make their regular appearance—16 altogether, and the youngest of them was a boy called Hendrik Jan Thomas Martens.

## European free trade and agriculture

From Our Correspondent

London, Friday. ANOTHER assurance that the British Government will not enter the European Free Trade Area if it includes foodstuffs or raises conflict with our undertakings to the Commonwealth and home producers has just been given by the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. D. Heathcoat Amory who has just returned from a visit to the farmlands of Canada.

lose quite a lot of its sales revenue through small fruits.

Also addressing the meeting, Mr. E. H. Gardener, Chairman N.F.U., Central Horticultural Committee, said he thought vegetable producers should not worry unduly about the prospects of European Free Trade because nobody really wanted free trade in agricultural products. Various Government Ministers would have to resign if they broke their promises.