

## **REVEREND JOHN THOMAS DANIEL**

Three Daniel brothers and their sister emigrated from Ireland to South Africa in 1820 as part of the wave of British settlers to be settled in the Eastern Cape. The youngest of the three, John Nevins Daniel, was a young man of 22 when he arrived in South Africa. At first he had no taste for the wilds of the Eastern Cape and two years after his arrival at Grahamstown he obtained a permit to return to England<sup>i</sup>. However, love intervened when he met Sarah, the eldest daughter of the British settler, Thomas Marsh<sup>ii</sup>. They married three years later in the Commemoration Methodist Church in Grahamstown<sup>iii</sup>.

The eldest of nine children was John Thomas Daniel who was born on 25 Jan 1826<sup>iv</sup> and baptised in the Commemoration Methodist Church in Grahamstown by Rev John Davis on the 2nd April 1826<sup>v</sup>. He had nine brothers and sisters, all born to his mother, Sarah, and when she died on 6th April 1838<sup>vi</sup>, John Nevins Daniel married for a second time<sup>vii</sup>. This time he married Rhoda Urry on 12th January 1839<sup>viii</sup> and proceeded to have another eight children with her. Thus John Thomas Daniel was the eldest of 17 children!

John Thomas Daniel's parents were consistent members of the Wesleyan Church<sup>ix</sup> so he grew up attending services in the Wesleyan Church. He became a disciple of Christ in early life and was a prominent worker in the Wesleyan Church at Grahamstown. His acceptable service as a Sunday school teacher and Local Preacher attracted the attention of Rev. W. Shaw who offered to send him as a Catechist amongst the Korannas, north of the Orange River<sup>x</sup>. Though only 22 years of age he responded to the call and started for the distant mission. Here and afterwards at Imperani and Platberg he laboured for nearly twenty six years.

Imperani Mission was situated not far from the present town of Ficksburg<sup>xi</sup> in what was then known as the Bechuana district. The Mission Station was started by Rev. James Allison. The people served by this Mission were the Batlokoa<sup>xii</sup> or Mantatees under their Chief, Sikonyela. The word Imperani or Mparane is likely derived from the South Sotho word "sephara"<sup>xiii</sup>, meaning flat and has reference to the shape of the mountain at which foot the Mission was built<sup>xiv</sup>. It was while serving here that John Thomas Daniel married the daughter of Thomas Hezekiah Sephton, Mary Ann, on 14th May 1849<sup>xv</sup>. The ceremony was conducted by Rev. Richard Giddy who today lies buried near to both of them in the mission cemetery at Thaba'Nchu. Witnesses at the wedding were a Mr. Pryn (after whose family Prynnsberg at Clocolan was named) and Mary Ann's eldest sister, Sarah Jane.

At Imperani John Thomas Daniel saved the life of a British Officer of the English army at the risk of his own<sup>xvi</sup>. At another he returned to his station to find it sacked. Subsequently he was forced to flee into the bush with his young wife and child, to escape the fury of a neighbouring tribe.

The Rev. C. Pettman visited Thaba'Nchu and met with some of the children of John Thomas Daniel and Mary Ann Daniel in 1920. This was only ten years after Mary Ann's death in Thaba'Nchu, so memories of their parents were still fresh in the minds of the Daniel children. The children related the following story to Rev. Pettman<sup>xvii</sup>.

"In 1851 John Thomas Daniel was the missionary at the station. At this time the Basuto<sup>xviii</sup> failed to conquer the Batlokoa after several efforts and eventually attributed this to the missionary's strong medicine. They determined therefore to remove the supposed cause of their failures by doing away with the missionary himself, and were watching and waiting for an opportunity to work their evil purpose.

The opportunity soon presented itself when Mary-Ann's brother, John Sephton and his sister, Elizabeth who had been to Grahamstown with a wagon of supplies, was on his return journey. For six months John Thomas Daniel and his wife, Mary Ann, had been unable, on account of the constant tribal wars, to get anything else in the country, and had been compelled to live entirely on the local sorghum (known then as Kaffir corn). A Mosotho named Balima had offered himself as a leader of the oxen, his purpose, as it proved, being to carry out the supposed wish of his Chief, Moshesh<sup>xix</sup>. On the arrival of the wagon at Imperani, John Thomas Daniel came forward to examine the wagon and its contents grateful to God for the relief which had come to hand. While thus engaged the Mosotho leader came stealthily behind John Thomas and with uplifted assegai he sought to stab him in the heart. Fortunately Mary Ann was looking out of the window and she saw the man raise his arm and cried out a warning. John Thomas turned himself suddenly at her cry, and was also likely under the protection of God, for the assegai pierced him and missing his heart, passed through his left lung and protruded through his back inflicting a near fatal wound. The would-be assassin was seized before he could stab again, and it was only with the utmost difficulty that Mary Ann wrestled the man away from the people at the station and succeeded in preventing them from killing the man on the spot. Mary Ann had to promise that if John Thomas were to die, she would hand the man over to be dealt with. Some reports state that the man died the next day of wounds sustained from the people loyal to John Thomas

Young John Sephton was sent racing off on horseback to the nearest doctor over seventy miles away. At no little risk to his own life, Dr. Lottri (sometimes referred to as Loutre or Lautré), a French medical missionary, rode to Imperani to attend to John Thomas. The Batlokoa were aware that the doctor was a friend of Moshesh, and were suspicious that the doctor may complete the work which Balima had set out to accomplish. They were determined that if John Thomas should die, that they would kill the doctor. The doctor was smuggled back to Morija<sup>xx</sup> under cover of darkness with the hooves of his horse being bound up in sheepskin so that they may make as little noise as possible.

Thanks to a vigorous constitution John Thomas Daniel slowly recovered, but the Basutos burnt practically all the buildings on the station. The dwelling house was the last building left standing. When John Thomas was sufficiently recovered to sit on his horse, though still very weak, he started off to ride to his nearest white neighbors at a place called Moolman's Hoek, but overhearing the men there consenting together that if the Basutos followed, for their own safety, they would hand him over to them. This brave man decided upon heroic action. In the morning, long before daybreak, he quietly and secretly saddled up, left the place and set out to ride over the mountains direct to Thaba Bosiu<sup>xxi</sup> to interview the great chief himself. The few Basutos he met along the way, having heard that he had been killed scattered in fright before him believing him to be a ghost. His interview with Moshesh made Moshesh appreciate the courage and

mettle of this man. The outcome was a lasting respect and friendship between the missionary and the Chief. Moshesh sent men to rebuild the burnt station and cattle to replace those that had been killed or stolen. This friendship lasted for a lifetime.

The story however does not end here. Mary Ann was heavily pregnant with her son, also named John Thomas Daniel, (likely because it was not believed that his father would survive) who was born shortly after the assegai incident. When he was born he was almost pitch black, which was probably due to the shock Mary Ann had recently experienced or possibly due to injury while she wrestled with the perpetrator. This second shock drove her nearly out of her mind as she now had to run the house and the mission station and also to nurse both patients as there were no other capable persons in the neighborhood. What she accomplished was almost superhuman, but both patients eventually recovered and lived for a long time afterwards. Two days after John Thomas had left Imperani for Moolman's Hoek, Mary Ann, not knowing what might have happened to her husband, could bear the strain of anxiety no longer, and resolved to follow him. This she had to do on foot, a matter of twenty-five miles. The elder of her two young children on her back and carrying the younger in her arms she set out. When she finally reached Moolman's Hoek with boots torn to pieces and stockings in shreds she found that her husband had left, but nobody could tell her where he had gone. The people of Moolman's Hoek drove her back towards the mission as far as they dared to go and left her to walk the rest of the way back to Imperani. She walked the rest of the way back to a now destroyed mission station carrying her children to await the unfolding of the Divine purpose on the deserted and all but completely destroyed mission station. Can we imagine the joy of the reunion when shortly after John Thomas Daniel returned from his daring venture into the lion's den? He truly personified his namesake! "

Imperani Mission was finally abandoned due to the turbulent state of the frontier. Subsequent to 1869, when it became part of the O.F.S., it was in turn a farm, a Government Forest Station, and eventually part of the Ficksburg town lands.

In October 1861 the Wesleyan Missionary Society District meeting, Northern Section held their second session in Bloemfontein<sup>xxii</sup>. These meetings were previously held about ten years earlier. The meeting lasted about a week, and interesting religious services were held daily. Different ministers occupied the pulpit in turn. The preachers were the Revds. Richard Giddy (the same one who married John Thomas and Mary Ann), James Scott, A. Briggs, W.R Longdon, John Ayliff, J.D.M. Ludolph, T. Cresswell and the resident minister, J.G. Morrow. The meetings were a gain to the Town, from a religious and a social point of view. John Thomas Daniel was, on the same occasion, after a probation period of thirteen years of mission work, amongst the Natives, ordained a Minister of the Gospel. The ordination service was impressively conducted by Rev. Ayliff, one of the oldest and most esteemed of the Wesleyan missionaries, and was largely attended.

In the year 1861 John Thomas Daniel established the mission village of Bensonvale<sup>xxiii</sup>. For twelve happy years he toiled here and the people became strongly attached to him. He was "their father"; great was the grief manifested when it was made known that he had been appointed to Thaba'Nchu. A deputation went off to meet the minister appointed to succeed him.

The good brother was politely but firmly told that he was not wanted, that the change was distasteful to the people; and that if he came they would all turn out and leave the station.

John Thomas Daniel spent seventeen years at Thaba'Nchu. His letters during this time to Rev. John Milner in London give one an insight to the difficult and varied work required of a missionary in those days. John Thomas wrote long detailed reports of church matters as well as the local socio-political situation in the Free State in general and in Thaba'Nchu specifically. His letters were written in longhand with a quill and are not easy to read. I have transcribed portions of one letter to give some limited insight as to what he wrote to London. On 22nd April 1887 he wrote to Rev Milner as follows:

*Rev. Dr. Sir,*

*"I had wished that ere to this I was in a position to communicate cheering news. I say I wished because I darely (sic) hope to say hope. The troubles through which we have had or pass since the death of the old chief's mother are well known to you, and the result as stated in our annual report, up to the end of the year our loss in removals by emigration amounted to 140. We ventured a hope that many of these would eventually return. This hope has not been realised, and the returns of the various circuits attached to Thaba'Nchu for the first quarter of the present year shows a further decrease from the same cause of 100 members. Beside our removals we have to bear as another result of the circuit year, the low attendance of classes of many of the church members, some of whom have turned cold. Others disappointed in their present pains, and suffering from heavy times inflicted by the move for the part they took in the late rebellion have become sullen and morose and take every opportunity of displaying their ill feeling towards the church members who are loyal to the government and church in the latest disturbance. The whole tribe has been split into two antagonistic political factions having much hatred towards each other, and the church has suffered severely in the loss of spirituality and will find that effects are pertaining heavily 2 illegible words again 1 illegible word of our 1 illegible word.*

*Fresh acts have been committed in Barolong territory by the Rebel Basuto. And some anxiety caused from a rumour that Samuel, the pretender to the Barolong Chieftainship has tried to induce the Basuto Chief to assist him with a view of attacking the Chief Sepinare. I cannot for a moment think the Free State Government would connive at such a small thing as the plight of Sepinare (Correctly: Tshipenare) now settled by arbitration of the Present of the Free State. It is difficult to assure Natives so as to make them contented, hence the mere knowledge that attempts are being made by the opposite people to match the political status quo is quite sufficient to keep them in a state of torment. Within the last two weeks two daring thefts have been committed by some of the malcontents now in the Free State. On the eve of Sunday last several mounted men came across the border, proceeded to the sheepfold, opened the gate and drove out 107 sheep. These sheep were followed by the owners into the Free State. This was all to no purpose. The owners were waylaid by the malcontents and severely beaten. Such things cause a very bad feeling among people here, for there are hundreds of people whose sympathies are with the Rebels and, the mutual enmity and bitterness are increased by such deeds as these. We are sorry to have to communicate that besides the 140 who were*

*returned as many having left on account of the 2 illegible words have to add to this loss of another hundred as shown by our March returns. Most of these members will doubtless have returned to their churches in the Free State or Transvaal according to circumstances."*

John Thomas Daniel was the fifth missionary after the mission station at Thaba'Nchu was founded by James Archbell. An indication of the esteem and admiration in which he was held by the Chief of the Barolong, Moroka<sup>xxiv</sup>, is the gift of a farm which Chief Moroka made to Mary Ann. As Moroka died before the farm could be transferred into her name, his successor, Chief Sepinare, confirmed the gift in a "Land Certificate". The young Chief Sepinare signed the deed in a thin spidery hand-writing. Sepinare had attended the school at the mission so he could read and write, whereas his father, Chief Moroka, made his mark with a bold cross.

I. S. J. Venter writes that the period between 1869 and 1888 was a period of renewal and advancement (Periode van hernieuwe opbloei) of the Thaba'Nchu mission. Rev. Ludorf had been transferred, and his various successors were all men with a good sense between right and wrong (gewetensgetrouheid). He writes that the best known (bekendste) amongst these was Rev. J.T. Daniel, who for many years was in charge of the mission; and with the help of other men who assisted him, acquitted himself in an excellent manner of his work. As with Ludorf he had a good knowledge of medicine. The means to administer effective medicines and cure many diseases caused him to increase the respect of his parishioners in the missionaries and decrease their reliance and belief in the witchdoctor.

In 1879 John Daniel sketched the political situation in South Africa quite succinctly illustrating that he was well informed of political developments beyond the boundaries of the Free State:

*"While so many of the South African native tribes have been involved in war with its manifold evils, our people have been preserved in peace" The defeated Hlubi chief, Langalibalele, was in exile in Cape Town. Cetsewayo of the Zulu had joined him there, after his success against the British army at Isandhlwana in January and his defeat at Ulundi in July. The Phuti Chief, Moorosi, has recently been killed on his mountain retreat in southern Basutoland, after a long siege by the Cape Mounted Rifles from March to November 1879. Meanwhile, the power of the Pedi paramountcy, which threatened British hegemony in the Transvaal, was effectively broken by the storming of the Maroteng stronghold in November 1879 and the capture of Chief Sekhukhune. A series of revolts against the Cape Colonial government had also taken place in the Transkei region. No wonder John Thomas Daniel reflected that Chief Moroka's Barolong at Thaba'Nchu remained the only independent African political community in all this part of South Africa. Little did he know that the Moroka's Barolong would soon be split into two antagonistic factions under his two sons, Tshipenare Moroka and Samuel Lehurele.*

As Moroka grew increasingly frailer he started to hand over control to his son, Tshipenare Moroka. Samuel Lehurele Moroka believed himself to be the rightful successor and managed to secure the support of the Anglican missionary, George Mitchell, who appointed him a Warden of the Anglican Church

In his circuit report of 1880, John Thomas Daniel wrote: "*They sowed the wind but do not believe in reaping the whirlwind.*" At the same time George Mitchell, the Anglican Missionary at Thaba'Nchu used the same metaphor: "*Tho' men's minds were not very easy, yet it was not imagined for a moment that a rough, strong and violent wind was rising which would in no long time scatter us to all the points of the compass like the down of some scotch thistle*". One cannot help wondering whether these two missionaries had a shared conversation one day and spoke about the ill "*wind*" which was beginning to blow across the land and decided to include the metaphor in their respective reports to their Principals.

The following is a direct quote from John Thomas Daniel's obituary which was read at the Wesleyan Missionary Society conference:

"His accurate knowledge of the people, their language, and habits of life; the implicit trust placed in him by the late chiefs, shared by all the people, Christian and heathen alike; his well-known medical skill, always at their service; and withal his untiring devotion to his great work; secured for him an influence quite unique, and made him a power for good in this tribe. His prudence, moderation, and wisdom, in times of recent excitement and tribal revolution, and the skill with which in these troublous (sic) days he guided his flock, and conserved the interests of Methodism deserve to be remembered. As a preacher he was practical; winsome in style, and powerful in his appeals to conscience. Many will be the "Crown of his Rejoicing in the Day of the Lord." As a friend, he was faithful and true, and hospitable. As a Pastor, he was kindly and sympathetic, winning the confidence of old and young, and the affectionate regard of rich and poor alike. For many months before his death his health was far from robust, it was evident to those who knew best that the earthly tabernacle was giving way. He bore his sufferings with patient submission to God's will. Shortly before death he said to his wife, "I am very weak; not only weak in body, but my mental powers are going, but thank God there is one thing I can do, I can still cling to Jesus". And so the clinging to the Master he had loved so many years, the tired servant fell asleep, and passed to his reward. He died at Thaba'Nchu on 15th July, 1888, in the 63<sup>rd</sup> year of his age, and the 33<sup>rd</sup> year of his ministry, mourned and lamented by thousands of sorrowing hearts.

An obituary notice was also placed in the Bloemfontein weekly newspaper, De Express: "In disposition he was loving and gentle; in Ministerial labours, earnest and diligent; as a Missionary he was effective and successful; owing to his acquaintance with Native character and customs, his knowledge of Dutch and Sesotto (sic) languages, and his medical experience. In his home and in the Church his loss will be deeply felt. He has served his own generation and by the will of God he has fallen asleep."

Queenstown Free Press Tuesday August 7, 1888

#### DEATH OF THE REVD. J.T. DANIEL.

The Northern Post says: It is with deep regret we record the death at Thaba 'Nchu of the Revd. J.T. DANIEL. He was one of the early pioneer missionaries of the Wesleyan body; and probably one of the most successful and useful in spreading its wide range of work among the powerful native tribes of the Lesuto. His name was a host among the natives, and his word to them law,

so great was their trust in his wisdom and judgment, and inflexible integrity. Amongst the Boers of the adjacent republic he was scarcely less loved and esteemed.

John and Mary Ann lie buried side by side in the mission cemetery in Thaba’Nchu. Not far from the mission cemetery Chief Moroka’s grave is a national monument.

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<sup>i</sup> Permit to return to England on 7/11/1822 (this permit donated to Albany Museum by Constance Myna Carmen Mitchley & her husband Darcy Guy Jeffcott in 1944).

<sup>ii</sup> According to “The 1820 Settlers of Salem” by A. E. Makin published by Juta & Co., Court road, Cape Town, Cape Province, South Africa / 1971, page 85, para 2: “ He joined the party of Edward Wynne in London early August 1819. His occupation was given as husbandman and watchmaker. The party formed themselves into the United Wesleyan Methodist Society on 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1819. Marsh was nominated as one of the three guardians of the Society. Eventually sailed aboard the Brilliant as a member of the party of Hezekiah Sephton, who had by then taken over the leadership of the group

<sup>iii</sup> Methodist Archives, Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Eastern Province, South Africa. Ref. Volume 1825 page 24 no. 90: Marriage certificate of John Nevins Daniel and Sarah Marsh.

<sup>iv</sup> Hibernian Research. Original document in Daniel files, 40a Fontein Street, Darling 7345 Western Cape, South Africa.

<sup>v</sup> Extract from the baptismal register of the Commemoration Methodist Church, Grahamstown, Eastern Province, South Africa / 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1862 ref. MS 15899/1

<sup>vi</sup> Death notice 3130/1838 Cape Archives Depot, Roeland Street, Cape Town, South Africa.

<sup>vii</sup> Grahamstown Journal of 14 February 1839, page 4 Column 2.

<sup>viii</sup> Grahamstown Journal of 14 February 1839, page 4 Column 2.

<sup>ix</sup> Methodist Archives, Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Eastern Province, South Africa: Proceedings of the Wesleyan conference of 1899 Page 7: Obituary of John Thomas Daniel

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<sup>xi</sup> Ficksburg is a town situated at the foot of the 1750 m high Imperani Mountain in the Free State Province of South Africa. The town was founded by General Johan Fick in 1867 who won the territory in the Basotho wars. He laid out many erven and plots to be bought at a reasonable price. The town was later proclaimed a municipality in 1891. The last Governor General of the Union of South Africa, Charles Robberts Swart was imprisoned here by the British in 1914 and released one day before his scheduled execution.

<sup>xii</sup> The term Batlokwa refers to several Sotho-Tswana communities that reside in Botswana, Lesotho and South Africa, comprising both the following Tlokwa Chiefs and more particularly members of the clans identified as Tlokwa, or individuals who identify themselves as of Tlokwa descent. Members of the Batlokwa clans are found in all the three Sotho-Tswana language groupings. I.e.: Sesotho, Setswana and Northern Sotho. Most of the Batlokwa clans trace their royal lineages to Queen Manthatisi and her son Sekonyela, and have the wild cat as their totem.

<sup>xiii</sup> Bukantswe V3 online Sesotho – English dictionary ref. 1:8187

<sup>xiv</sup> James Backhouse: “Narrative of a Visit to the Mauritius and South Africa (1844)” Page 396. Backhouse visited the place in 1839.

<sup>xv</sup> Methodist Archives, Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Eastern Province, South Africa: Marriage certificate of John Thomas Daniel and Mary Ann Sephton.

<sup>xvi</sup> Methodist Archives, Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Eastern Province, South Africa: Proceedings of the Wesleyan conference of 1899 Page 7: Obituary of John Thomas Daniel.

<sup>xvii</sup> Methodist Archives, Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, Eastern Province, South Africa: The Methodist Churchman vol. XXXiii no 154 Cape Town, Monday June 16, 1924; “A page from the past: Striking incident in a missionary’s experience” by the Rev. C. Pettman.

<sup>xviii</sup> The Sotho people (Basotho or Basuto) have lived in Southern Africa since around the fifth century. The Sotho nation emerged from the accomplished diplomacy of Moshoeshe I who gathered together disparate clans of Sotho – Tswana origin that had dispersed across southern Africa in the early 19<sup>th</sup>

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century. Most of the Sotho today live in South Africa, as the Orange Free State was originally part of Moshoeshoe's nation (modern day Lesotho).

<sup>xix</sup> Moshoeshoe (cir 1786 – March 11, 1870) was born at Menkhoaneng in the Northern part of present day Lesotho. He was the first son of Mokhachane, a minor Chief of the Bamokoteli lineage – a branch of the Koena (crocodile) clan. In his early childhood he helped his father to gain power over some smaller clans. At the age of 34 Moshoeshoe formed his own clan and became a Chief. He and his followers settled at the Butha-Buthe Mountain.

<sup>xx</sup> Morija is a town in western Lesotho, located 35 miles south of the Capital, Maseru. It was the site of the first French Protestant Mission founded in 1833.

<sup>xxi</sup> Thaba Bosiu is a sandstone plateau with an area of approximately two square kilometers and a height of 1804 meter above sea level. It is located between the Orange and Caledon Rivers in the Maseru district of Lesotho, 24 km east of the country's capital, Maseru.

<sup>xxii</sup> Bloemfontein is the capital city of the Freestate province of South Africa, and the Judicial Capital of the nation.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Bensonvale is situated near to the Freestate border in the Herschel district, Eastern Cape, South Africa.

<sup>xxiv</sup> K. Schoeman: *The Wesleyan Mission in the O.F.S. 1833 – 1854* Cape Town, 1991 pp 31044. Also S. M. Molema: "Chief Moroka: his life. Times, his country and his people", Cape Town, 1951