

**Servant of God**

**The early years of The Reformer -**

**Andrew Abraham Stockenström le Fleur**

Produced in conjunction with the Griqua community.

2003

- 1813 The name Griqua is accepted.
- 1859 A commission set up by Adam Kok III goes to investigate No Man's Land. The commission includes Abraham le Fleur, father of Andrew Abraham Stockenström le Fleur I.
- 1861 Adam Kok III and his people begin their trek to No Man's Land.
- 1867 Andrew Abraham Stockenström le Fleur I is born in Herschell on 2 July.
- 1872 Adam Kok III moves to Kokstad.
- 1878 Adam Kok III dies on 28 April.
- 1885 The Le Fleur family arrives in Kokstad on 13 July.
- 1889 The Reformer receives a calling from God at Mount Mynjanie on 9 May.
- 1894 The Reformer is elected as leader of the Griqua people by the executive council in June.
- 1894 The Reformer visits Cape Town between September and December to make representations of behalf of Griqua land claimants.
- 1896 The Reformer puts the Griqua grievances to Sir Gordon Sprigg, Cape Prime Minister, in December.
- 1897 The reformer is arrested on a charge of inciting rebellion in January.
- A preliminary examination of the charges takes place in March.
- The Reformer is acquitted by a Circuit Court in Umtata in October.
- 1898 The Reformer and 50 burghers gather at Driekop to discuss land claims. A skirmish takes place with the Cape Mountain Rifles. The group hand themselves over at the Kokstad magistrates court.
- The Reformer is tried on a charge of attempting to wage war in April.
- The Reformer is found guilty of high treason on 29 April and sentenced to 14 years hard labour.

The Reformer takes leave of his family and is taken to the Breakwater Prison in Cape Town on 5 May.

The Reformer arrives at Maclear per postcart in the evening of 7 May.

The Reformer reaches Cape Town per train from Sterkstroom on 13 May.

A falling rock nearly kills The Reformer while he was working at a quarry on 7 June.

- 1903      The Reformer is released from prison at 15:00 on 3 April.
- 1904      The Reformer starts his organisational work among the Griqua and Coloured people on the Cape Flats.
- 1912      Stoffel Moses invites the Reformer to work with the communities in the Touws River district.
- 1916      The Reformer sends Dirk Sehas to Namaqualand to investigate the plight of people in places like Leliefontein and Kommagas before departing to Kokstad. Adam Kok III appeared to The Reformer in a vision asking: “When are you going to fetch the rest of my children in Kokstad.”
- 1917      The Reformer organises a Griqua trek from Kokstad to Touws River after having rented two farms, Doringrivier and Drie-Koppen.
- 1919      The Reformer forms the Griqua choirs at a gathering in Maitland in July.
- 1920      The Reformer founds the *Griqua and Coloured People’s Opinion* in January.
- 1920      The Reformer forms the Griqua Independent Church of South Africa at a conference held from 5 to 7 April.
- 1927      The Reformer leads the last trek of Griqua people from Kokstad.
- 1939      The Reformer starts negotiating with a certain Van Rooyen for hiring parts of a farm, Kranshoek, for use by the Griqua and a site for his burial at Robberg.
- 1941      The Reformer pays his last visit to Ratelgat.
- 1941      The Reformer dies at a house adjacent to the site of his tomb on 11 June.

## **Who are the Griqua?**

The Griqua are a people of mixed descent, with indigenous, slave and European ancestry, initially known as Bastard Hottentots. In 1813 the Rev. John Campbell of the London Missionary Station proposed that they change their name to Griqua due to the close ties many of them had with a Khoikhoi tribe known as the Grigriqua.

## **The road to Kokstad**

As a result of tension with the Orange Free State Republic and Cape Colonial governments regarding land ownership, Adam Kok III, descendant of Adam Kok I, the first leader of the Griqua people, set up a commission in 1859. This commission went to a place then known as No Man's Land, later Griqualand East, to investigate the possibility of settling there. At that time Adam Kok III and his people were stationed in the Philippolis district. Subsequently, Adam Kok III and his people began to trek to No Man's Land in 1861. Initially Adam Kok III built a laager near Mount Currie in the newly proclaimed Griqualand East before moving to Kokstad in 1872.

## **A prophet and leader is born**

Andrew Abraham Stockenström le Fleur, later known as “The Reformer”, second son to Abraham and Annie (née Read) le Fleur was born at Herschel near Aliwal North on 2 July 1867.

The Le Fleur family lived at Rouxville in the Orange Free State Republic until Lady Margeret Kok, widow of Adam Kok III, convinced Abraham le Fleur, who had been a member of the commission set up by Adam Kok III, to move to Kokstad to act as her secretary and advisor. The family arrived at Kokstad on 13 July 1885 where they stayed for a short while before moving to Matatiele to start “Le Fleur Brothers, Wagon-makers and Blacksmiths”.

### **The origin of his name**

The Reformer’s father was guide and bodyguard to Sir Andries Stockenström, Lieutenant-General of the Eastern Province. According to Griqua legend, Abraham one day saved Stockenström’s life while he was being attacked by a band of Xhosas. Afterwards Stockenström said to Abraham:

“You are a brave man. One day, when you have a son, you must name him after me. Take this five pound note; it must be used to christen the boy; if he turns out to be a coward, you must beat him to death, because a brave man like you does not deserve a coward for a son.”

Abraham le Fleur called his first son Thomas Lodewyk. When his second son was born, he named the boy after himself and Stockenström, thereby fulfilling God’s revelation to him that this was the fulfilment of Stockenström’s prophecy.

## **A calling from God**

After looking for his father’s donkeys for three days, the young Le Fleur received a calling from God at Mount Mynjanie near Kokstad on 9 May 1889. He recalled the calling: “Go and gather the dead bones of Adam Kok and call them as one nation, so they can be My people and I their God.” He was a deeply religious man blessed with prophetic vision, and because of this, he is still known in popular parlance as *Die Kneg* (servant of God).

## **An elected leader**

Andrew Abraham Stockenström le Fleur was elected leader of the Griqua people by the Executive Council of the Griqua in June 1894. In 1896, he married Rachel Susanna Kok. His concerted efforts at reorganising the Griqua people, who had for many years been leaderless after the death of Adam Kok III on 28 April 1878, led to him being given the name of The Reformer, in addition to him being called *Die Kneg*.

## **Land claims**

In execution of his calling and at the request of the Griqua people, The Reformer devoted himself to reclaiming Griqua land that had been lost before and after the formal annexation of Griqualand East by the Cape Colonial Government in October 1879. This was a continuation of the work his father had done in trying to reclaim land settled by Europeans. He visited Cape Town between September and December 1894 to make representations on behalf of the claimants. A week after his return to Kokstad in December, Sir Walter Stanford, Administrator of East Pondoland, opened an enquiry into land claims and investigated 349 cases. When Sir Gordon Sprigg, then Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, visited Kokstad in December 1896, The Reformer put the Griqua grievances to him.

## **Persecution by the law**

By January 1897 his attempts at reclaiming land had led to a perception that he was an agitator and he was arrested on a charge of inciting rebellion. A preliminary examination took place in March 1897. He was kept in jail until he could be tried at the circuit court in Umtata in October 1897, when he was acquitted.

When, after some time, no response was received from the Cape Colonial Government on the land claims, The Reformer called together 50 Griqua burghers at a place by the name of Driekop near Kokstad to discuss the issue. The Government had by now declared him an outlaw and offered a reward of £500 for his capture - dead or alive. A skirmish took place between The Reformer's people and the Cape Mountain Rifles at Driekop. The burghers had to defend themselves armed only with quince sticks, but came off unscathed and even managed to capture some of the soldiers. The Reformer advised his followers not to use further violence and the group went to the magistrate's office at Kokstad and handed themselves over. The Reformer was tried at Kokstad in April 1898 on a charge of attempting

to wage war. He was found guilty of high treason on 29 April 1898 and sentenced to 14 years hard labour at the Breakwater Prison in Cape Town.

### **The Judgement**

In pronouncing judgement on AAS le Fleur the presiding judge, Justice Jones, said:

“No matter what wrongs you have suffered, I am going to pass a severe sentence to you of 14 years hard labour, to put the fear into the hearts of the other chiefs. Do you want to say anything?”

The Reformer replied:

“Your worship, because you used your oath as a judge who must sentence guilt, and passed it as a sentence of fear, you will not leave that seat in honour.” (Later Judge Jones was dismissed for heavy drinking.)

The Reformer went on to say:

“Now to remove this sentence, there will be a Boer and British war, and British loss will be 100 000 men and your Boer comrades, 45 000.”

**“Come oh come while Christ is calling”**

**The settlement of the Griqua people under  
The Reformer**



## **A new direction**

The Reformer was released at 15:00 on 3 April 1903, as he had foretold while in prison. After his release he was offered the post of Governor-General of Rhodesia. He turned down this offer in favour of devoting himself to the calling he had received from God at Mount Mynjanie in 1889.

While working in prison a stone that he had been lifting nearly caused his death. This incident led to The Reformer devoting himself wholly to the realisation of his calling. His work was henceforth characterised by renewed attempts to unify and uplift the Griqua people, rather than reclaiming land as he had done before his imprisonment. He propagated this by developing settlement schemes and encouraging self-reliance to enable the Griqua people to express their culture, religion and traditions to the full.

## **The Cape Flats**

In accordance with his conviction, The Reformer encouraged the Griqua and Coloured people of the Cape Flats to buy their own land in order to become self-reliant. A request was made to the Cape Colonial Government to make Crown Land available at a nominal price. When this request failed, The Reformer personally bought land at Eureka Estate. The result of this initiative was that Griqua and Coloured people could own land between Retreat and Kraaifontein. These projects played an important role in building up the Cape Flats and were the first of many projects aimed at uplifting the Griqua people.

## **Settlement schemes**

In 1912, an inhabitant of Touws River, Stoffel Moses, invited The Reformer to work with the communities in that district. With this in mind, The Reformer acquired the farm Ouplaas on hire-purchase from J.D. Lowgan, a hotel owner in Laingsburg. The farm was unfortunately lost on technical grounds after the Griqua people had spent a number of years working the land. Before departing for Kokstad in 1916, The Reformer sent Dirk Sehas to Namaqualand to investigate the plight of people in places like Leliefontein and Kommagas. As a result of, amongst others, the outbreak of the First World War and the great influenza epidemic the Griqua and Coloured people went through particularly trying times. At the suggestion of The Reformer, these people were resettled in the Vredendal district. In 1916 Adam Kok III appeared to The Reformer in a vision asking: "When are you going to fetch the rest of my

children in Kokstad.” To give effect to this he organised a Griqua trek from Kokstad to Touws River in 1917 after having rented two farms in the Touws River district, Doringrivier and Drie-Koppen, for these people to settle on. A total of eight hundred people accompanied The Reformer by train, which he chartered for the trek, departing from Maclear station. This project failed as a result of the unsuitable agricultural conditions and concurrent urbanisation of the people.

## **Griqua choirs**

The Reformer formed the Griqua choirs at a gathering in Maitland in July 1919 to send out a clarion call to Griqua people across the country to unite with the words “Come oh come while Christ is calling”. In the same year, the then Administrator of the Cape, Sir Frederick de Waal, made a call for assistance for workers at the copper mines at Okiep in Namaqualand that had been retrenched as a result of the closure of the mines. The choirs performed every Sunday to raise funds in answer to the call made by De Waal. The money raised was put in a pillowcase and handed over to De Waal for the needy communities.

## **Griqua and Coloured People’s Opinion**

In January 1920 The Reformer founded the newspaper *Griqua and Coloured People’s Opinion* of which he was also the editor. This newspaper was in circulation until 1935. The newspaper was used to inform the Griqua and Coloured people of important affairs affecting their communities, as well as publishing The Reformer’s prophecies. Amongst others, his prediction of the establishment of the Coloured Representative Council was published in this newspaper. The Reformer would often use this newspaper to communicate with the authorities of the day.

## **The Griqua Independent Church of South Africa**

As a result of his conviction that the missionaries had over the years discouraged the people from nationhood and had been responsible for the loss of their land, The Reformer urged the people to start an independent church. Resultantly, The Reformer spearheaded the establishment of the Griqua Independent Church of South Africa at a conference held in Maitland on 5 to 7 April 1920 as an offspring of the Griqua National Church at Kokstad, the first indigenous church to be established in South Africa. The main aims of the Church, of which The Reformer was the first President, were to provide for the spiritual needs of the

Griqua people, maintain unity among the people and fulfil the calling The Reformer had received from God.

## **Ratelgat**

The Reformer regarded his frequent visits to Ratelgat, a farm outside Vanrhynsdorp (previously known as Luiperdskop) as an integral part of his calling. These visits played an important role in the Reformer's personal life. During his stays there he would often isolate himself at the site to communicate with God and write letters to the authorities. He also received many of his visions at Ratelgat. In addition to the prophecies, the Reformer initiated many self-help projects at Ratelgat. His last visit to Ratelgat was in 1941.

### **Examples of prophecies made by The Reformer at Ratelgat\***

- Building of Shishen Saldanha railway line
- New station at Cape Town
- Kokstad to be populated by African people
- Jakkalskraal will become the granary of the Griqua people
- The Griquas will go to Geneva
- Andrew will become leader (present paramount chief)
- Drought, political unrest and famine in Southern Africa
- British royal house will flee to South Africa and stay at the Beacon Island Resort
- Ratelgat will become a Garden of Eden

\*These "prophecies" are part of the rich oral legacy of the Griqua people. Some however, dissociate themselves from the current publication of these prophecies because they believe it exacerbates tensions and because they cannot be supported by documentary evidence.

## **The trek of the last Griquas from Kokstad**

In 1927, The Reformer led the last trek of Griqua people from Kokstad. People from Elandsdrif (Cradock), Trompsburg, Louisvale, etc. joined this trek. These people were originally settled at Keurvlakte (Nature's Valley), where they established themselves as fishermen and farmers. This trek was to play an important role in the eventual settlement of Griqua people from across the country in that area.

In 1939 The Reformer started negotiations with a farmer, a certain Van Rooyen, for hiring parts of a farm, Kranshoek, for use by the Griqua people and a site for his burial at Robberg in the future. His son, Thomas le Fleur, continued the negotiations after his death. At that time, The Reformer lived on a farm called Jakkalskraal, close to Kranshoek.

The Reformer died in a house adjacent to the site of his tomb at Robberg on 11 June 1941. It is still a regular place of pilgrimage for the Griqua people of South Africa. After his death, his eldest son Abraham Le Fleur succeeded him as leader of the Griqua people.