

The birth of Alfred County: 1844-1870

'If joined to the Colony of Natal it would throw open a large area for industrious settlers.'
- Lieutenant Governor John Scott to Secretary of State Newcastle, 21 November 1860.

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On 1 January 1866 Acting-Lieutenant Governor Colonel John Jarvis Bisset, in the company of the Secretary for Native Affairs, Sir Theophilus Shepstone, the Colonial Secretary, Major David Erskine, the Surveyor-General, Dr PC Sutherland, an officer and seven men from the Royal Artillery, an NCO and twelve men from the 99th Regiment and a twelve pound howitzer, assembled on the banks of the Mtamvuna river. Also present was Griqua chief Adam Kok with 200 mounted men. Following a 21 gun salute delivered by the Royal Artillery, Colonel Bisset formally declared the annexation to the Colony of Natal of the territory known as Nomansland.¹ Its new name was Alfred County, named after the second son of Queen Victoria, Prince Alfred, Duke of Saxe-Coburg Gotha and Edinburgh, who had visited Natal in 1860. Almost 1,550 square miles in extent, Alfred County extended Natal's southern border from the Mzimkulu to the Mtamvuna river and reached westward to the Ingeli range of mountains.²

The annexation brought to an end what the *Mercury* described as 'an anomalous state' which had characterised Natal's southern border since its inception as a colony. By 1865 Nomansland was described as 'a refuge for the destitute where crime, licence and vice in all its forms find a fit and safe sanctuary.'³ The ivory trade was the primary attraction for white settlers, Henry Francis Fynn himself having been involved in the late 1820s. With the proliferation of firearms, by the 1850s the elephant population had been exterminated.⁴ British annexation, in the words of a correspondent of the *Natal Witness*, would 'put a stop to the stealing and murderous propensities' which, he claimed, were common in the territory.⁵ British presence on the Mzimkulu frontier in 1865 comprised just three policemen under command of a Captain Allison. Although members of the Natal Mounted Police, they did not have horses.⁶ Yet when a call for the appointment of a field cornet was made so as to improve security, the official response was that there was no necessity.⁷

The apparent decisiveness displayed by Bisset in annexing Nomansland, however, was not typical of Britain's approach to colonisation. John Galbraith has noted that British policy in southern Africa was characterized by material and humanitarian interests which were difficult to reconcile. As such they 'contributed to aggravation rather than to solution of the frontier problem' and, consequently, 'British intervention on the frontiers was weak and ineffectual.'⁸

Uncertainty and confusion had coloured British policy with regard to Nomansland since 1844 when the Cape governor, Sir Peregrine Maitland, entered into a treaty with Faku, chief of the Amapondo, regarding the territory between the Mtata and Mzimkulu rivers known as Kafirland. In terms of that treaty, Britain

¹ Select Document No. 25, presented to the Natal Legislative Council, 6 July 1866. Bisset to Cardwell, 16 January 1866, 89-91.

² R Russell, *Natal: The land and its story*, (Pietermaritzburg, 1904), 6.

³ *Natal Mercury*, 22 April 1865.

⁴ William Beinart, 'Production and the material basis of chieftainship: Pondoland 1830-1880,' in S Marks and A Atmore, (eds.), *Economy and Society in pre-industrial South Africa*, (London, 1980), 128, 138.

⁵ *Natal Witness*, 14 March 1862.

⁶ *Natal Mercury*, 22 April 1865.

⁷ CSO 201, No. 866, 14 June 1864.

⁸ JS Galbraith, *Reluctant Empire: British policy on the South African frontier 1834-1854*, (Westport, Connecticut, 1963) 4-5.

agreed to forego claims to any part of Kafirland whilst at the same time agreeing to protect Faku from 'unjust and unprovoked aggressions.' Faku, in turn, agreed to allow livestock stolen from British territory and traced to Kafirland to be returned, failing which he would be liable to compensate fully for the stolen property.⁹ The problem with Maitland's treaty was that Faku occupied only a part of Kafirland. His authority did not extend to the strip of land between the St John's River and the Mzimkulu, which was occupied by an assortment of refugees and smaller African tribes who had no allegiance to Faku. For the

British they constituted a problem. Governor Scott noted in 1860 that these groups made a living out of 'continued depredations upon the border farmers in Natal,' and the Natal government had called upon Faku to 'suppress these robberies and restore the stolen property.' In response, Faku pleaded that he had no authority over those perpetrating stock theft and that the stolen property was not amongst his own people. From the colonial point of view, the 1844 agreement with Faku needed drastic revision and in February 1850 Crown Prosecutor Walter Harding was dispatched to Faku's residence to sign a new treaty. In the presence of the missionary the Reverend Thomas Jenkins and subordinate chiefs, Faku ceded the territory between the Mtamvuna and the Mzimkulu to Natal.¹⁰

According to Scott, however, the matter was never finalised. Although the 1850 treaty documentation had been sent to the Cape governor nothing further materialised.¹¹ Ten years later in 1860 when Scott commenced a series of exchanges with the Colonial Office in London on the subject, law and order in the territory, which had come to be known as Nomansland, had deteriorated considerably. In his November 1860 despatch to the Secretary of State for Colonies, the Duke of Newcastle, Scott expressed alarm at the 'lawlessness and turbulence' which prevailed in the area. He cited the presence of armed and mounted gangs which traded gunpowder and firearms with other lawless elements beyond the Drakensberg mountains. On that premise Scott urged Newcastle to extend British authority over Nomansland adding that Natal could manage it 'without any risk or cost both of which may have to be incurred if it is allowed to... continue unchecked.'¹² Newcastle's response was sympathetic. However, he requested an accurate description of the south western boundary of the territory before any proclamation of annexation could be made.¹³ The entry of a new stakeholder at this juncture complicated the issue.

Cape governor Sir George Grey had given his assent to Adam Kok of the Griqua tribe to occupy a tract of land to the south-eastern side of the Drakenberg between the sources of the Mzimkulu and the Mzimvubu rivers. Grey's assent was based partly on the opinion that Faku had not intended to cede Nomansland to Natal and also as compensation to the Griquas for their loss of territory on the south-western border of the Orange Free State.¹⁴ Incensed at this turn of events, Scott disputed Grey's claim that Faku had not willingly ceded the Nomanland tract to Natal. In Scott's view, Grey's undertaking to Kok would 'lead to many complications which may act injuriously on this Colony.'¹⁵ Wary of the diplomatic row which was brewing, Newcastle advised that matters be put on hold whilst he engaged in an exchange of despatches between Grey and Kok.¹⁶ Further aggravating the situation was that Natal's south western boundary had not been properly surveyed.¹⁷ This did not prevent Scott from asserting that Natal still had the right to

⁹ Select Document No. 25, presented to the Natal Legislative Council, 6 July 1866. Scott to Newcastle, 23 November 1860, 3-4. Scott was citing the treaty entered into between Maitland and Faku on 23 November 1844.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³ Newcastle to Scott, 26 December 1860, Natal No. 107.

¹⁴ J Robinson, *A life time in South Africa; being the recollections of the first premier of Natal*, (London, 1900), 225.

¹⁵ Scott to Newcastle, 27 March 1861, Natal No. 13.

¹⁶ Newcastle to Scott, 4 May 1861, Natal No. 123.

¹⁷ A Duminy, *Mapping South Africa: a historical survey of South African maps and charts*, (Johannesburg, 2011), 86.

extend control over Nomansland. To press home the need for decisive action he dispatched reports from the resident magistrates of Upper and Lower Mkomanzi in which they emphasised the disordered state of affairs to the south of Natal's borders.¹⁸ Grey's departure as Cape governor and his replacement by Sir Philip Wodehouse at the end of 1861 did not lend momentum to events. No sooner had Newcastle informed Wodehouse that Nomansland would be annexed to Natal,¹⁹ a new stumbling block appeared: the exact area to which Kok and his tribe were to be relocated. Until those details were finalised, Wodehouse asked Scott to defer any move to annex Nomansland.²⁰

Scott made no attempt to conceal his exasperation. In a dispatch to Wodehouse he stated that he found it 'objectionable' that continued delays were preventing Natal from annexing Nomansland; that more than a year had elapsed since he had first expressed concern about the 'lawless' conditions on the Colony's southern borders.²¹ He reiterated those views to Newcastle urging his superior to recognise that annexation had become 'very necessary' in the light of ongoing lawlessness.²² Wodehouse took exception to Scott's remarks and in told him unequivocally that until the commission assigned to finalise Adam Kok's territorial boundaries had completed its work, Scott would have to endure 'the prolongation for a few months of the disorders' in Nomansland.²³ Scott remained unbowed: 'I certainly acquiesce in this fresh delay with very much regret,' he replied to Wodehouse.²⁴ The Natal Governor's position was not helped by a subsequent dispatch from Newcastle in which Scott was told that where matters of 'native policy' were concerned, Wodehouse's 'judgment must prevail.'²⁵ The full import of Newcastle's shift in policy struck Scott almost immediately. This occurred when Wodehouse informed him that because a stalemate had been reached in trying to establish the precise location of Kok's western boundary, 'it becomes my duty to inform you that it appears impracticableto carry out the annexation to Natal of the land ceded by Faku.'²⁶

The 'disorders' to which Wodehouse referred, stemmed to an extent from what William Beinart has explained as 'points of tension in the polity' in relations between chiefs and people. By the 1860s the Paramount Chief's ability to demand labour from kraals had become limited to short periods only. In a pastoral economy the decentralization of stockholding contributed to a diffusion of political authority.²⁷ 'As settlement became more dispersed....the basic units of settlement in which all the people of Pondoland lived, increasingly became the nuclei of productive activities.'²⁸ Lung-sickness among Pondo herds may have contributed to cattle theft. In any event, a consequence of the commercial boom in Natal in the early 1860s was a heightened demand for draught oxen to power wagon transport.²⁹

Newcastle then declared that imperial considerations would determine policy and strategy. He wrote to Scott in December 1862 that as long as Britain's colonies in South Africa were 'dependent for their

¹⁸ Scott to Newcastle, 5 July 1861, Natal No. 41; Scott to Newcastle, 30 August 1861, Select Document No. 25, 49.

¹⁹ Newcastle to Wodehouse, 5 January 1862, Select Document No. 25, 52.

²⁰ Wodehouse to Scott, 18 January 1862, Select Document No. 25, 53.

²¹ Scott to Wodehouse, 31 January 1862, Select Document No. 25, 54-56.

²² Scott to Newcastle, 1 February 1862, Select Document No. 25, 57.

²³ Wodehouse to Scott, 13 February 1862, Select Document No. 25, 57-59.

²⁴ Scott to Wodehouse, 1 March 1862, Select Document No. 25, 59-60. It is of note that at this time Dr PC Sutherland, Natal's Surveyor-General, had begun to lay new boundary line beacons in anticipation of the annexation of Nomansland. See: *Natal Witness*, 28 February 1862.

²⁵ Newcastle to Scott, 13 May 1862, Natal No. 217.

²⁶ Wodehouse to Scott, 15 May 1862, Select Document No. 25, 63.

²⁷ W Beinart, *The Political Economy of Pondoland 1860-1930*, (Johannesburg, 1982), 14.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

defence upon British assistance, it will be necessary that questions of this kind should be adjusted by an officer representing not merely the interests of any particular Colony, but the policy of the Imperial Government and with a view to the general maintenance of peaceful relations between the natives and the Government.³⁰ Scott's response indicated both his frustration and his disappointment. In December 1862 he put forward the idea that for a limited period the area intended for annexation should be placed under his direct control as a trial run so as to ascertain the limits of land to be apportioned to each tribe.³¹ Newcastle demurred, citing the need for the boundaries of the Nomansland territory to be accurately defined before annexation could be pursued.³²

Three years later Scott found himself no closer to resolving the challenges Nomansland posed. But he remained positive. In his address to the opening of the Legislative Council in May 1863 he reported that Newcastle had informed him that the annexation would take place but that a timeframe had not been specified.³³ A report in the *Mercury* lamented what it called 'this constant equivocation' over Nomansland and denounced 'Cape Town interference' as doing 'vast mischief.'³⁴ In a subsequent tilt at the lack of progress, an editorial in the *Mercury* urged the government to act as the coastlands were becoming valuable. 'The extension of our southern boundary is the preliminary of a shorter and more certain connexion with East London and Algoa Bay,' it opined.³⁵ But the pace of imperial deliberations appeared impervious to such opinions. Instead, 1863 saw Nomansland subjected to an exchange of views as to where its boundaries should be pegged. From his distant office in London, Newcastle suggested that the Ingeli range should form the northern boundary but was vague on the whereabouts of the north-west boundary, the Mtamvuna, Mzimkulu and the ocean taking care of the other compass points.³⁶ Scott, in turn, dispatched his boundary suggestions to Newcastle and Wodehouse but the latter was not prepared to commit firmly to any suggestion until Sir Walter Currie, the Commandant of the Armed and Mounted Police in Kaffraria, had completed his survey of Adam Kok's territory.³⁷

The boundary saga developed a new dimension when Currie disclosed that Kok had intended to establish his capital a few miles from the junction of the Ibisi river with the Mzimkulu. 'To deprive the Griquas of any part of the Ibisi or its tributaries would certainly be a serious matter to them and cause much dissatisfaction,' stated Currie in a dispatch to Wodehouse.³⁸ By July even Newcastle had become frustrated at the seemingly intractable situation which had developed as regards Nomansland. Writing to Wodehouse he expressed the hope that some agreement of the boundaries could be reached 'in order that the settlement of this question may no longer be delayed.'³⁹ Instead, the quagmire worsened. Not only did Scott express surprise at the intended whereabouts of Kok's capital but he was outraged by Currie's reference to the Amabacas tribe as 'unauthorised squatters' in the territory. In a lengthy despatch he sketched the background of the Amabacas, arguing that they had dwelled south of the Mzimkulu for almost 50 years and, therefore, could not be regarded as 'unauthorised squatters.' At the same time Scott

³⁰ Newcastle to Scott, 2 September 1862, Natal No. 249.

³¹ Scott to Newcastle, 4 December 1862, Natal No. 143.

³² Newcastle to Scott, 25 February 1863, Natal No.290.

³³ *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XV, No. 756, 6 May 1863.

³⁴ *Natal Mercury*, 23 May 1862. A subsequent report disclosed that Adam Kok received a £300 salary from the Cape government. See: *Natal Mercury*, 2 July 1864.

³⁵ *Natal Mercury*, 6 January 1863.

³⁶ Newcastle to Scott, 25 February 1863, Natal No. 290.

³⁷ Wodehouse to Scott, 19 May 1863, Select Document No. 25, 71.

³⁸ Currie to Wodehouse, 28 May 1863, Select Document No. 25, 72.

³⁹ Newcastle to Wodehouse, 6 July 1863, Natal No. 657.

made it clear that the Amabacas were a menace in terms of their cattle-stealing proclivities which had resulted in them being viewed as ‘a terror even to the frontier kafirs of the Cape Colony.’⁴⁰

What followed left Scott and the Natal Legislative Council in little doubt that their views and opinions amounted to very little. To Scott’s amazement the next despatch from Wodehouse ignored all his concerns about the Amabacas and the positioning of Kok’s capital and simply informed him that because he did ‘not entertain any serious objection to the boundary line proposed by Sir Walter Currie,’ it had been accepted by Newcastle.⁴¹ Letters Patent then followed from Newcastle authorizing the annexation of the district ceded by Faku between the Mtamvuna and the Mzimkulu and between the Kalamba mountains and the coast.⁴² Any lingering doubts Scott may have had about Natal’s role in the issue were removed by a subsequent despatch from Newcastle which bluntly instructed him to ‘submit to the Legislative Council the draft of the Law which, when passed will place the territory under the general government of the Colony.’⁴³ However, it was not until the autumn of 1864 that the Legislative Council reconvened. The legislation Newcastle prescribed for the annexation of Nomansland served to aggravate the Council’s already angry mood which the flawed Vetch project had brought about.⁴⁴

The introduction of the Annexation Bill was greeted with a demand that all the correspondence relating to Nomansland over the years first be made available. Disapprobation was expressed that that correspondence had been conducted without reference to the Legislative Council.⁴⁵ A Select Committee on Nomansland was then convened. In its report presented in August it rejected the proposed boundaries as ‘injudicious and likely to lead to unfavourable results, both to the Colony and to the Griquas.’⁴⁶ As a result the Council passed a Bill which differed from that which Newcastle had proposed in as far as boundaries were concerned. Scott, whose term as Governor was about to end, declined to sign it although he agreed to submit the Council’s misgivings about the ‘anomalies and dangers involved in the present arrangement’ to the new Colonial Secretary of State, Edward Cardwell. Nonetheless, he made it clear to his superior that the request of the Natal Legislature to re-open the whole subject ‘is, therefore, one which can scarcely at this time be considered feasible.’ In his parting words Scott expressed the hope that at its next session the Council would pass legislation that was ‘freed from exceptional and objectionable conditions.’ These concerned the exclusion of Africans from the franchise, the registration of land claims by Africans, the extent of land to be ceded to Adam Kok and the extent of land to be set aside for Africans in general.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, a petition submitted to the Legislative Council in September 1864 reflected the degree of enthusiasm on the part of some colonists to settle in Nomansland. In advance of its annexation, seven settlers, five of them from the Richmond area and two from Lower Mkomanzi, requested land grants in Nomansland.⁴⁸

⁴⁰ Scott to Wodehouse, 18 August 1863, Select Document No. 25, 75-76.

⁴¹ Wodehouse to Scott, 15 September 1863, Select Document No. 25, 77.

⁴² Newcastle to Scott, 14 December 1863, Select Document No. 25, 78-79.

⁴³ Newcastle to Scott, 19 December 1863, Select Document No. 25, 80.

⁴⁴ £90,000 had been spent yet less than ten percent of the Vetch pier project had been completed. In addition, payments had been made without authorisation, freight on some materials had been paid for twice, materials had been ordered in excess of needs. See: BJT Leverton, ‘Government finance and political development in Natal 1843-1893,’ (D.Phil. thesis, Unisa, 1968), *Archives Year Book of South Africa*, Vol 33, 1970, 81.

⁴⁵ *Natal Mercury*, 17 May 1864. The full schedule of correspondence was presented to the Legislative Council on 6 July 1866 as Select Document No. 25. It comprised 55 despatches dated from 21 July 1860 to 1 February 1866.

⁴⁶ Natal Legislative Council, *Votes and Proceedings*, Vol. XI, 1864, 235.

⁴⁷ Scott to Cardwell, 26 October 1864, Natal, No. 73.

⁴⁸ Natal Legislative Council, *Votes and Proceedings*, Vol. XI, 1864, 291. The petitioners were: FG Ashmore, W Payne, L Drake, G Harrison, W Wells, A Shaw snr, A Shaw jnr.

By 1865 the Legislative Council found itself in a vexed situation as Scott had refused to endorse its terms for the annexation of Nomansland. The problems of unrest and smuggling continued to manifest themselves in the territory; in addition, Kok claimed he could refuse the right of landing to the ferryman appointed by the Natal Government on the Mzimkulu river as well as the levying tolls on wagons passing through 'his' country.⁴⁹ Cardwell had also indicated that he hoped the Natal Legislature would abandon its 'inconvenient and irritating' legislation and accept the December 1863 draft for the annexation of Nomansland.⁵⁰ Thus, quietly and without any debate, the Bill declaring Natal's laws applicable in Nomansland passed its third reading in the Legislative Council on 12 July and became Law No. 14 of 1865.⁵¹ After years of delay the legislative hurdle clearing the way for the formal annexation of Alfred County was finally passed. The specific proclamation was published on 13 September while on 23 November 1865 Cardwell informed the new Acting Lieutenant-Governor, Colonel Bisset, that royal assent had been granted to Law 14.⁵²

The Proclamation confirmed the portion of land ceded by Faku on 11 April 1850 as the basis of the new territory and outlined the actual boundaries as follows:⁵³

On the North-East by the Umzimkulu river, from the mouth of the river to the junction with the Ibisi; on the North and North West by a line drawn from the said junction to the nearest point of the ridge or watershed dividing the waters of the Ibisi from those of the Umzimkuliwana, hence along the said ridge to the Ingela range, thence along the Igela range keeping to the watershed, to a large beacon recently erected by the Surveyor-General of the said Colony of Natal and Sir Walter Currie, at the western extremity of the said range; and thence straight to the nearest source of the Umtamvuna River from the said source to the sea; on the South-East by the sea from the mouth of the Umtamvuna to that of the Umzimkulu.'

In John Robinson's view, by deploying a military force to the banks of the Mtamvuna and firing a 21-gun salute in the presence of Adam Kok and his men to announce the annexation of Alfred County, Colonel Bisset, whom Robinson described as 'a sagacious and an active-minded ruler of colonial origins,' succeeded in impressing upon Natal's new subjects the message that British law and order would prevail.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the situation remained precarious in that Alfred County added some 29,000 new African subjects to the Colony of Natal⁵⁵ at a time of deepening economic recession and limited resources. In fact once Bisset's little force had withdrawn, the means which the new Resident Magistrate, Lieutenant HK Wilson,⁵⁶ had at his disposal to enforce British authority was pitiful. This is apparent from correspondence Wilson had with the Colonial Secretary in which six months after his appointment he requested four pairs of handcuffs and a cat o' ninetails as he had none.⁵⁷ Wilson's formal quarters were also extremely spartan. He hired a room at Duka Fynn's kraal for ten shillings per month which served as his office and courtroom.⁵⁸ But he had no furniture or office equipment. This was evident from letters he wrote in February and March 1866 requesting 23 items of office appurtenances including paper, ink, stationery, tables, chairs, a desk and a set of 'pigeon holes' for filing. Despite the poverty of his

⁴⁹ Acting Lieutenant-Governor John Maclean to Cardwell, 28 March 1865, Select Document No. 25, 86.

⁵⁰ Cardwell to Maclean, 9 March 1865, Select Document No. 25, 84.

⁵¹ Natal Legislative Council, *Votes and Proceedings*, Vol. XII, 1865, 184.

⁵² Bisset to Cardwell, 2 October 1865; Cardwell to Bisset, 23 November 1865, Select Document No. 25, 88.

⁵³ *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XVIII, No. 971, 12 September 1865.

⁵⁴ J Robinson, *A life time in South Africa*, 226. Bisset's parents were 1820 settlers. He served in three wars on the Eastern Frontier and from 1840 was an officer in the Cape Mounted Rifles. See: WJ De Kock (ed.), *Dictionary of South African Biography*, (Johannesburg, 1968), 78-79.

⁵⁵ Bisset to Cardwell, 16 January 1866, Select Document No. 25, 91.

⁵⁶ *Government Notice*, No. 3, 1866.

⁵⁷ CSO 250, No. 1144, 2 June 1866.

⁵⁸ CSO 245, No. 697, 19 March 1866.

circumstances, Wilson was told that only £10 could be spent on his needs.⁵⁹ The extreme frugality of the colonial administration towards Alfred County was also reflected in the response Sidney Turner, the ferryman on the Mzimkulu, received to his application to be appointed as County Field Cornet: he was informed that the post could not be filled as no provision had been made for it in the Estimates.⁶⁰

Despite these circumstances, Robinson viewed the addition of Alfred County as ‘a distinct contribution to [Natal’s] self-importance, and until Zululand was annexed it was the only territorial acquisition which Natal at any time could boast.’⁶¹ At the time, however, very little was known about Alfredia, as Natal’s new county was often called. Editorials in the *Mercury* suggested that sugar and coffee would be suitable on the coast and urged the government to ‘induce a stream of settlers to flow in the direction of Alfred.’ Significantly, the *Mercury* also saw potential in the mouth of the Mzimkulu as a harbour, noting that the river was navigable for five miles.⁶² In May 1866 it quoted Dr Sutherland, the Surveyor-General, as stating that ‘very little outlay’ would be required to make the mouth of the Mzimkulu safe for craft up to 60 tons in size.⁶³ Of immediate promise, however, was the presence of a large deposit of limestone in the vicinity of the Mzimkulu. Sutherland surveyed the area and forwarded specimens to Sir Roderick Murchison, a geologist in London, to ascertain the possible value of the deposit.⁶⁴ Although transport proved difficult until the arrival of the railway line in 1901, by that time the limestone works were the largest employer of labour in the Port Shepstone area.⁶⁵

Alfred County: 1866-1870

There was much initial enthusiasm about the prospects of Alfred County. In March 1866 the Government Surveyor laid out fifty acre plots on the south bank of the Mzimkulu. Sidney Turner, who owned a trading store on the north bank, which was in Alexandra County, noted an increase in business since the annexation and claimed to have made a profit of £82 over the previous six month period.⁶⁶ The *Times of Natal* reported that some colonists in the Isipingo district were contemplating moving there if they could obtain suitable Crown Land grants.⁶⁷ Colonel Bisset bought 1,000 acres of land on the north bank late in 1866 and asked Turner to develop a coffee plantation for him there. He made a second land purchase early in 1867 acquiring ten plots on the south bank in the vicinity of the drift, about a mile from the river mouth. Turner, in a letter to his father in January 1867 stated that he had ‘never felt so sanguine about the future’ having just moved into his new brick-built house and store on the south bank of the river.⁶⁸ Among the reasons for his optimism was the positive economic effect he thought the discovery of copper in the Insizwa mountain area in Pondo territory might have in stimulating trade and development.⁶⁹

⁵⁹ CSO 217, No. 440, 15 February 1866; CSO 244, No. 581, 7 March and 13 March 1866

⁶⁰ CSO 244, No. 577, 28 February 1866.

⁶¹ J Robinson, *A life time in South Africa*, 226.

⁶² *Natal Mercury*, 13 February and 27 January 1866.

⁶³ *Natal Mercury*, 26 May 1866. Sutherland’s opinion on the cost of making the Mzimkulu safe for shipping turned out to be grossly inaccurate. By 1907, after the expenditure of £70,000 on Port Shepstone harbour, it was abandoned as a riverport. See: *Debates of the Legislative Assembly of the Colony of Natal*, Vol. XLIII, 1907, 286.

⁶⁴ Report of the Surveyor-General on Alfred Quarries. Select Document No. 27, 1866, presented to the Legislative Council on 9 July 1866.

⁶⁵ 530 African, Asian and European men were employed. See: LU/755A/1901, Vol. 3/2/9, Durban Archives Depot.

⁶⁶ D Child, *Portrait of a Pioneer*, 47.

⁶⁷ *Times of Natal*, 6 October 1866.

⁶⁸ D Child, *Portrait of a Pioneer*, 56, 62, 60.

⁶⁹ Select Document No. 31 of 1867, presented to the Legislative Council on 30 August 1867.

A further reason for optimism was the prospect of river shipping on the Mzimkulu. In correspondence with his parents in April 1866, Turner had remarked that the Surveyor-General, Dr Sutherland, had been staying with him while he conducted a survey of navigation possibilities.⁷⁰ Months later Sutherland submitted his findings. He found that the river was navigable for over five miles and that it had a maximum depth of thirty feet. However, shoals of rock in the mouth of the river would require removal. He also recommended construction of a breakwater.⁷¹ Adding to the expectations about river shipping was the fact that the area at the mouth of the river had been referred to as 'Port Shepstone.' A Proclamation by the Acting-Governor, Colonel Bisset, announcing the dissolving of the Legislative Council on 1 February, ahead of the elections scheduled in March, was issued from Port Shepstone on 15 January 1866.⁷² Bisset had visited Turner on that day and enthused about the future prospects of Port Shepstone in terms of a road linking it to Umzinto, the establishment of a postal service and an influx of settlers.⁷³

Stagnation

But the copper discovery, like gold in Alexandra County, proved inconsequential⁷⁴. Moreover, Sutherland's recommendations on making the Mzimkulu safe for shipping were doomed to be ignored until 1880. At ten shillings per acre, the price of 'township lots' in the vicinity of the drift, therefore, was pretentious and unrealistic⁷⁵ given the fact that the area was a wild frontier and hardly different from Crown Land elsewhere in the Colony which sold for four shillings an acre.⁷⁶ Not surprisingly the Report of the Surveyor-General for 1870 showed that of none of the plots in two parcels of land, 1,000 acres on the south bank of the Mzimkulu and 3,400 acres on the north bank, had been sold.⁷⁷ As noted previously, the new Governor, Robert Keate, prescribed severe cuts in expenditure on public works as the way to balance Natal's budget. As a result by 1869 several public works in other parts of the Colony were in danger of becoming utterly useless and on account of the £12,000 deficit that year, there was no expenditure on roads.⁷⁸ For Alfred County, however, that made no difference as it had been totally neglected as regards public works since its annexation.

As was the case with Alexandra County, the revenue that Alfred County contributed to the colonial treasury was far in excess of what it received in return. In 1866 the resident magistrate HK Wilson collected £1,385 in revenue, £920 of which was derived from hut tax. Official expenses amounted only to £872. Alfred County's balance sheet remained relatively unchanged throughout the rest of the decade.⁷⁹ But that situation also reflected the stagnation which prevailed in terms of its development. The anticipated influx of settlers did not materialise. In 1866 the settler population was listed as 28 adults; in 1868 it was put at 29 adults.⁸⁰ With the exception of Sidney Turner, who in 1866 established a fishery that produced three tons of dried fish which he sold to the employers of indentured Indians in the Umzinto

⁷⁰ D Child, *Portrait of a Pioneer*, 48.

⁷¹ CSO 265, No. 138, 24 January 1867.

⁷² *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XVIII, No. 990, 23 January 1866.

⁷³ D Child, *Portrait of a Pioneer*, 43.

⁷⁴ Small deposits of gold were found in the Umzinto district in 1868-69.

⁷⁵ *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XIX, No. 1045, 29 January 1867: Reserve of Township of Shepstone.

⁷⁶ Over the period 1866 to 1870 in various counties Crown Land was sold at four shillings per acre. See: Proclamation Notice, *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XVIII, No. 988, 9 January 1866; Proclamation Notice, *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XX, No. 1097, 14 January 1868; *Natal Government Gazette*, Vol. XXII, No. 1259, 29 November 1870.

⁷⁷ Select Document No. 28, 1870, presented to the Legislative Council on 7 July 1870.

⁷⁸ B Leverton, 'Government finance,' 116.

⁷⁹ CSO 264, No. 43, 4 January 1867; CSO 293, No. 103, 10 January 1868; CSO 323, No. 242, 25 January 1869.

⁸⁰ CSO 264, No. 43, 4 January 1867; CSO 323, No. 242, 25 January 1869.

district,⁸¹ economic development was stagnant in comparison to other parts of the Colony. Most settlers lived in wattle and daub huts or what were called 'kaffir' huts. Cultivation of the soil did not extend beyond tending patches of mealies for family consumption. Ten of the settlers were licensed sawyers and made their living from the forests. Apart from that enterprise, secondary trading constituted the basis of the County's economy. By 1868 there were five retail shops and two liquor outlets.⁸² The only agricultural production of any note was that of the local African population. The agricultural return for 1867 listed 1,000 acres of Indian corn, the production of 200 pounds of coffee, and the planting of sweet potatoes.⁸³

In comparison with Alexandra County, Alfred County was more of a frontier-type society in terms of its very small settler population, their remoteness and lack of social cohesion.⁸⁴ The nearest school and medical practitioner was fifty miles away in Umzinto. There was no local defence group. The only privately established local institution was a Lutheran mission station under Reverend P Stoppel.⁸⁵ The only social cohesion that existed was amongst the six or seven officials who worked at the court house at Murchison which lay ten miles inland on the road to Harding. Official indifference towards Alfred County served only to entrench its existence as a backwater. The response to magistrate Wilson's request for a lock-up jail was simply to refer to the Estimates. Although crime was minimal, Wilson's dilemma was that he had no place where prisoners could be securely confined. Consequently in confining them to a 'kafir' hut, he was obliged to post a full-time guard and for that task he could not spare the manpower.⁸⁶ The solution was to send prisoners under guard to the Umzinto gaol. As it was, Wilson was extremely critical of the two white Natal Mounted Policemen who made up the sum total of his constabulary, describing them as 'perfectly useless.'⁸⁷ The colonial administration in Pietermaritzburg took over eight months to confirm Charles Shaw's application for the position of postmaster. In exasperation Shaw pointed out to the Colonial Secretary that between October 1866 and June 1867, he had dealt correctly with 200 mail items.⁸⁸ When Wilson requested the appointment of a justice of the peace to assist him in collecting hut tax, the response was that no such appointment would be made but that he would be granted an extra eight days to complete the task.⁸⁹ An application for a government-appointed ferryman to be established on the Mtamvuna river was also rejected as 'not necessary.'⁹⁰

Following the extremely heavy rains which fell across the Colony late in August 1868, Wilson requested £3 to effect repairs to the thatching of his office and court house.⁹¹ The records do not reflect a response but less than two years later it was reported that the court house had collapsed following further heavy rains. The then magistrate, WAMaclean, (Wilson had left the post after taking a year's leave for ill

⁸¹ *Natal Mercury*, 17 January 1867.

⁸² CSO 323, No.242, 25 January 1869. Whereas white woodcutters in the Cape's Knysna forests initially were men who had failed to make a living elsewhere, the sawyers of Alfred County took advantage of a natural asset which was cheap and easy to exploit. See: R Morrell (ed.) *White but Poor: essays on the history of poor whites in southern Africa 1880-1940*, (Pretoria, 1992), 43.

⁸³ CSO 279, No. 1552, 8 July 1867. See also: C Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*, 179.

⁸⁴ S Marks in *Reluctant Rebellion: the 1906-1908 disturbances in Natal*, (Oxford, 1970), 16, notes that in terms of social codes, spatial patterns and limited governance, Natal evinced the character of a frontier society.

⁸⁵ CSO 293, No. 103, 10 January 1868; CSO 323, No. 242, 25 January 1869.

⁸⁶ CSO 274, No. 1043, 1 June 1867.

⁸⁷ CSO 253, No. 1419, 24 June 1866.

⁸⁸ CSO 259, No. 2025, 2 October 1866; CSO 275, No. 1125, 14 and 24 June 1867.

⁸⁹ CSO 268, 14 and 27 March 1867.

⁹⁰ CSO 291, No. 2615, 9 January 1868.

⁹¹ CSO 312, No. 2038, 1 September 1868.

health⁹²) expressed alarm as to where he could file the court records as there was no other suitable building in Murchison.⁹³ Court proceedings had to take place in the magistrate's private dwelling.⁹⁴ Official indifference towards the County persisted into the new decade. In September 1870 the new resident magistrate, HC Shepstone, bemoaned the fact that licence fees were not being collected because no replacement of the official who performed that task had been made.⁹⁵

In May 1867, despite his earlier 'sanguine' feelings about prospects in Alfred County, Sidney Turner accepted an offer by Colonel Bisset to purchase his house, store and boats and left the district.⁹⁶ Hopes of development and expansion did not materialise. Apart from news reports of the wreck of the *Ambleside* at the mouth of the Mzimkulu river on 30 August 1868, the columns of the press were devoid of news from Alfred County as the decade of the 1860s came to an end. The decline in the status of the County was also reflected in the taxes - excluding hut tax - collected from the settlers between 1866 and 1870: in 1866 the figure was £455 but had declined to £118 in 1869.⁹⁷ When John Robinson conducted his survey of the South Coast in 1870 his remark about the territory south of the Mzimkulu summed up the plight of Alfred County bluntly: 'There is no European enterprise requiring notice further south,' he wrote.⁹⁸ A year later the Surveyor-General, Dr Sutherland, was even more scathing in his appraisal of prospects in the County. Noting that South Shepstone was the only township reserved within the County in the belief that trade, industry and river shipping would take place there, Sutherland stated that that prospect was 'too remote' to contemplate at that stage.⁹⁹ The hope expressed by Governor Scott in 1860 that the incorporation of Alfred County would draw 'industrious settlers' seemed a forlorn one.¹⁰⁰ If the 'frontier process' involved the subjugation and dispossession of the indigenous inhabitants and their lands, that process did not feature in the birth of Alfred County.¹⁰¹

The peaceful and stable relations that prevailed in the County for nearly twenty years before stock theft in the proximity of the Pondo border became problematic,¹⁰² may also reflect an argument adduced by Morrell, Wright and Meintjes. They posit that acceptance by Africans of colonial rule was often a result of relief from oppression by other African polities.¹⁰³ Despite the frugal approach of the colonial authorities, the one positive to emerge from the annexation of Alfred County, as far as settlers were concerned, was that of security. Whereas Nomansland had been regarded as a sanctuary of illicit activities, the presence of that minuscule British authority at Murchison from 1866 somehow seemed to bring stability in settler minds. No branch court meetings were held, as was the case in the other counties, because the low level of crime did not warrant them.¹⁰⁴ Responding to the proposal by the Legislative

⁹² CSO 317, No. 2597, 9 November 1868.

⁹³ CSO 351, No. 304, 9 February 1870.

⁹⁴ *Natal Mercury*, 2 April 1870.

⁹⁵ CSO 367, No. 1958, 26 September 1870.

⁹⁶ D Child, *Portrait of a Pioneer*, 69.

⁹⁷ CSO 381, No. 740, 30 March 1870.

⁹⁸ J Robinson, *Notes on Natal*, 126.

⁹⁹ CSO 386, No. 1201, 2 June 1871.

¹⁰⁰ Scott to Newcastle, 21 November 1860, Select Document No. 25, 6.

¹⁰¹ M Legassick, 'The frontier tradition in South African historiography,' in S Marks and A Atmore (eds.), *Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa*, (London, 1980), 46.

¹⁰² *Supplement to the Blue Book for the Colony of Natal*, 1885, Report of Resident Magistrate for Alfred County, B56.

¹⁰³ R Morrell, J Wright, S Meintjes, 'Colonialism and the establishment of white domination 1840-1890,' in R Morrell, (ed.), *Political Economy and identities in Kwa-Zulu Natal: Historical and Social perspectives*, (Durban 1996), 36.

¹⁰⁴ CSO 337, No. 1778, 27 August 1869.

Council in 1869 that retrenchments were needed as part of measures to reduce government expenditure, magistrate Maclean conceded that his interpreter had not had any cases since 1866 and that his messenger had been involved in just two cases.¹⁰⁵ While the colonial presence was no more than a toehold, it at least seemed to have a salutary effect.

¹⁰⁵ CSO 340, No. 2072, 29 September 1869.