Conclusion

This case study of how a rural Cape village on the west coast was affected by the 1918 influenza epidemic demonstrates once again the devastating effect of the disease on the South African population. It confirms the close link that existed between Mamre and Cape Town in that death rates were very similar in the two locations, as were the dates when the number of deaths peaked. Mamre was a rural village but not an isolated one. The influenza epidemic crossed all geographical and social boundaries — 70 years later this pattern might have implications for the spread of tuberculosis and possibly AIDS in South Africa. However, the facts that both these diseases have long incubation periods compared with influenza and that tuberculosis has important socio-economic determinants limits the comparability of the patterns of spread.

The utilisation of church records as a source of demographic and medical information, especially in historical populations, serves as a reminder of the usefulness of non-traditional sources in the study of demographic trends.

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Mamre — history and development

J. M. KATZENELLENBOGEN

Summary

Mamre's history spans the period of Khoikhoi habitation of the area to the present-day village. In 1808 a Moravian mission station was established there. The church remains an important feature of the modernising community, which is currently under secular control.


Present-day Mamre is a village of about 5000 inhabitants along the Cape west coast approximately 48 km north of Cape Town. Mamre is 5 km north of Atlantis, which is a newly developed dormitory town to Cape Town (Fig. 1). It is surrounded by farmland and falls within the Malmesbury magisterial district. As one of the first Moravian mission stations in South Africa, it is a village with a rich history.

Early history

When the Dutch arrived at the Cape in 1652, the Khoikhoi numbered approximately 100 000 and were distributed in patrilineal tribes of up to 2500 members. Their defeats in battle by the colonising Dutch in the 17th century and their decimation by smallpox (especially in the early 18th century)

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The disappearance of Khoi autonomy was ultimately due to the assault of the colonial system on all components of their independence: livestock and labour were withdrawn from Khoi society, pastures were encroached upon, chiefs and their followers were subjugated to Dutch law, and the Khoi culture and value system was eroded. The loss of cattle, a major factor, was accelerated through the weakening of the other aspects of Khoi society. By the mid-1700s some Khoi remained in small tribal groups while others, being freemen, offered their services to white farmers and drifted between farms.

Groenekloof, the farm upon which Mamre is situated, was originally land controlled by the Khoikhoi Cochoquas. In 1697 it became a government cattle post and between 1701 and 1791 a small garrison was stationed at what was then known as De Kleine Post.

History of the Moravian Church in South Africa

Early missionary activity in South Africa was exclusively Protestant. The first church to involve itself in this work was the Moravian Church (Unitas Fratrum), which was based in Herrnhut in Saxony (present-day East Germany). The Moravian Church worked among the Khoikhoi from 1737 to 1744 at Baviaanskloof (Genadendal). Opposition was encountered from white colonials and the local (Dutch) church authorities as a result of which the missionary, Georg Schmidt, was expelled. The mission reopened in 1792 and grew, establishing other mission stations in both the western and the eastern Cape.

White landowners often regarded the Moravian mission stations as an unwanted haven for potential workers. The missionaries were therefore criticised even when they devoted their efforts entirely to the building up of religious communities rather than to some expression of social protest, as in the case of the London Missionary Society.

Dutch, which formed the base upon which was built the modern Afrikaans language, was the common language spoken on the missions. The Moravian journal Bode is the first publication (1859) which shows signs of the development of modern Afrikaans.

The Moravian mission stations flourished and by about 1860 the majority of baptisms were of infants, indicating that the local population's religious needs were pastoral rather than evangelical. The process by which the Moravian Church in South Africa became a fully independent province of the Unitas Fratrum took a century to be completed. During that time indigenous ministers and leaders were trained and the administration of some mission stations was handed over to secular bodies.

The establishment of a mission station at Groenekloof

The motivation for the establishment of a mission station at Groenekloof came from the need perceived by the colonial authorities to establish an institution for the Khoikhoi soldiers of the Cape Corps and their families and to stem the influence of Islam among the slave community at the Cape. The Earl of Caledon was a strong motivator for the establishment of a Moravian mission station, although the Moravian missionaries, known as the Brethren, were ambivalent about the idea at first. However, they were encouraged by the reported desire for the Khoikhoi to receive instruction in Christianity, the acceptance of the government of the conditions that there would be no compulsion to admit to the mission dependants of soldiers who did not want to become Christians, and the probability of a closed community at the mission.

Khoikhoi from the surrounding farms populated the mission and after 1839 there was an influx of liberated slaves, who integrated well into Groenekloof life, having attended services there in the past. Hans Clapmuts, aged 110 and blind, who had resisted conversion for 30 years, joined the community in 1839, a year before his death.
A school was started in Groenekloof in 1833, with local residents being trained as teachers. In time the people became a close-knit community. Most people were involved in agricultural work in their gardens. Grain milling started in 1830, using a horse-mill. A water-mill was built in 1844 (Fig. 4). Some inhabitants trained in a variety of trades, and worked in the district as tradesmen. Others hired out their labour to surrounding farmers.

In 1854, Groenekloof was renamed Mamre, a name originally given to a mission station on the Begha River that had been closed on account of the border wars with the Xhosa. The word 'Mamre' is a Hebrew one meaning a temporary settlement and Mamre is referred to in Genesis as a place where Abraham built an altar to the Lord.

About a hundred Mamre citizens qualified to vote in the first Cape Parliament election in 1854, and participated in petitions against the subdivision of grant stations for freehold plots for individuals. They preferred to keep the land in joint property, for fear of ultimately being bought out by colonists. Officially the government was legal owner of the land and the mission was appointed as trustee.

Initially migration from Mamre was mainly to the surrounding farms, but later most people sought work in Cape Town, where a mission was set up to gather together all the Moravians who were living there, mostly among the Malay community. During the years 1883 - 1887 the foundations of what was later known as the community at Moravian Hill were laid. This community was situated in District Six and formally terminated in 1981 with the forced removal of the community from the area as a result of the Group Areas Act. Until the 1930s everyone in Mamre belonged to the Moravian Church, but since then other churches have established themselves in the village. At present, 90% of the population consider themselves to be Moravians. The village is administered by the Mamre Village Management Board, which was initially under the control of the church but became independent in the 1930s. Board members, regardless of religious affiliation, are elected by the community.

The legal position of home 'ownership' in Mamre has changed over the last century. The church, as trustee of state land, allocated plots to parishioners who built and maintained their homes. In the 1950s, the Mamre mission returned the grants previously obtained from the government. The Rural Coloured Areas Act (No. 24 of 1963) outlines the legislation controlling present-day Mamre. It is possible for leaseholders to change their status to home-owners. Erven are transferred by grant to individuals, who need only to pay a survey fee (G. C. Underwood, Consultant Town Planner Mamre — personal communication). Some houses are rented out privately.

Over the last 2 - 3 decades, Mamre has had little building maintenance and infrastructural development. The well-developed gardens described in historical accounts are now neglected and many houses are in disrepair. The restoration of the mill in 1973 and the recognition of the mission as an historical monument did not form part of any general community maintenance programme, and therefore did not directly benefit the people of Mamre.

Piped water only became available in 1978, following an outbreak of typhoid, the source of which was the local spring (Dr L. H. Tibbit, Medical Officer of Health, Regional Services Council — personal communication). When the Koeberg nuclear station was completed in 1985, it was ironical that Mamre (10 km away) had no electricity and no tarred roads, but had a nuclear emergency evacuation plan.

In 1971, the Divisional Council of the Cape was given the responsibility of providing Mamre with environmental and health services. A clinic runs maternal and child health, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted disease services. Swartland Hospital employs a community sister who provides limited curative care in Mamre. A health inspector, based in Atlantis, covers environmental health issues in Mamre. A private general practitioner visits the village twice a week, while a state-financed district surgeon sees patients at no cost who qualify...
for this benefit through disability, indigence or old age. Many people receive care from private practitioners in Atlantis and Darling. Wesfleur Day Hospital (Atlantis) and Swartland Hospital (Malmesbury) are the nearest referral centres for curative care.

In the 1970s a dormitory town to Cape Town was planned along the west coast to accommodate some of the thousands of people removed from 'white' areas of Cape Town under the Group Areas Act. Before the location of present-day Atlantis was finally confirmed, Mamre was considered as being a possible centre for this 'growth point'. However, a site approximately 5 km from Mamre was finally chosen, with Mamre and Pella (a nearby Moravian mission station) remaining protected rural villages. With the growth of Atlantis from the mid-1970s the Mamre community has been less isolated and has made use of facilities and services in Atlantis.

In 1987, the Mamre Village Management Board implemented plans to upgrade Mamre. The funds were raised by selling one of the farms belonging to the community (after heated debate in the community). By mid-1987 the rebuilding of the roads, electrification of the village and establishment of a small-scale rented housing scheme (short-term renting for the duration of housing renovation) was well in progress. Plans for the building of sewage works are under way, and connection should take place in 1990. Land has been surveyed in order to increase the number of plots available for building. Plans for additional community facilities such as schools, an old-age home, sports fields and recreational centres are being drawn up (G. C. Underwood — personal communication).

Conclusion

Mamre’s history spans the period of Khoikhoi habitation of the area to the present-day modernising town. Cultural, political and architectural events in the village have often reflected developments in South Africa in general, and in the western Cape in particular.

Today the village is rapidly undergoing rural-urban transition owing to its close proximity to Atlantis and Cape Town, together with the rather sudden installation of modern bulk services. Its working people have been absorbed mainly into the Atlantis–Cape Town economies, with commuting being part of the lives of many of its inhabitants.

Mamre’s rich history, transitional nature, close proximity to urban centres and fairly circumscribed location make it of interest to several academic disciplines, for example history, economics and demography. Health-related topics are also of interest in this community. The articles in this edition cover a variety of health-related issues that have been researched in Mamre since 1986.

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