

RASCHER FAMILY IN SMITHFIELD – FIVE GENERATIONS

1. FIRST GENERATION IN SMITHFIELD

The first **RASCHER** to settle in Smithfield was **Ernst Rudolph Rascher** who settled in Smithfield, with his wife, Anna Alma Elizabeth Rascher (born Berner) in 1882 .

Shortly afterwards he was joined in Smithfield by his brother Ernst Jean Rascher.

1.1 MARRIAGE

Ernst Rudolf Rascher was born on 27 April 1853 in Strasburg, Uckermark, Germany as the ninth and last child of Ernst Carl Wilhelm Rascher and Auguste Louise Schlier.

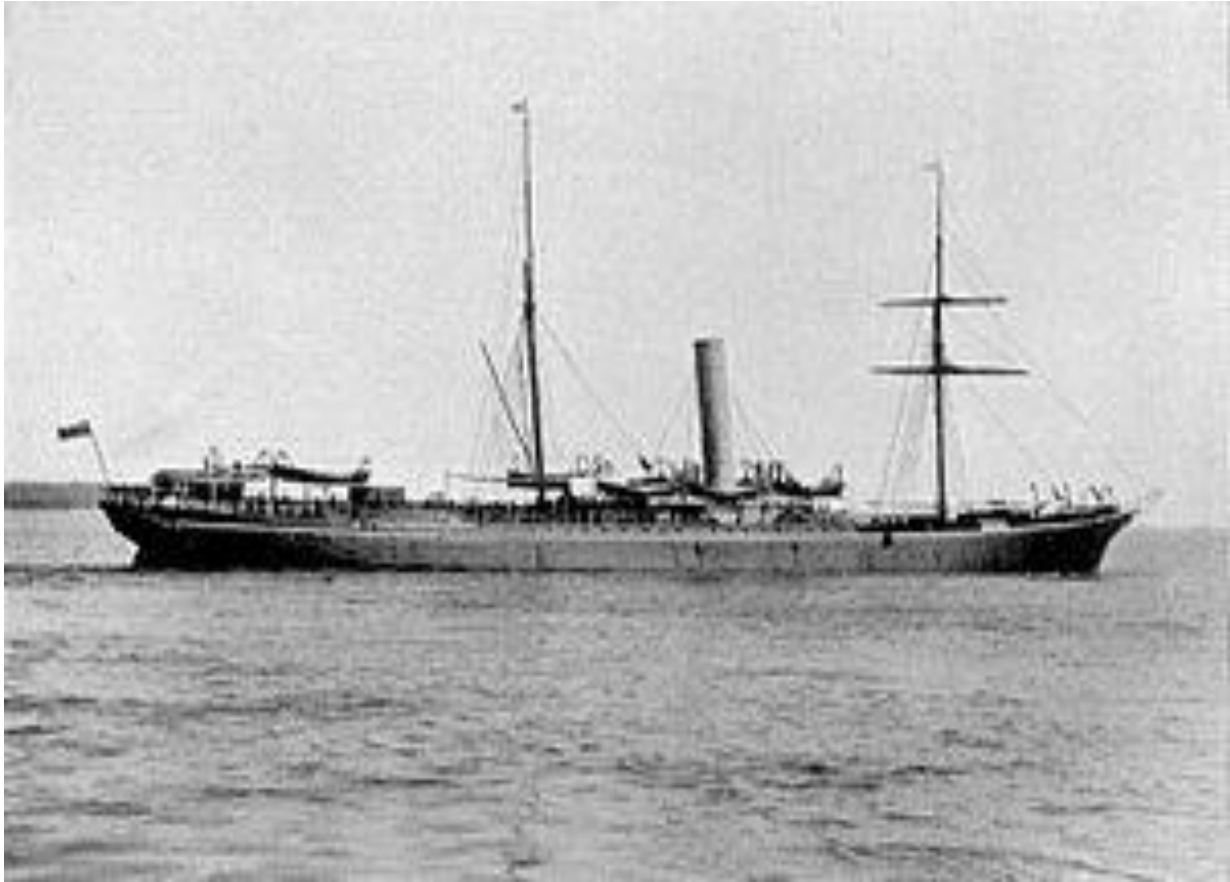
At the age of 28 Ernst Rudolf Rascher married the 20 years old **Anna Alma Elizabeth Berner** in Strassburg Germany on 22/8/1881. The photo below is of Ernst Rudolph and Alma shortly after their wedding. (Anna Alma Elizabeth Berner was commonly known and referred to as **Alma**).



They decided to emigrate to South Africa where Ernst had already spent some time before their marriage.

They came to South Africa on board the ship RMS Nubian that left Europe on 22 November 1881 and arrived in Cape Town on 9 January 1882.

The Nubian was a passenger and cargo steamer with a top speed of 12 knots. (22 km per hour). From 1876 to 1883 this ship was used for the Cape mail service



At this stage Ernst Rudolph had already travelled to and from South Africa and arrival in South Africa would therefore not have been an extraordinary experience for him.

He also had experience of the interior of South Africa, since before he married Alma in Germany he already had businesses in Winburg and Bethulie.

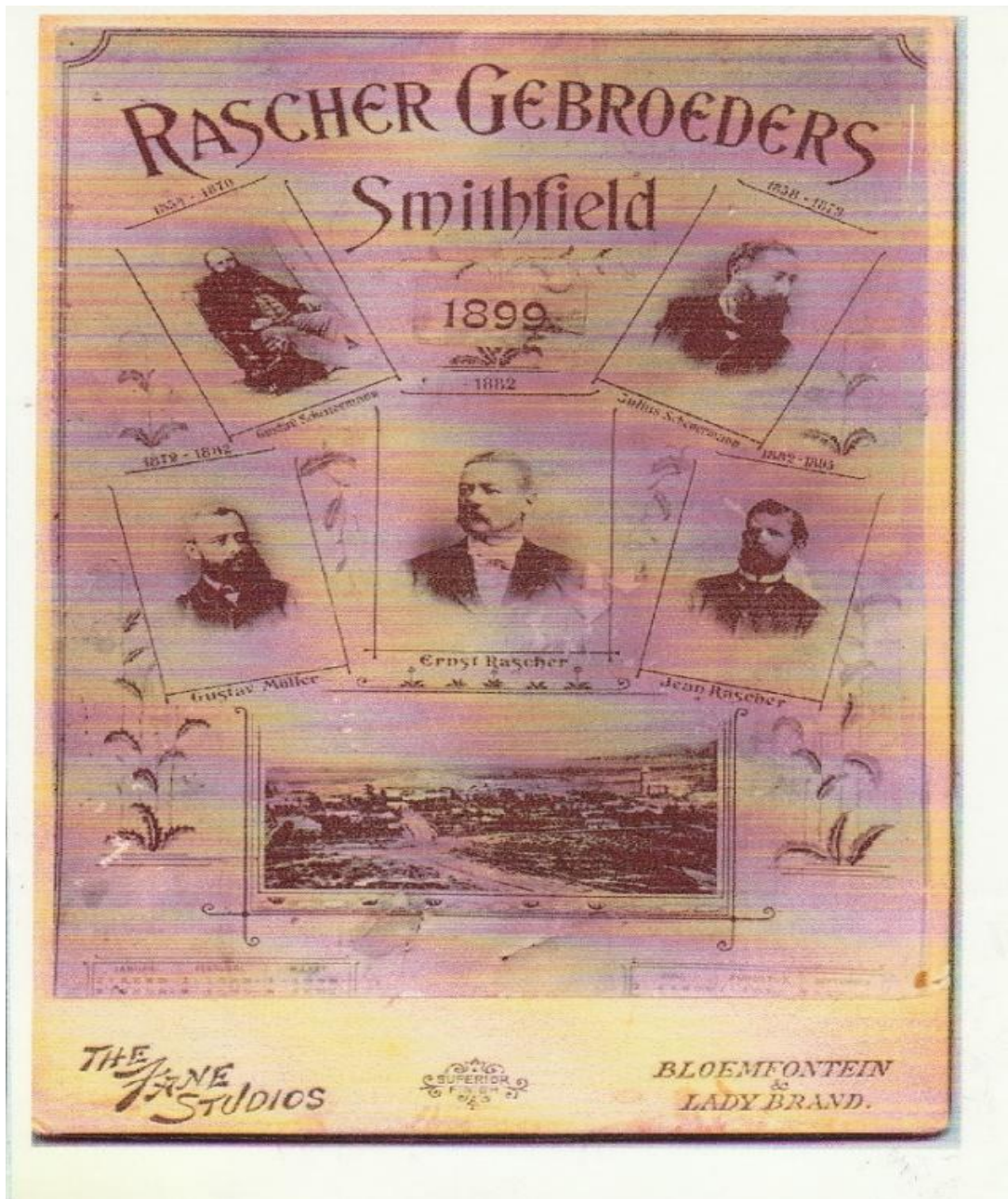
Alma, on the other hand, was only 20 years of age and had no previous experience of any country other than Germany. The South African natural environment differed vastly from that in Germany and the lay out of the towns and architecture also differed in many ways from that in Germany.

1.2 ERNST RUDOLPH RASCHER - THE BUSINESSMAN BEFORE THE ANGLO-BOER WAR.

It would seem that he had, before he left for Germany in 1881, made a deal with a shop owner in Smithfield, Gustaf Muller, to purchase the latter's business on his return to South Africa.

It also seems that his brother, Ernst Jean, at this stage also joined him in Smithfield.

The records of 1899 show that Ernst and his brother Ernst Jean, generally called **Jean**, in 1882 took over the business, a general dealer shop, from Muller. See the small print in picture below.



The picture below is of the shop of the Rascher brothers in Smithfield.



It was situated on the corner of the current and Streets.

The picture below depict Smithfield of the time.



Shortly after having purchased the shop in Smithfield, Ernst Rudolph also establish a small shop on the farm Helvitia in the Smithfield district. This shop served the local farmers of the area. It was managed by the son of Ernst Rudolph's oldest brother Ernst Gabriel Wilhelm. This nephew of Ernst Rudolph was Ernst Karl Wilhelm, called Karl and came to South Africa in 1885.

Ernst Rudolph's brother Ernst Jean passed away in 1895 in Smithfield and is burried in the old cemetry in Smithfield. Ernst now became the sole owner of the business in Smithfield and on the farm Helvitia.

1.3 ERNST RUDOLPH RASCHER - THE FARMER IN THE SMITHFIELD DISTRICT BEFORE THE ANGLO BOER WAR

While being a merchant was his main business, Ernst Rudolph also expanded his activities to farming.

These activities he conducted on three farms in the Smithfield district, namely Helvitia, (on which he had a shop), Essex, and Cetelfontein.

The main agricultural activity in the Smithfield district, being a semi-Karoo area, was sheep farming, with wool being the main produce.

Also in this domain **Ernst Rudolph Rascher** took the lead. In 1885 he wrote a lengthy letter to the paper in Bloemfontein regarding the enhancement of wool production.

In 1888 he went to Germany and other parts of Europe to look for suitable sheep to be imported to South Africa. On his return he brought with him Rambouille and Kammarol ewes and rams. Not only did he used these to improve his own flocks, but he also established an agency for the import of these kind of sheep. (See Prinsloo's book).

It would seem that his experiments with improving the wool of his sheep yielded success. In November 1889, Ernst sent examples of his wool to the editor of a newspaper in Bloemfontein for evaluation. It was thereafter reported that the wool was of high quality.

On invitation of the editor, a lengthy letter by Ernst concerning the qualities of the Rambouillet wool sheep, appeared in the newspaper on 1 February 1890.

The picture below is of the passport issued to Ernst Rudolph for the purposes of his trip to Europe in 1888.

From this document it can be learned that **Ernst Rudolph Rascher** had blond hair, a blond beard and blue eyes, that he was 5 feet 10 inches tall and that he had a scar above the left eyebrow.

We also learn from this document that he was a Veldcornet (officer in the militia) at the time and that the passport was signed by President JH Brand, who was the President of the Orange Free State at the time.



1.4 ERNST RUDOLPH RASCHER'S EFFORTS TO ENHANCE SMITHFIELD.

In 1890 Ernst Rudolph Rascher and his brother Jean decided that Smithfield could do with trees along its streets and started a tree planting project.

This tree planting project was carried on for a few years and many of the streets in Smithfield, including the main street, were lined with trees.

The two Rascher brothers also combined this action with the assistance they rendered to the farmers of the district during a plague of grass hoppers. According to Prinsloo's book about the history of Smithfield, (p.378), the Rascher brothers bought bags of grass hoppers from the farmers and used these as compost in the holes made to plant the trees in. About the tree planting project a

local inhabitant of the town wrote a poem, cited and pictured below. (See **A Prinsloo : Die Geskiedenis van Smithfield, p.378**).

The poem, dated 10 October 1890, reads as follows:

By Philip James
Butler Smithfield
1890

I send these lines in thankful praise
- And hope I'm not too late -
To Rascher Brothers of this town,
Good Burghers of the State!

Dear Sir

Your philanthropic tree planting
Sheds beauty on the waste,
That lay for years so desolate,
But now, a road of taste.

Leading to the lonely graveyard,
Where sweethearts sometimes stay
Admiring the long Avenue
Of blue gums all the way.

Yet a future generation,
When I have passed from here,
Will bless the men who gave these trees,
With labor and expense.

And your sons when ripe in manhood!
their little ones will please,
Telling tales about dear Grandpa's and
How they planted the big trees.

Don't spurn this offering (far from bright)
Accept it as the Widow's Mite.

10th Oct.
1890.

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Unfortunately, some of these trees, namely those planted along the main street of Smithfield were removed in the mid-1980s to allow for the broadening of the main street. In the Beeld newspaper of that time, the journalist, Johan Van Wyk, in his column "Potjiekos", lamented the decision of the Municipality to remove the trees which, at that stage, were around hundred years old.

elf 'n kweker van brood-
erduidelik wanneer per-
ie besit en vervoer van
benodig word omdat
s onduidelikheid daaroor

as 'n plant wettig aange-
dit net 'n blote formali-
ermit te kry.

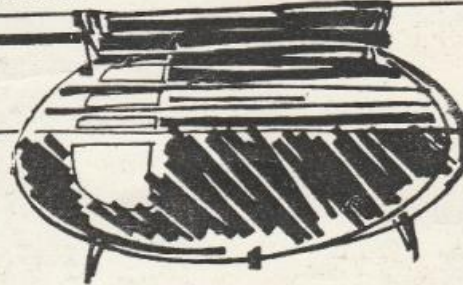
E. cupidus. Vanweë die groeiwyse
van die twee spesies word alle groot-
tes van die plante spesiaal beskerm.

Broodbome wat uit Natal en
Kaapland kom, word as beskermde
plante beskou. Spesiaal beskermde
plante mag nie besit, uitgehaal, ver-
koop, gekoop en vervoer word sonder

tansie aan die koper se naam
die verkoper se naam verskyn, asook
die naam van die plant en die aantal
plante verkoop.

Die kwitansie is die koper se be-
wys dat hy die plant wettig bekom
het. Die kwitansie dien as permit vir
die vervoer en besit van die plant.

e was . . .



kerk teen hul sin in die kele van Smithfield se
NG mense afgedruk het en die historiese ou
kerk (een van die eerstes ten noorde van die
Oranje waarvoor die materiaal met ossewaens
van die Baai af aangery is) op die ou end met
sewe dinamietkerse laat opblaas het.

En nou word daardie verminkte, eens groot, prag-
tige, gesonde bloekoms wat 107 jaar langs die
waterleivore in Smithfield se hoofstraat koelte
gegee het, finaal uitgegrou.

Ek hoop die stadsraad van Smithfield geniet dit
terdeë. Ek hoop hy krul van lekkerte elke keer
as een se laaste wortel afgekap word: en nog 'n
gapende bomkrater die vaal, bleek Hofmann-
straat 'n verdere kerkhof van eensame verlaten-
heid maak.

Kan 'n mens só ongevoelig wees? Kan 'n stadsraad
só dwaas, só vermetel en só arrogant wees?
Luister ons dan nie, hoor ons dan nie hoe die
wind die klanke van *I'll talk to the trees* oor die
toppe van die bome van ons voorvaders laat ruis
nie?

Ek hoop dit weerklink van nou af tot in der dagen

tot dag en nag in die ore van die stadsvaders van
Smithfield.

Maar alles is nie verlore nie. Saterdagmiddag
terwyl ek in bloedige, stowwerige hitte onder 'n
pragtige akkerboom voor die Smithfield Hotel
stilhou, skep ek moed. En nog meer toe ek later
die verhaal van die boom aanhoor.

Hoe Alma Elizabeth Rascher toe sy saam met
haar man, Ernst Rudolph, in 1881 uit Duitsland
na Suid-Afrika gekom het, 'n paar akkers van
die lanings in Strassburg in haar handsak saam-
gebring het.

En in die Vrystaat waar die Rashers ('n broer het
hom later by hulle aangesluit) 'n bekende sake-
familie met ook 'n winkel in Bloemfontein
geword het, is hierdie akkers langs die watervo-
re op Smithfield geplant. Die een voor die
Smithfield Hotel is die laaste oorblywende.

Die res moes ook oor die jare voor sogenaamde
ontwikkeling swig.

Ek hoop hierdie boom word spoedig ter nagedag-
tenis aan die Rashers tot 'n Nasionale Gedenk-
waardigheid verklaar. Maar tog gou voordat die
stadsraad van Smithfield hom afkap . . .

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The newspaper clipping above further indicates that Alma also did her bit regarding tree planting in Smithfield.

She planted some oak seeds which she brought with her from Strasburg in 1881 along the street in front of the Smithfield hotel.

The municipality later removed many of these oaks and the only remaining one was the one right in front of the main entrance to the hotel and mentioned in the newspaper clipping above.

This is a picture, taken in 1991, of the only remaining oak planted by Alma. However it may be, it would seem that **Ernst Rudolph** and Alma tried to enhance their surroundings. Unfortunately this tree was also taken down.



1.5 ERNST RUDOLPH RASCHER - AS MAYOR OF SMITHFIELD

Ernst Rudolph Rascher served as Mayor of Smithfield for two terms.

In 1884 the bridge between Smithfield and Rouville was completed and officially opened by President Brand. During this event Ernst Rudolph read an address to Brand.

On 20 September 1887, a meeting was held at Smithfield to discuss the question regarding the extension of the railway line from the Cape colony through the Orange Free State to the Gold Fields of Transvaal. Ernst Rudolph Rascher was opposed to this idea.

At that stage there were two opposing views regarding the so called railway question.

On the one hand there were those who opposed the extension of the railway line from the Cape colony into the interior and thus into the territory of the two independent Boer Republics, namely the then Orange Free State and the Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek (Transvaal).

The fear was that such a line would be used for the expansion of British Imperialism and was therefore viewed as a treat to the independence of the two Republics.

In addition, this group was in favor of closer cooperation between the two Republics, less dependence on the seaports of the Cape for imports and they also preferred a railway line to the seaports of the then Portuguese East Africa. (Currently the port of Maputo in Mozambique).

On the other hand, the view was held that closer cooperation with the British Colonies (Cape and Natal) would be to the advantage of the economic development of the two Boer Republics.

Ernst, being strongly opposed to British Imperialism and pro-Boer independence, was part of the first mentioned group.

Eventually the government decided to opt for the extension of the railway line from the Cape seaports through the Orange Free State to the ZAR (Transvaal).

Ernst obviously had no other choice but to abide by this decision. He then proposed that, seeing that the government had already decided to build the line from the Cape Colony, that it then should run from Aliwal North through Rouxville and Smithfield to Bloemfontein and further to the Transvaal. In this way Smithfield would at least have some benefit from it.

On 7 September 1889, President FW Reitz, who was elected to the position in January of that year, visited Smithfield. He arrived at noon and was received by the whole town. Ernst Rudolph Rascher presented an address to the President, which, according to the author Prinsloo on p. 374, was short but nice.

At 3 o' clock in the afternoon the President had a meeting with the inhabitants of Smithfield regarding the state of government affairs of the Orange Free State Republic.

During this meeting the toll agreement with the Transvaal Republic as well as the building of a railway line through the Free State were discussed.

Although Ernst, as Mayor, insisted that the line should pass through Smithfield, it seems, judging from the response that President Reitz gave during this meeting, that the matter at that stage had already been decided and that it would not run through Smithfield. In fact we know that the government of the Orange Free State had already, during a conference in Cape Town in February 1888, indicated that the line in the Orange Free State would not pass through Smithfield.

Later that evening the President was hosted to a dinner in his honor and Ernst proposed the toast.

The next year the line was built directly from Bethulie to Bloemfontein, thus by-passing Smithfield. Up until today, Smithfield is not served by a railway line.

In retrospect, Ernst and his likeminded friends were correct in fearing that such a line would lead to the loss of the independence of the two Republics. Less than 10 years after the building of the railway line through the Orange Free State to Transvaal, this line was extensively used by the British for the transport of large numbers of troops and supplies when they invaded the two Republics during the Anglo-Boer War that broke out in October 1899. After this war the two Republics lost their independence and became a part of the British Empire in 1902.

President Reitz again visited Smithfield during April 1891 and in 1892, during which occasions Ernst, as Mayor, hosted him.

According to the author Prinsloo, Ernst showed the necessary courtesies during these visits, but could hardly hide his dislike of President Reitz for the way in which the railway question had been managed.

In 1893 it was decided to host a show in Smithfield. Ernst was one of the members of the organizing committee and served as a judge for the horse categories.

From the information regarding the life of Ernst since he left Germany in his late teens during the mid-1870's, up to the closing years of the 1800's it would seem that he was a successful business man, farmer and local politician. .

Although he was a German immigrant, he became involved in local politics, being twice elected as Mayor as well as Veldcornet (Officer in the local militia) by the local community.

He and Alma had 7 children who survived babyhood and it would seem that they had a happy and prosperous life. This would however be dramatically impacted upon by the Anglo-Boer War that broke out in October 1899.

1.6 FAMILY LIFE AND CHILDREN BEFORE THE ANGLO-BOER WAR

Amidst all the commercial and political activities, **Ernst Rudolph** and Alma also had a family life.

Ernst and Alma had the following eight children, all born in Smithfield before the Anglo-Boer war.

Walther Ernst Fritz Wilhelm *28/9/1882

Wilhelm Louis Jean *7/1/1884 (He passed away in 1918 during the Great Influenza Epidemic).

Edmund Felix Ernst *24/8/1886

Ernst *June 1888 – Died as a baby in December 1888.

Alma Augusta Flora *18/10/1889 – Commonly known as **Alla**. (She legally adopted Ernst Berner Rascher after his parents, Ernst Jean Sylvester (mentioned below) and Sophia Elizabeth Botha, had both passed away when he was respectively 4 and 7 years of age.

Albrecht Ernst Herman *22/8/1891

Oswald Ernst Wilhelm *3/11/1893

Ernst Jean Sylvester *31/12/1895.

In the photo below Ernst and Alma are sitting in their garden enjoying tea and Ernst is reading a newspaper. This picture was taken in the 1890's

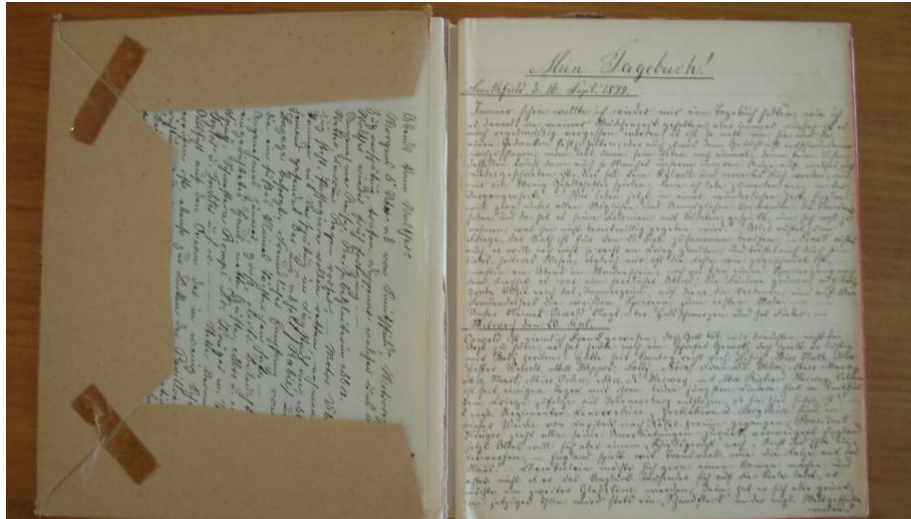


1.7 ERNST AND ALMA DURING THE ANGLO BOER WAR. - ALMA'S WAR DIARY

1.7.1 THE CALL-UP

In October 1899 war broke out between England on the one hand and the Republic of the Orange Free State and the Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek on the other hand.

Although being a German citizen, **Ernst Rudolph** joined the Boer forces at the beginning of the war.



The narrative of their lives during the Anglo Boer War continues in the diary which Alma kept during these years. Pictured to the left. (The original is in old German handwriting and had been translated into modern German writing by her grandson, **Ernst Rudolph Berner Rascher**.

The following text highlights some of the prominent events as well as the emotions reflected in the Diary.

Ernst Rudolph Rascher was commandeered on 7 October 1899 by the Magistrate, named Haupt, who personally came to see Ernst at home during the evening.



Alma wrote that Ernst and some friends were having their usual card evening when the Magistrate brought the news.

The card table at which **Ernst** and his friends were sitting during that evening is in the photo on the left.

Alma continued by telling how she felt in the days that followed. However hard she tried to show a brave face, her heart and hands were trembling and eventually Ernst noticed this. He tried to console her as best he could and promised her that he would return unharmed.

However, she wrote that “Yes, I know, when it will be the Will of God, but will it be His Will?. I know, God can protect my love from even the fiercest hail of bullets and that no enemy will be able to harm even a hair on his head. Who however knows the way of God, oh, God please do not make it for me more difficult than I will be able to endure. My soul is silent before God! Do not thousands of other women also suffer like I do? And is it also not equally difficult for our husbands to leave their wives and children without knowing what would become of them?”

1.7.2 ERNST RUDOLPH ON COMMANDO

The Smithfield Commando was mustered on 10 October 1988 in Smithfield.

The picture below shows the mustering of the Smithfield Commando at this time.
(This photo was published in Jewish Affairs, Vol 64 no 3 of Chanukah 2009, on p.9)



Mustering the Smithfield Commando at the beginning of the war. Isadore Bernitz is in front, immediately to

As can be seen from this photo, the Boers were no professional soldiers and in contrast to photos of professional military parades, no neat straight lines of cavalry were formed. Every individual just took up his position in the group wherever he wanted. They were dressed in civilian clothes.

About this event Alma wrote “The burghers of the whole district was on the market square. The woman marched from the city hall and met them there. They sang the Free State anthem. After this they placed their hats on the tips of their rifle barrels in salute to the Free State colors that bore

the motto: “Met God voor Vryheid”. After this the Commando was addressed by an old gentleman with the name of Wessels, then by Commandant Hans Swanepoel and then by Ernst.”

According to what Alma wrote, her emotions now swung between fear of the uncertain future and being proud of her husband. She described her emotions at that moment as follows:

“Although many of the Burghers are physically bigger than he is, his loyal honest eyes reached the whole group, his energy and his willingness always to assist everyone, won their hearts. I was filled with pride and love and was still before God. But my heart was filled with fear – will all this soon be over?”

After the mustering the Commando left the town and encamped only a few km away.

On their way to set up camp, a strange incident happened. A Burgher with the name of Roelof Van Wyk, was killed by lightning.

The first night on Commando, Ernst slept in his little horse drawn wagon in the Lager. Since the Commando would remain there for a few days, and since the camp was just outside of Smithfield, Ernst spent the next few nights at home. About this, Alma wrote:

“The few hours that we still had together brought us closer. Silent hours on the veranda, reflecting with gratitude on the years that had passed and had given us hope, but with fear in our hearts”.

On 11 October Alma visited the Boer camp outside Smithfield with Ernst. Regarding this visit she wrote:

“It was interesting to me to visit the camp with Ernst and to observe the kind way in which everybody interacted with the man of my heart”.

On 16 October 1899 Ernst finally had to leave his house and join the Commando. The camp had to move closer to Bethulie. About this Alma wrote the following:



“The camp had to be moved to Bethulie. Now we finally had to say good-bye. For the last time Ernst lay down on the sofa in the bedroom, surrounded by our children and I sat by his side. From time to time he looked at his watch. Then Ernst got up. We said our last good-byes in the dining room, with every heart beat a prayer. We went onto the veranda and for a few minutes sat down on our old chairs. Then the horse cart pulled up – a last kiss and Ernst got into the cart – a last wave of the hand and all disappeared around the corner”.

His daughter Alla years later related her experience about these parting moments.

She was one of the children sitting around their father. She was about to turn ten two days later, on 18 October 1899.

She said that she was not afraid at all because she had so much trust in her father that there was no doubt in her mind that he would return from the war.

There was however one thing that troubled her and that was that her father would not be with her on her birthday, which was two days later on 18 October 1899 when she would turn 10. She said that, being the only girl among six brothers, her dad always made her feel very special on her birthdays and gave her a special birthday present.

The next we learn from Ernst is from a 4 page letter dated 19 October 1899 which he wrote to Alma from Bethulie. Especially interesting to note is the way in which officers were democratically elected rather than being appointed on military merit. From this letter it can be seen that Ernst was once again elected Veldcornet. It will be recalled that at the time his 1888 Passport was issued, he was also described as being a Veldcornet.

In this letter he also tells Alma that he saw her in his dreams when he took an afternoon nap, thanks her for her telegram and then tells her how he had been elected as Veldcornet and therefore was one of the “Krygsraad” members. He sends his love to her and the children.

From the letterhead on which the letter had been written, it is notice that it reads KA Rampf, formerly E Rascher. This was the shop in Bethulie which Ernst sold as eluded to earlier in the text.

Then followed two telegrams.

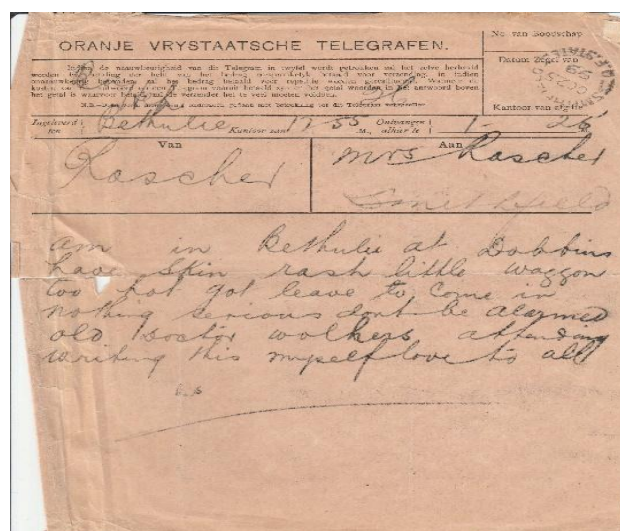
The telegrams were written in English. The reason for this was that the telegraphist, both in Bethulie from where the telegram was sent, as well as in Smithfield where it was received, might have experienced difficulties in sending and deciphering text in German.

In the first telegram, dated 23 October 1899, Ernst reported that all was well.

However, in the second telegram dated two days later on 25 October 1899, he wrote as follows:

Am in Bethulie at Dobbins. Have skin rash. Little wagon too hot. Got leave to come in. Nothing serious don't be alarmed. Old Dr Wohlers attending. Writing this myself. Love to all”.

The photos below are of these telegrams.



Telegrams were delivered in small orange envelopes.



1.7.3 EARLY RETURN FROM COMMANDO DUE TO ILL HEALTH (KIDNEY STONES)

On 28 October 1899 Alma wrote as follows in her diary:

“My dear husband was brought to me in a serious condition after he had been treated by Dr Wohlers in Bethulie for four days”.

Ernst was now back in Smithfield and suffered repeated attacks of kidney stones.

The British forces moved north across the Orange River , which was the border between The Orange Free State and the Cape Colony and by March 1900 had captured the state capitol, Bloemfontein.

The British authorities then offered amnesty to all fighters on the Boer side to stop fighting without any further action taken against them by the British. It was understood that those who accepted the amnesty offer could return home and continue their normal lives.

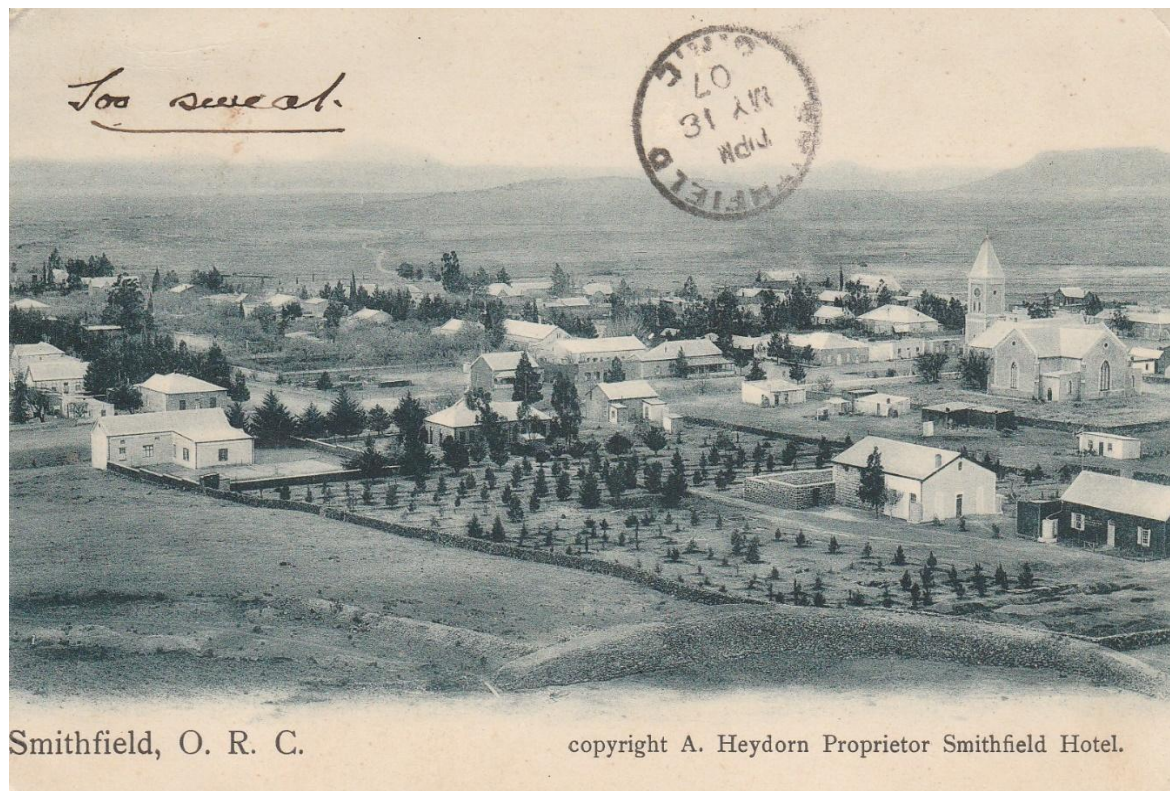
Ernst, being of ill health, accepted this offer and thought that he would be able to continue his life as before.

In the mean time the British Forces had also captured and occupied Smithfield.

1.7.4 ERNST RUDOLPH RASCHER ARRESTED AND LOCKED UP IN THE SMITHFIELD JAIL BY THE BRITISH AFTER CAPTURING SMITHFIELD - THEN RELEASED DUE TO ILL HEALTH.

On 16 May 1900, notwithstanding the amnesty, Ernst was arrested for taking part in the initial stages of the war as an officer. He was locked up in the old jail in Smithfield.

On the picture of Smithfield below, it is the white building in front to the right with the high stone wall on the side and a tree in front of the center of the building. This picture was taken shortly after the war.



Fortunately, Ernst only spent one night in jail. On 17 May 1900 he was released due to ill health.

About this event in their lives Alma wrote "One night and one day, so near to God I have not felt myself since the death of my child"

With the death of her child she meant her son who died at the age of a few months.

1.12.5 ERNST AS MERCHANT IN SMITHFIELD DURING THE ANGLO-BOER WAR

As merchant, Ernst had from time to time to visit Port Elizabeth and East London in the Eastern Cape to arrange for the importation of his merchandise.



Since Smithfield was now situated in British occupied territory, Ernst had to have the permission of the military authority to move around freely.

The photo to the left is of a permit issued on 9 August 1900, granting Ernst permission to proceed to Port Elizabeth and East London and to return to Smithfield within one month.

According to what his daughter Alla later said about this merchandise was that, two months later, in October 1900, it got laid up at Aliwal-North since the British did not want it to be transported to Smithfield. Fortunately these goods later enabled **Ernst Rudolph** to open a shop in Aliwal North. (More details about this later in the text).

In November 1900 Ernst again had an attack of kidney stones and Dr Helm had to insert a catheter. By 27 November 1900 it became so bad that the doctor wanted to inject Ernst with Morphine. Ernst however declined.

During the same month of November 1900, the British forces looted Ernst's shop on his farm Helvitia, burnt down all the buildings there and took all his livestock. According to the records housed at the Anglo-Boer War museum in Bloemfontein, this took place on 15 November 1900.

During this event Ernst nephew, Ernst Carl Wilhelm, who was, as mentioned above, in charge of the shop at Helvitia, was captured by the British. He was 28 years of age at the time and had just a few months earlier married Nora Bird. He was given the prisoner number 15457 and was sent to Groenpunt Prisoners of War Camp near Cape Town.

A few weeks later, on 6 December 1900, Ernst's oldest son, Walther, aged 18 at the time, was captured near Reddersburg, a town approximately half way between Smithfield and Bloemfontein. He was given prisoner no 16210 and dispatched to the Groenpunt POW Camp.

1.7.6 EVACUATION FROM SMITHFIELD TO ALIWAL NORTH AND THE RESCUE OF THE RASCHER VALUABLES

In January 1901 the British decided to evacuate all inhabitants of Smithfield to a Refugee Camp in Aliwal North in the then Cape Colony.

Ernst and Alma received this news on 5 January 1901. They started loading as much as they possibly could on an ox wagon and two horse drawn carts.



Their daughter, Alla, about 12 years old at this stage thought of it as a new adventure. However she was also concerned about her toys that might be left behind and therefore had her own little wooden box into which it was packed. Into this box also went the toys of her little brother, **Ernst Jean Sylvester**.

For Ernst and Alma the matter was of course more serious. Ernst was a businessman and had cash on hand. Alma also had to take care of her silver and jewels. Accordingly the cash and jewels were placed in the “safe” pictured to the right.



They could obviously not take everything with them and had to leave much of their possessions, including furniture, behind. Fortunately for them, Dr. Helm, the local medical practitioner, was kept in Smithfield for the treatment of ill British soldiers stationed at Smithfield.

Dr Helm requested Ernst to be allowed to live in the Rascher house and to establish his surgery there during the absence of the Rascher family. This was agreed upon. How fortunate this was for the survival of the furniture that forms part of the Rascher heritage, will become clear later in the text.

By 7 January 1901 everything that they could take with them, was packed and loaded on the ox wagon and two horse drawn carts and they were ready to leave the following morning.

Alma wrote the following about her activities and emotions on this day:

“In the afternoon I showed Mrs. Helm everything in the house and recommended my books to her. I went from room to room to say farewell to everything. Much went through my mind. It is so

difficult to leave everything behind, my poor husband, for a quarter of a century he worked so hard and honestly – and now?”

They left Smithfield early on the morning of 8 January 1901 and reached Rouxville by evening.

On the next day they remained in Rouxville and Alma wrote: “Today, precisely 19 years ago, I for the first time set foot on African soil”.

1.7.7 ALIWAL NORTH

1.7.7.1 ACCOMMODATION IN THE CRITERION HOTEL AND A RENTED HOUSE



On 11 January 1901 they reached Aliwal-North.

On their arrival they found that a Refugee Camp, consisting of bell shaped tents, had been set up by the Aliwal North municipality for the refugees at the confluence of the Gariep and Kraai Rivers.

These refugees were mainly from Smithfield, Rouxville and Zastron.

It was quite a large camp in terms of the number of inhabitants. A few months after their arrival in Aliwal North this camp already contained 726 men, 1622 women and 2395 children.

Conditions in the camp were very difficult. During its existence until November 1902, 546 children under the age of 15 died as well as 186 people above the age of 15.



However, Ernst, Alma and their children fortunately escaped life under these conditions in a Concentration Camp.

There were two reasons for **Ernst Rudolph** and his family being able to avoid living in the Concentration Camp.

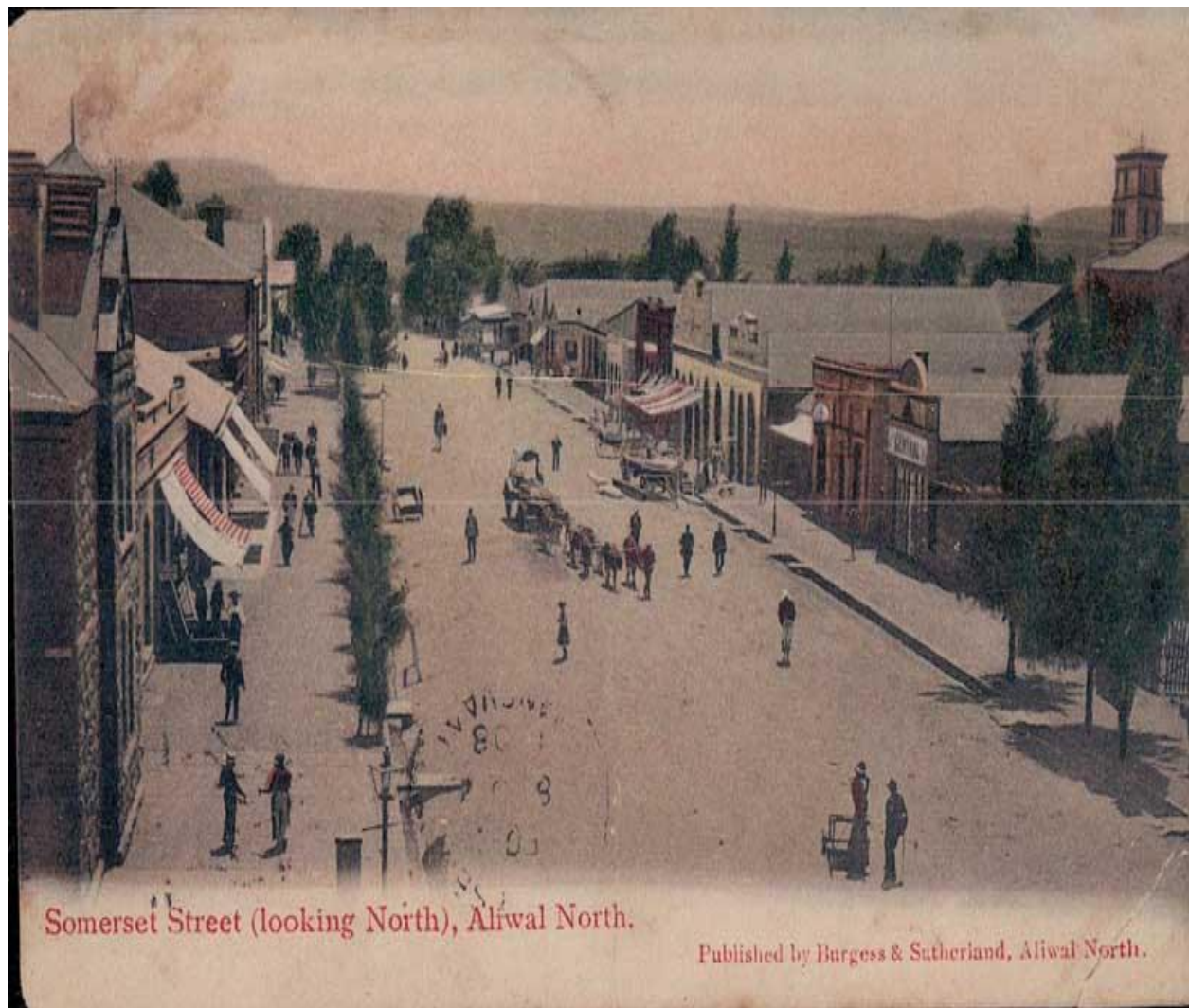
In the first instance, Ernst, Alma and their children were German citizens. Secondly, Ernst was financially in the position to pay for accommodation in the town of Aliwal North. On their arrival they took up accommodation at the Criterion Hotel for a few days and thereafter rented a house just across the street from the hotel.

About this Alma wrote the following:

“We found accommodation in two rooms at the Criterion hotel for much money, 3 Pounds 10 schillings per day, and stayed there for three days. On 15 January we succeeded in renting a house across the street from the Criterion hotel for 7 Pounds per month and moved in on the same day”.



As far as I could establish the Criterion hotel was situated in Somerset Street, which was the main street of the town.



Their chances of physically surviving the Anglo-Boer war were therefore much greater than that of those who had to live in the Refugee Camp outside the town.

Ernst Jean Sylvester, who was generally called by his third name, **Sylvester**, was now a boy of six while his sister, Alma, who was called **Alla**, was now 12 years of age.

1.7.7.2 ERNST RUDOLPH RASCHER AS MERCHANT IN ALIWAL NORTH BEFORE MOVING BACK TO SMITHFIELD.

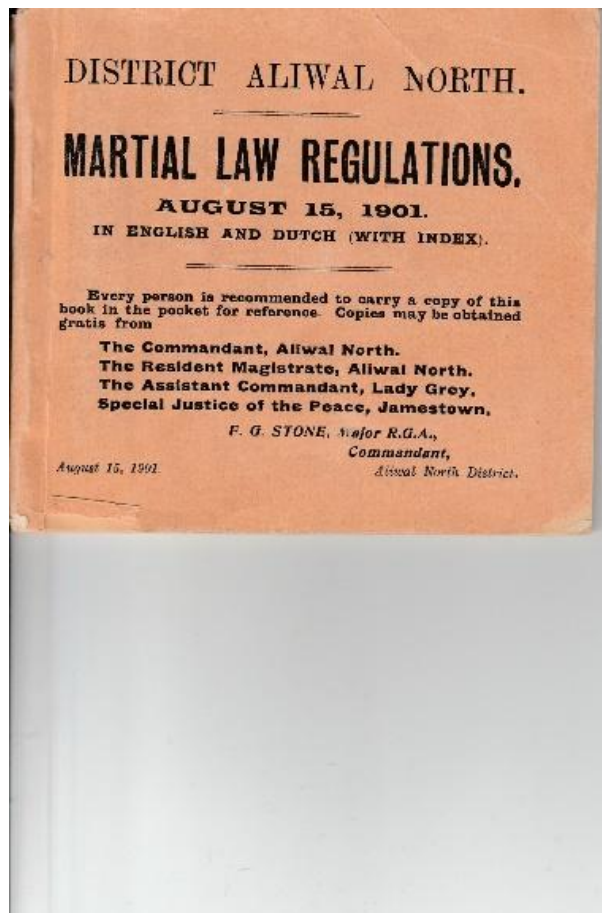
Ernst was also in the fortunate position that, due to the war, much of the merchandise that he had ordered from East London and Port Elizabeth for his shop in Smithfield, had been held up and stored in Aliwal North due to the war.

He therefore was in the position to immediately open up a shop in Aliwal North in partnership with JC Keast.

About this, Alma wrote as follows;

“31 January 1901. Ernst had been working very hard over the past few days. He bought cattle and sheep for speculation purposes and rented a shop in the close vicinity of the house. All our merchandise that was supposed to have gone to Smithfield was held up here since October when the war started and was now available to us. Our shop here is called Rascher and Keast. Ernst also established a shop in the refugee camp where Moore and Eric are helping him.”

For the remainder of their sojourn in Aliwal-North, **Ernst Rudolph** was a merchant and speculated with cattle and sheep.



Strict martial law regulations applied to everybody living in Aliwal North at the time. As a shopkeeper and owner of livestock Ernst was subjected to more regulations than others.

Among others he had to be shown the pass of every customer before he served them and was held responsible should he serve any person without such a pass.

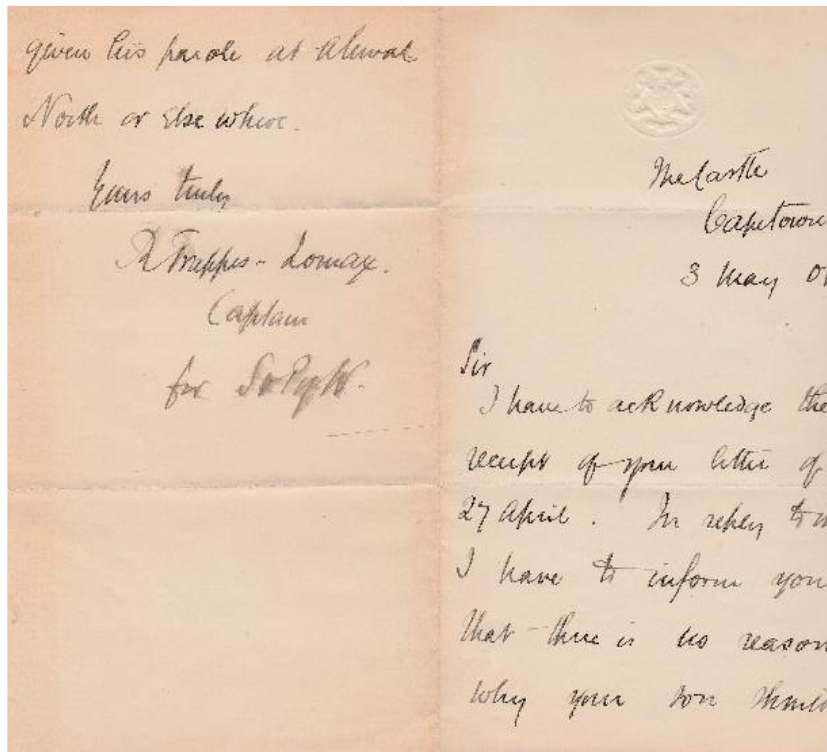
Should he serve any person in military uniform, he had to take down their rank, number and unit information and submit it forthwith to the military authorities.

He was not allowed to owe horses, donkeys, mules or oxen without the specific written permission of the military authorities.

1.8 ERNST'S ATTEMPT TO HAVE HIS SON WALTHER RECEIVE PAROLE FROM THE MILITARY AUTHORITIES AND TO RETURN TO ALIWAL-NORTH

As has been pointed out above, **Ernst Rudolph** and Alma's son, Walther, had been captured by the British in December 1900 and had been sent to Groenpunt at the Cape as Prisoner of War.

After having settled in at Aliwal-North, **Ernst** endeavored to have his son Walther released on parole.



He apparently wrote a letter to this effect to the military authorities on 27 April 1901, which accidentally was also **Ernst Rudolph's** date of birth.

Judging from the reply, pictured above, this effort was unsuccessful.

Both their son Walther and their nephew Ernst Karl Wilhelm were only released after the end of the war in May 1902.

1.9 END OF THE WAR AND RETURN TO SMITHFIELD – HOW THE RASCHER FURNITURE SURVIVED THE ANGLO-BOER WAR IN SMITHFIELD

Shortly after the end of the war in May 1902, **Ernst Rudolph** and Alma returned to their house in Smithfield in which Dr. Helm had been living during the war and where he also had his surgery.

Upon their arrival they found the house still standing and most of the furniture and other household equipment intact.

There were however some damage done by the British soldiers.

At a stage some British troops entered the house and started opening cupboards and drawers. A few of them also started damaging the furniture before Dr Helm was able to prevent them from doing further damage by threatening that he would stop treating ill or wounded British soldiers should they continue destroying anything further.

Unfortunately, at that stage some damaged had already occurred.



Standing in front of the big sideboard, one notices that the wooden panel of the right hand top door is of slightly lighter color than the one to the left. The one to the right was damaged by the British troops with an axe. It was repaired by **Ernst Rudolph Berner** Rascher in 1967, almost 70 years after the war.

On the side panel a mark left by an axe is clearly visible.

In addition they also cracked the marble top of the sideboard.



One of the sitting room chairs was damaged by having its top scroll cut off.

The top of the living room center table was damaged with an axe. It was repaired by **Ernst Rudolph Berner** Rascher in 1967.

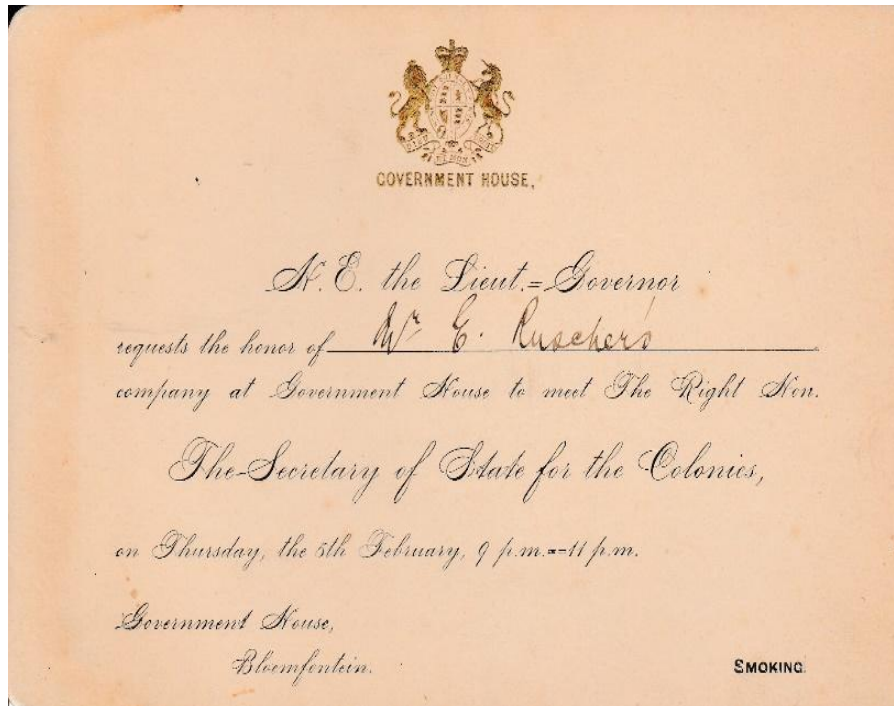
Fortunately this was all the damaged done before Dr. Helm intervened.

This is how the Rascher furniture survived the Anglo-Boer War.

Ernst Rudolph, Alma and all their children were now back in Smithfield with all their valuables and household goods intact. They, their children and their belongings had survived the destruction and ravishes of the Anglo-Boer War.

1.10 AFTER THE RETURN TO SMITHFIELD – ERNST RUDOLPH RASCHER THE “DIPLOMAT”.

After their return from Aliwal-North, **Ernst Rudolph** again opened shop in Smithfield and also continued with farming activities.



He also kept up his interest in local politics and wrote a couple of letters to the newspapers in Bloemfontein.

He retained his standing in the Smithfield community of the time and was on occasions invited by the British Lieutenant Governor of the Orange River Colony to a government functions in Bloemfontein to meet with the Secretary of State for the Colonies on 14 February 1903.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies or Colonial Secretary was the British Cabinet Minister in charge of managing the United Kingdom's various colonial dependencies. After the end of the Anglo-Boer war the Free State had of course become a British colony. At this stage this position was held by Joseph Chamberlain.

Chamberlain visited South Africa between 26 December 1902 and 25 February 1903, seeking to promote Anglo-Afrikaner conciliation and the colonial contribution to the British Empire. To these ends he met with people viewed as influential within their communities. The reception given to Chamberlain in the Orange River Colony was surprisingly friendly, although he was engaged in a two-hour argument with General Hertzog, who accused the British government of violating three terms of the Treaty of Vereeniging - the Peace Treaty agreed to upon the British and the Boers.



The two photos above depict the Government House in Bloemfontein referred to in the invitation pictured above. Before the Anglo-Boer war it was the Residence of the State President of the Oranje Vrij Staat.

1.11 VISIT TO GERMANY IN 1903

The war had however taken its toll on **Ernst Rudolph's** health. In 1903 he therefore decided to go to Germany for medical treatment at the healing waters of Wiesbaden.

What exactly **Ernst Rudolph** was suffering from is unknown. My grandmother only told me that at the stage that they went to Germany in 1903, **Ernst Rudolph** had extreme difficulty in speaking. According to her he was hardly audible and that she at many occasions served as his voice by putting her ear close to his mouth when he wanted to say something and she would then express his words in audible form.

Ernst left for Germany accompanied by Alma and their children Alla and Ernst Jean Sylvester in June 1903.

At this stage the parents of Ernst had already passed away.

Ernst, Alma and the two children stayed over at the parents of Alma in Birkenwerder in the vicinity of Berlin. They were Friedrich Wilhelm Felix Berner and Florintine Karoline Amalie Hansmann.

While **Ernst** and Alma went to Wiesbaden, Alla and Ernst Jean Sylvester stayed with their Berner grandparents

From Wiesbaden Alma wrote the postcards pictured below to her parents and children in Birkenwerder on 7 and 11 August 1903 respectively.



At the bottom of this postcard Alma informs the children that this is where their father every morning had to drink his dose of health water.



On this postcard Alma remarks that she and **Ernst** Were standing in front of the statue in the picture at the time she wrote the message and asked them to keep the postcard.

Before their departure from Germany they paid a visit to **Ernst's** brother Louis in Hamburg.

Since the late 1880's and up to the end of the Anglo-Boer war in May 1902, Louis was the Consul for the Orange Free State in Hamburg. He previously lived in Bloemfontein for some time and Rascher Street in Bloemfontein is named after him.

When the war ended in May 1902 the Consulate ceased to exist.

During this visit Louis presented **Ernst Rudolph** with three keepsakes from the then defunct Consulate, namely two engraved glasses and a paper weight.

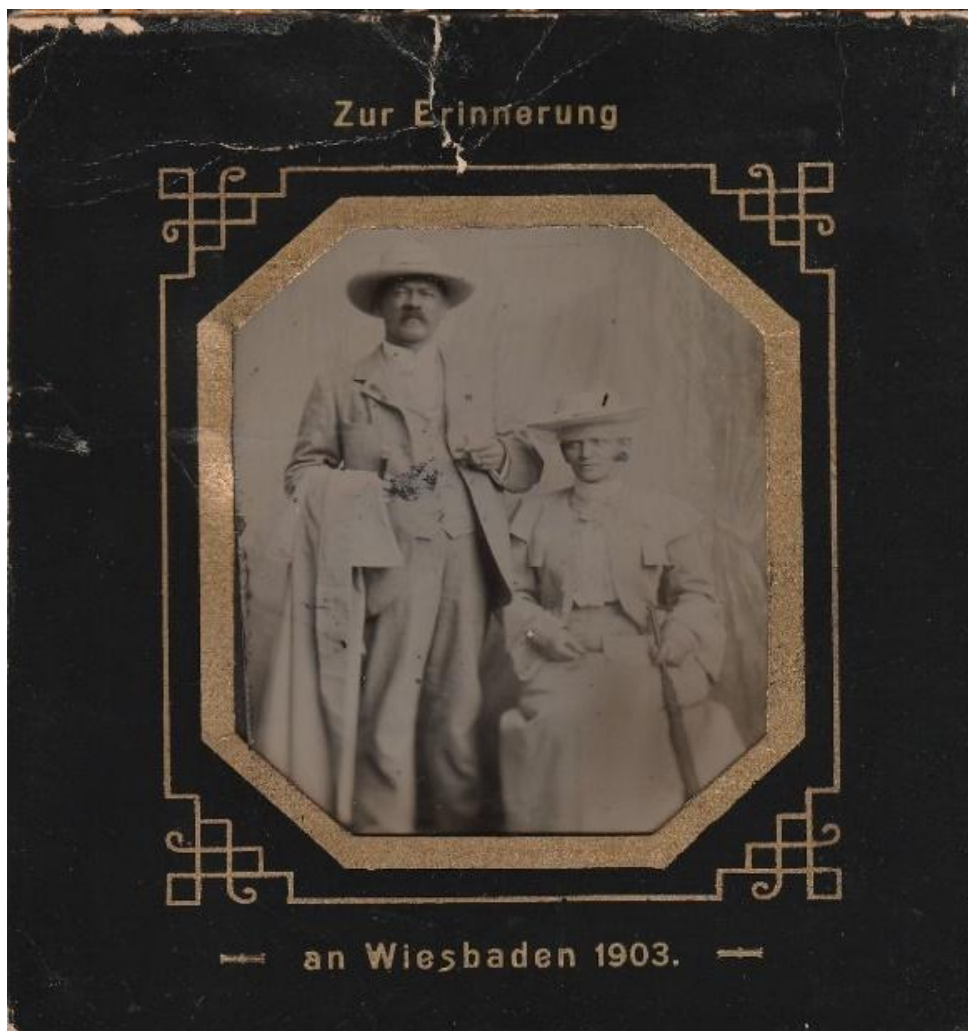


The glasses are engraved with the coat of arms of the Free State and the weight is engraved with the words Oranje Vrystaat. These items are in the Anglo-Boer War museum in Bloemfontein.

An interesting story about how Louis Rascher, as Consul, during 1901, assisted five Free State Burghers who had escaped from a British prisoners of war ship, to return from Europe to South Africa, appears on pages 181 and further in the book “Die Vyf Swemmers, by Barnard.

About Ernst’s brother Louis, the book, among other things, mentions that Louis was a staunch supporter of the Boers and that, although having been back in Germany for almost twenty years, he could still speak Afrikaans fluently. The story then continues explaining how Louis assisted the five swimmers in getting enough money and equipment to return to SA and re-join the Commandos.

According to the documents contained in the Free State Archives, Louis initiated various charities in Germany during the war through which clothes, blankets and such articles were collected and sent to South Africa to the benefit of the Boer women and children that were at that stage of the war housed in British Concentration Camps in South Africa.)



After their visit to Louis they first went to London where they did some site seeing before returning to South Africa.

The picture below is of **Ernst Rudolph** and Alma during their visit to Wiesbaden.

According to their daughter Alla, this was the last photo taken of **Ernst** before his death in December 1904.

They returned to South Africa in November 1903.

According to what Alla told me, **Ernst's** health was never fully restored. He however kept up all his efforts as a merchant and farmer.

Ernst Rudolph Rascher passed away in Smithfield on 25 December 1904 at the age of 51 years and 8 months

He was buried in the “old cemetery” in Smithfield.

1.12. ALMA'S LIFE IN SMITHFIELD AFTER THE PASSING OF ERNST RUDOLPH.



Alma was 43 years of age at the time of **Ernst Rudolph's** passing.

After his death Alma sold the shop and the farms and lived from the interest she earned. She never married again.

She passed away on 24 January 1942, at the age of 81 in the same house in which she and **Ernst Rudolph** had lived and raised their children in Smithfield.

She was laid to rest in the same grave as **Ernst Rudolph** in the old cemetery in Smithfield.

About her, Prinsloo, in his book “Die geskiedenis van Smithfield” on p.694, wrote the following:.

“Mev A Rascher, een van die mees respektêerde ou dames van Smithfield. Sy het saam met haar man in 1882 hulle hier kom vestig nadat hulle uit Duitsland weg is en sy en Smithfield was baie nou aan mekaar verbonde.

Hier het al haar kinders groot geword en hier het sy al die soet en suur van die lewe deurgemaak.

‘n Mens kon nouliks aan Smithfield dink, sonder om van haar melding te maak en hiermee le ons ook ‘n kransie op haar graf wat in die ou kerkhof rus”.

(Mrs. A Rascher, one of the most respected old ladies of Smithfield who arrived here from Germany with her husband in 1882, was closely associated with Smithfield. She raised all her children here and here experienced both the good and bad in life. One can hardly think about Smithfield without mentioning her and we herewith place a wreath on her grave in the old graveyard).



2. SECOND GENERATION AND SMITHFIELD.

2.1 ERNST JEAN SYLVESTER RASCHER * 31/12/1896 SMITHFIELD SOUTH AFRICA +16/12/1931 SMITHFIELD X SOPHIA ELIZABETH BOTHA *30/11/1893 SMITHFIELD +26/2/1928 SMITHFIELD.

Ernst Jean Sylvester Rascher was born on 31/12/1896 in Smithfield South Africa as the 8th child and 7th son of **Ernst Rudolf Rascher** and **Anna Alma Elizabeth Berner**.



He was called by his third name, **Sylvester**.

Much of the duration of the Anglo-Boer War, he spent with his parents in Aliwal-North.

They returned to Smithfield in 1902 when **Ernst Jean Sylvester** was 6 and he started attending the local school.

Ernst Jean Sylvester Rascher married **Sophia Elizabeth (Bettie) Botha**.

Bettie was the granddaughter of Adriaan Johannes Gerhardus Roux who was in his own right a leading figure in Smithfield. (For his details see under Roux below).

Ernst Jean Sylvester Rascher and Sophia Elizabeth Rascher (born Botha) had two children born in Smithfield.



Ernst Rudolph Berner Rascher
*4/6/1924 in
Smithfield.
Jacobus Wilhelm Berner Rascher
*17/1/1927 in
Smithfield.

On the photo to the left **Ernst Jean Sylvester Rascher** and **Bettie Rascher** (born Botha) are with their son **Ernst Rudolph Berner Rascher**

The photo BELOW is of Sophia Elizabeth Rascher (born Botha).



During their adult years in Smithfield Ernst Jean Sylvester worked as a clerk and Bettie as a shop assistant.

Sophia Elizabeth (Bettie) Rascher (born) Botha passed away in Smithfield on 26/2/1928 at the age of 34.

Her two children were respectively 4 years and 1 year of age at the time of her passing.

As a widower it was difficult for Ernst Jean Sylvester to take care of two such young children. The two children therefore moved in with their grandmother Alma and Aunt Alla, the latter being a spinster living with her mother.

Only little more than three years later, Ernst Jean Sylvester Rascher passed away in Smithfield on 16 December 1931 at the age of 35 years.

His two children were therefore now orphans aged 7 and 4 respectively.

Ernst Jean Sylvester Rascher's sister Alla, with whom the two children were living, then immediately formally adopted them and raised them as if they were her own children. They came to call her "Mutti" which is the German version of "Mom". She was in fact the only mother they really knew.

2.2 ALMA AUGUSTA FLORA RASCHER *18/10/1888 SMITHFIELD +1976. (SISTER OF ERNST JEAN SYLVESTER AND ADOPTING PARENT OF HIS CHILD ERNST RUDOLPH BERNER RASCHER)

Alma Augusta Flora Rascher was born in Smithfield on 18/10/1888.

As had been explained in the preceding text, **Alma Augusta Flora Rascher** was the sister of **Ernst Jean Sylvester Rascher** whose two children she adopted after he had passed away at the age of 35.

At a young age she spent some time during the Anglo Boer War with her parents in Aliwal North before returning to Smithfield where she completed school at the local school in Smithfield.

She never married and stayed single her whole life. She lived with her mother Alma and her two adopted children in her mother's house in Hoffman Street in Smithfield. This house was just next to where the Rascher shop used to be and where currently the doctor's consulting rooms are situated.

She served as the local librarian in Smithfield for 58 years. The photo below is of her portrait that hung in the Smithfield library. The caption below the portrait reads as follows:

"Born 18 Oct 1889 of German parentage. She commenced her librarianship at the age of sixteen and retired in 1963 after 58 years of devoted service to the Smithfield community"



Although she did not have formal training in music, she was viewed as a good piano player and served as music teacher to many children in the Smithfield community.

Likewise, although she had no formal education as a teacher, as from 1907, when she was 18 years of age, she was from time to time used as an assistant teacher at the local school in Smithfield.

During her younger days she enjoyed playing tennis and served on the Committee of the local Tennis Club.

In 1966, three years after her retirement as librarian, her health deteriorated and she left Smithfield to go and live with her adopted son Ernsnst Rudolph Berner Rascher who was a teacher in Koppies at the time.

Up to the age of 85 she was a keen reader. Her favourites were history books and detective stories.

She passed away in 1976 at the age of 87.

She is buried in the new grave yard in Smithfield.

PHOTO

More regarding her life as adopting mother will become clear from the text that follows below.

THIRD SMITHFIELD GENERATION

ERNST RUDOLPH BERNER RASCHER

Ernst Rudolph Berner Rascher was born in Smithfield on 4 June 1924 as the oldest child of Ernst Jean Sylvester Rascher and Sophia Elizabeth Rascher (born Botha).



He became known as “Boetie” and carried this nick-name for the rest of his life.

In the photo to the left he appears with his parents Ernst Jean Sylvester and Bettie.

His mother passed away in 1928 when he was four years of age.

His father passed away in 1931 when he was seven. At the age of 7 he was therefore left an orphan. However he was immediately legally adopted by his paternal aunt, Alla, who raised him as her own child.

But already three years before the legal adoption, when his mother Bettie passed away in 1928 and he was only 4 years old, his widowed father found it difficult to cope with two such young children and therefore Boetie and his younger brother started living with their grandmother Alma and their aunt Alla in Alma's house.



These photos are of Boetie Rascher in front of his grandmother's house and in the backyard.

Both his grandmother and his mother took a keen interest in him and regularly organised family events. About this he told me that he especially liked the walks in the "poort" with Alla during which occasions he could speak to her about anything he wanted to talk about. (The "poort" is the road leaving Smithfield in the direction of Bloemfontein.

These talks especially kindled his love for history.

Alla was the local librarian and she always had interesting things to share regarding history.

In the photo below **Ernst Rudolph Berner** and **Alla** are taking a brake during one such a walk in the "poort".



long



In the picture to the left he, his brother and a few friends are enjoying a picnic at Smithfield dam.

In the photo below, **Ernst Rudolph Berner (Boetie)**, his younger brother and Alla are dressed in the uniforms of the Afrikaner cultural organization that was called the “Voortrekkers”.

The “Voortrekkers” as organization, was established in 1931 as a Christian-Afrikaner movement with the aim of promoting and strengthening the Afrikaner culture among young Afrikaners.

Although Alma was of German origin with German as mother tongue and although she kept to the Lutheran religion all her life, she very closely identified with Afrikaner ideals of independence from British Imperial rule. The Afrikaners of the Free State and Transvaal became subjects of the British Crown after they had lost the Anglo-Boer war in 1902.





From an early age he liked to build models and to construct things. In the photo to the left he poses with a model of a farm barn

In the photo below to the left he is busy constructing a cart to be drawn by a dog while his younger brother is assisting. In the photo to the right he and his younger brother are posing with the final product and the dog harnessed to the cart.



He started smoking at the age of 16. This picture was taken in the poort at Smithfield.



He completed metric at the high school in Smithfield at the end of 1941.

He then started studying at the University of the Orange Free State in Bloemfontein at the beginning of 1942.

He however regularly went home during weekends and during Varsity holidays.

It was during one such holiday in Smithfield that he met his future wife in Smithfield.

This lady was Anna Cecilia Wilhelmina Coetzer generally known as Miensie or Miems.

Miensie was at this stage working in Smithfield as a clerk at Barclay's Bank

Anna Cecilia Wilhelmina Coetzer was born on 11 March 1924 on the Farm Haasfontein in the Smithfield district. She spent most of her childhood in Rouxville where she matriculated.

However, after school she started working in Smithfield.

Ernst Rudolph Berner Rascher and Anna Cecilia Wilhelmina Coetzer started dating in 1944.

She lived in a guest house, in those days called a losieshuis. It is where currently Buckley's guest house is.

About the car and the friends in the picture to the right **Ernst Rudolph Berner** and Miensie told me the following: The gentleman wearing the hat in the picture was the only one of this group of



friends who had a car. The three dating couples often went to Aliwal North to dance parties at the hotels there – all six of them squeezed into the car. At the time Smithfield had very little entertainment for young people.

One night, on their return to Smithfield they had a small accident in the main street.

Since it was already late at night there was virtually no traffic in the streets of Smithfield.

Aside from the car in which they were travelling down the main street of Smithfield, the only other thing on wheels in the main street was the so call “nagkar”, or literally translated into English, the “night car”. This was a four wheeled wagon drawn by a team of donkeys and used for the removal of the toilet buckets from the outside toilets. In those days flush toilets were virtually unknown in small towns like Smithfield and almost all households made use of the so called “bucket system”. A team of workers would every night remove the buckets, replace it with clean ones, put the used buckets with its contents on the wagon and later dump the contents at the sewage disposal pit some way out of town.

The gentleman driving the car in which the three couples were travelling apparently had his attention drawn to something totally different than driving and collided with the back of the donkey wagon. Chaos ensued. The impact caused many of the buckets to fall off the wagon, while the donkeys started running, spilling the contents of the remaining buckets as they went down the street. It caused a small town scandal.

Ernst and Miensie got engaged while Miensie was still working in the bank in Smithfield.

They were married in Bloemfontein in 1949, after which Ernst’s career as teacher took them to many towns until his retirement in 1978 and their return to Smithfield where they lived in their house at Hamilton Street no 2.

Ernst Rudolph Berner retired from teaching in 1979 and moved to Smithfield where he bought a house at 2 Hamilton Street.

He passed away in Smithfield on 11 March 1982. He was 57 at the time.

After the passing of Ernst Rudolph Berner, Miensie stayed on in their house in Smithfield.



She continued being a popular socialite in Smithfield. (In picture to the left wearing white dress she is pictured during a festival held in Smithfield) Foto right. In the middle.



Anna Cecilia Wilhelmina Rascher (Miensie) (born Coetzer) passed away on 12 September 1991 and was buried next to **Ernst Rudolph Berner Rascher (Boetie)** in the new cemetery in Smithfield.



FOURTH GENERATION IN SMITHFIELD

SYLVESTER BERNER RASCHER

Sylvester Berner Rascher, born in 1954, is the son of Ernst Rudolf Rascher and Miensie Rascher (born Coetzer).

Sylvester Berner Rascher was posted to Smithfield as Station Commander of the South African Police at the beginning of 1980.

Upon his arrival in Smithfield he held the rank of Sergeant.

During 1981 he was promoted to the rank of Warrant Officer and remained the Station Commander at Smithfield.

At the end of 1982 he attended the Officers course in Pretoria and was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant at the end of 1982.



During 1983 he was transferred from Smithfield to Harrismith.

Sylvester Rascher's son Ernst spent 4 of his childhood years in Smithfield and Sylvesters daughter Angelique was baptised in the Dutch Reformed church in Smithfield, thus becoming the 5th Rascher generation with direct historical links to Smithfield.
