

How Laffelarhoo became Charlotte

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In 1819, Major George Pigot (c1782-1830), his newly-wed second wife Betsy and his teenage daughters Catherine and Sophia, left England for the Cape, accompanied by some 20 indentured servants from Berkshire. Pigot, the illegitimate son of a noble lord, was a well-off gentleman farmer who hoped to carve out a fine estate in the Albany district on the eastern frontier.

His party included a carpenter, a blacksmith, a wheelwright, three masons, a cooper, a baker, a shoemaker and 10 farmers, some of whom were married men with families. Four of the single farming men were brothers named Amos, Richard, John and Priesthood Boucher (also spelled Bowsher), aged 24 to 14, who had apparently left several impoverished siblings behind in Berkshire.

The struggles and disappointments of the 1820 settlers are too well known to repeat, but the Boucher brothers never regretted their decision to emigrate. They eventually became independent farmers and although they never had much cash, they encouraged their English relatives to take advantage of the free passages offered by Sir George Grey's government 37 years later, and join them in the Winterberg.

The self-important Pigot and his servants settled in the Blaauwkranz valley and began to lay out the farm known as Pigot Park. This prime location contained an abundance of good water, pasture, wood, stone and clay, but it was prone to cattle-rustling by dispossessed Xhosa living near the frontier.

Although his peers found him intelligent and agreeable, Pigot was not a good team leader, being quick-tempered, intolerant and humourless. There is a legend that he referred to his single men's quarters as a "den of thieves" during an angry outburst, causing Priesthood Boucher to suggest that the name be displayed. A painted sign was duly nailed above the door,



SUPERIOR: A settlers' cottage in 1823. The Bouchers' dwelling would have been far more modest



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much to the men's amusement and their employer's fury.

The 1820 settlers were not allowed to own slaves, but Pigot appeared to have plenty of servants. However, by 1823, he had acquired at least one prize negress, Laffelarhoo of Madagascar. She had been freed from a foreign slave

work for five years.

By then, they had started a family which eventually numbered five sons and four daughters, and in June 1828 they submitted a memorial to Lieutenant Governor Bourke informing him that Pigot had been pleased to consent to Charlotte being discharged from her indentures, and asking him to cancel them, which was done.

Richard signed the memorial, and Charlotte's cross was witnessed by Donald Moodie, who had married Sophia Pigot soon after Boucher's wedding in 1824.

Major Pigot died in 1830, and the Bouchers had settled among members of Liversage's party when the Sixth Frontier War broke out in 1834. They were obliged to abandon their home and move to Grahamstown, where they purchased a house and two lots of ground for £120.

Charlotte was a widow aged 57 when she died on the Blinkwater Road while travelling with her son in January 1860. By then, the family had forgotten her origins. Her birthplace was listed as Mauritius, and Mr Hatton of Post Retief did her an injustice by referring to her as a former slave when he applied for a copy of her marriage registration.

Her estate consisted of a third share in a farm and some livestock, estimated to be worth about £240 – a relative fortune. Back in England, her husband's impoverished Berkshire relative Charles Boucher and his sons aged 10 and 8 earned just 14 shillings a week between them in 1857, which was insufficient to support a family of eight.

Their clergyman wrote: "I need not say that they are occasionally in great want. It is with great pleasure that I add that the whole family are quite as meritorious as they are needy. Charles' wife Mary Ann is a pattern of industry and good management."

ship and released at the Cape, prior to being indentured without wages for 14 years.

Pigot's daughter Sophia, who kept a naive journal detailing the family's first year at the Cape, does not mention her, and there is no record of her meeting with Richard Boucher and their subsequent courtship.

By 1823, Laffelarhoo had been baptised Charlotte, and at the end of the year Richard applied to the matrimonial court at Grahamstown for permission to marry her. This was granted, with the proviso that she should remain in her master's service until her apprenticeship had expired.

The couple, aged about 25 and 20, were married by the Rev. William Boardman (1775-1825), an Anglican clergyman who accompanied the settlers. Pigot's plan to retain Charlotte's domestic services appears to have been somewhat impractical, but the Bouchers managed to make it