

Origin of the Wentzel Family of the Strand Muslim Community

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Introduction

During a talk at the Western Cape Archives and Records Service (WCARS), I mentioned that the Muslim Wentzels were among the pioneering families who had settled at Mosterd Bay (Strand) after emancipation. It was then when a gentleman in the audience pointed out that Wentzel is a German surname.

I deemed it fitting to write about this family, firstly, to trace the patriarch of the Muslim Wentzel family and his descendants, and, secondly, to focus on Ismodien Wentzel, my paternal great-grandfather and his brother, Gamat, who both died as lepers on Robben Island. Thirdly, I place emphasis on Jogera Rhoda, who lost eight of her eleven children in the early 1900s. She is the granddaughter of Galiel and Jasmena Wentzel, and my paternal grandmother.

Galiel Wentzel

According to oral history, as related to me by Ragiema Crombie on April 8, 1990 at my residence in Firgrove, Galiel Wentzel married Ouma Jasmena. She did not know her surname. She said that from this union, seven children had been born. The sons were Ismodien, Gamat, Oesman (Boppa Oesman) and Kaliel (Oompie Calla). The daughters were Jamiela, Layla and Asa.

Evidence of Jasmena's surname was eventually found on her Death Notice. We then came to know that she was the daughter of Java and Cornelia Wanza.

Galiel Wentzel's parents

Galiel Wentzel was born in 1815¹ in the Somerset West area. On his Death Notice, his father is indicated as just Wentzel, and his mother as Lena Wentzel.

185872. Died 7 September 1903. 2798

Death Notice.

PURSUANT TO THE PROVISIONS CONTAINED IN SECTION 9, ORDINANCE No. 104.

Name of the Deceased *Jasmena Wentzel, widow,*

Residence of the Deceased *Somerset Strand*

Name of the Parents (Father *Jacob Wentzel*
Mother *Cornelia Wentzel*)

Age of the Deceased *85* years _____ months.

Condition in life (occupation) *Fisherman's wife*

Married or Unmarried, Widower or Widow *Widow*

Name of Surviving Spouse _____

Name or names and approximate date of death of previous Spouse or Spouses *Kalid Wentzel*
Died about 18 years ago

The day of the decease: on *5th April 1903*

At what House or where the person died *House of Samuel Wentzel, Som. Strand*

Name of Children of Deceased, and whether major or minors (being separately those born of different marriages.)

- (1) *Jannika, married to Reuben [unclear]*
- (2) *Samuel Wentzel*
- (3) *Aysa, married to Herman Buekhuus*
- (4) *Oesman Wentzel*
- (5) *Kalid Wentzel*

Whether Deceased has left any Property, and of what kind. *None, except the sum of £97.50 deposited in her credit in the Public Trust Fund*

The Deceased has left *no* Will

Dated at *Somerset West* this *6th July 1903*

Kalid Wentzel
Son of Deceased

This Notice must be filled up and signed by the nearest Relative or Connection of the Deceased who shall at the time be at or near the place of death, or, in the absence of such near Relative or Connection, by the person who shall have the usual charge of the house, or, in the absence of such person, and must be sent either to the Master of the Supreme Court, in Cape Town, or, if the deceased be a Country Resident, to the Resident Magistrate of the District, in English.

Figure 1: Death Notice of Jasmena Wentzel, confirming her surname.
Source: WCARS: MOOC 6/9/482, folio 2798.

The offspring of Galiel and Jasmena Wentzel, as narrated by Ragiema Crombie (nee Rhoda), is corroborated on the Death Notice of both Galiel and his wife, Jasmena Wentzel.

¹ Death Notice of Galiel Wentzel, a fisherman who was born in Somerset West. He died in September 1885 at the age of 70 years at Somerset Strand.

94606 Filed 30 Sept. 1890 (15)

Death Notice,

PURSUANT TO THE PROVISIONS CONTAINED IN SECTION 9, ORDINANCE No. 104.

- Name of the Deceased Gabiel Wentzel
- Birthplace of the Deceased Someract West
- Names of the Parents of the Deceased { Father Wentzel
Mother Kena Wentzel
- Age of the Deceased about 70 years _____ months
- Condition in life (occupation) Fisherman
- Married or Unmarried, Widower or Widow. Married
- (a) Name of surviving Spouse _____
- (b) Name or names and approximate date of death of previous Spouse or Spouses _____
- The day of the decease: On or about September 1890
- At what house or where the person died Own house Som. Strand
- Names of Children of Deceased, and whether majors or minors all majors. 7 children

(Listing separately those born of different marriages)

Jemadieu
Emment
Gala
Acamin
Leila
Jockie
Ada

- Whether Deceased has left any property, and of what kind half share in lot No. 5 Middelburg

The Deceased has left 1/3 Will.

Dated at Someract Strand
this 13 September 1890 Jasmina x Ka-malo
A. H. H. H. H. State in what capacity.

Witnessed and signed by the nearest Relative or Connection of the Deceased who shall at the time be at or near the place on which the death occurred, and next be sent under the Master of the Supreme Court, in Cape Town, or if the death occurred in the Country Districts, to the Resident Magistrate of the District, in duplicate.

Figure 2: Corroboration of the oral history about the offspring of Gabiel Wentzel.
Source: WCARS: MOOC 6/9/284, folio 1818.

The Death Notice of Gabiel Wentzel confirms that his father was a Wentzel.

Finding a male in the Hottentots Holland area with the surname Wentzel

A Carel David Wentzel (CDW) resided in the Hottentots Holland area on the farm Morgenster of Willem Morkel² in 1808.³ It will be shown that at the time when Gabiel was born, CDW was still resident in the Hottentots Holland area (Hopkins 1969). CDW was the only Wentzel listed on the *Opgaafrol* at the time.

²Carel David Wentzel features on the 1806–1809 list of inhabitants on farms in the Hottentots Holland area (WCARS: 1/STB, Vol. 16/138).

³WCARS: *Opgaafrol* J237 and J238.

In fact, CDW was already on Onverwacht when Lady Anne Barnard and her husband arrived there late in the afternoon on Saturday, May 4, 1798 (Robinson, Lenta, and Driver 1994). The entourage left Cape Town in the morning by a specially constructed ox-wagon and stopped at the farm Meerlust where they were royally entertained by the Myburghs. On arrival at Onverwacht, they were met by CDW and a few slaves who were minding the farm. CDW regretted that the Morkels were absent and that the supplies were locked up. He could thus not provide them with as much as he would have liked. However, he did prepare and shared with them a meal of mutton broiled on coals with parsley, crumbs, pepper and butter, with a few dozen eggs and some potatoes. According to Lady Anne Barnard, he was very kind and did his best for their comfort by providing them with feather beds for the night (Robinson, Lenta, and Driver 1994). Lady Anne Barnard and her entourage slept at Onverwacht and left on the Sunday to cross the Hottentots Hollandkloof (later Sir Lowry's Pass) with a fresh team of oxen, which CDW lent them (Robinson, Lenta, and Driver 1994).

The observations of Lady Anne Barnard, and CDW's responses to questions (in his role as host), provide some insight into the occupation and character of this young man of about 18 years. She found him to be more intelligent than any of the men of his class. He intimated that he was originally from Europe and had come to South Africa when an infant. At the time, he was teaching the children to read and write and he was earning eight rixdollars a month (Robinson, Lenta, and Driver 1994). To oblige *Mynheer* (Morkel), he also looked after the farm.

From CDW, she came to know that slaves were not allowed to eat meat, but instead were given brown bread of a very low quality (Robinson, Lenta, and Driver 1994).

CDW's remark that farmers would not think of it to allow slaves to live as he did, makes it evident that he was treated as an equal by the Morkels and other settlers. He commented that if farmers should allow such treatment of their slaves it would remove the distinction between themselves and their slaves.

As a poor tutor, the prevailing status quo between farmer and slave bewildered and alarmed him, but he had become accustomed to a milieu of subordination in all its facets. Lady Anne drew a picture of the tutor, which is shown here as Figure 3.



Figure 3: Sketch of Carel David Wentzel by Lady Anne Barnard.
Source: Fairbridge (1924, 63).

Carel David Wentzel, the tutor

Before the establishment of mission and public schools in Somerset West, children of the Hottentots Holland area had been educated, as in other remote parts of the country, by a travelling tutor, known as a *meester*, who would work on contract at a farm, and, when possible, neighbouring children would join his classes (Heap 1993,133).

I contend that the extract below from the history of the Hendrik Louw Primary School in the Strand could refer to the same Carel David Wentzel.

One feels inclined to guess that before the fifties of the last century the few Strand children attended the private schools, one of the nearest being that of the Morkels at *Morgenster* and *Onverwacht*, now known as “*Die Bos*.”

It sounds incredible that as late as 1821 the Dutch Reformed Church of Somerset West had to dispense with the teaching services of “*voorleser*” Wentzel because funds for his salary could not be raised locally nor recovered from government sources. (Laerskool Hendrik Louw 2015)

Carel David Wentzel was appointed as *voorleser* (reader) by the Dutch Reformed Church *Kerkraad* early in 1820. He served the congregation for 20 months, but lack of funds caused

his service to be terminated in October 1821 (Hopkins 1969, 42). Since at least 1798, he was the teacher on the Morkels' farms Morgenster and Onverwacht. He died at Riversdale in 1857 at a ripe old age (Hopkins 1969, 42).

In the *Opgaafrol* of 1842 for the District of Swellendam, in which the field-cornetcy of Bosjesveld is situated, a Carel David Wentzel (CDW) is listed. He paid a capitation tax of six shillings for that year.⁴ On July 11, 1857, a Carel David Wentzel, who was an instructor, died at the age of 76 years at the residence of Anthony du Preez in Riversdale.⁵ He was thus born in 1780.

In South African Genealogies (Volume 16), the year of his baptism and that of his demise are confirmed as being 1780⁶ and 1857 respectively (Genealogical Institute of South Africa (GISA) 2008, 135). Is this the same Carel David Wentzel who was a teacher on Onverwacht in 1809?

In 1809, he would have been 28 years old. The *Opgaafrol* of the field-cornetcy of Bosjesveld, taken in 1842, would make him 61 years old. He died 15 years later in 1857. Adding 15 to 1842 gives one 1857, the year of his death; and adding 15 to 61 gives 76, the age at which he died. Based on the aforementioned calculations, I am inclined to believe that I am dealing with the same Carel David Wentzel. More importantly, he is listed at death as an instructor.⁷

It is thus highly probable that this Carel David Wentzel fathered Galiel with a woman of colour. He was probably in his mid-thirties when this happened. Galiel Wentzel's birth in the Somerset West area in 1815 creates the possibility that his mother might have been a slave on a farm in the Somerset West area, as the village of Somerset West was only established in 1817 (Heap 1993, 107).

Lena, a Slave in the Household of the Morkels

In 1826, Willem Morkel, Daniel's son, who owned the farm Onverwacht, inherited six slaves⁸ from his widowed aunt, Helena (nee Malan), who owned the farms Voorburg and Mosterdbaay in the vicinity. Among the five slaves was a housemaid named Lena, who, at the time of transfer, was 35 years old.⁹ Between 1817 and 1825, Lena had four children, namely, Lena, Leander, Corridon and Adonis. In addition, she had a son, Jephtha, who was

⁴ WCARS: J358 *Opgaafrol* for the Swellendam district for the year 1842.

⁵ WCARS: MOOC 6/9/79, folio 4550. Death Notice of Carel David Wentzel.

⁶ WCARS: VC 609. Baptism in the Dutch Reformed Church, Cape Town, 1780–1786.

⁷ WCARS: MOOC 6/9/79, folio 4550. Death Notice of Carel David Wentzel.

⁸ WCARS: SO 6/94: 137. Lena, a housemaid on Onverwacht, is listed in the Slave Register of Willem Morkel, Daniel's son.

⁹ WCARS: SO 6/94: 137. Lena and her five children are listed in the Slave Register of Willem Morkel, Daniel's son, and the registration date is August 17, 1826. Lena was then 35 years old, and a housemaid on Onverwacht.

about 12 years old on August 17, 1826, as reflected in Figure 4 in an extract from the slave register of Willem Morkel.¹⁰

I contend that this Jephtha, who was described as being about 12 years old at that time, is the son that CDW fathered with Lena in 1815. At the time when Galiel Wentzel was born, Lena would have been 24 years old. It should also be borne in mind that legally sanctioned slave marriages did not exist until the passage of the Nineteenth Ordinance of 1826 (Shell 1994, 320). Lena was probably CDW’s concubine. (Concubinage is an interpersonal and sexual relationship in which the couple are not or cannot be married.) According to De Villiers (1966), CDW never married.

Date	Name	Sex	Age at Birth	Maternal Name	County
1817					
March 21	Taanje	Male	about 11 years		St. Albans
	Dirk	Male	6		St.
	Jacobus	Male	11		St.
	Cornelius	Male	2		St.
1818					
August 17	Lena	Female	35 years		St.
	Lena	Female	21 years	Lena	St.
	Leander	Male	18 Nov 1817		St.
	Coridon	Male	15 March 1819		St.
	Silvius	Male	8 May 1820		St.
	Jephtha	Male	about 12 years		St.
1824					
December 20	Cypriote	Male	35		St.
1825					
January 21	Jan	Male	21		St.

Figure 4: Registration of Lena’s slave children.

Source: WCARS: SO 6/94: 137.

Lena’s origin could not be established, but the patriarch of the Wentzels came from Dresden in Germany to the Cape under rule of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in 1748 (Plug 2014). CDW is the son of Carel David Wentzel and Sophia (Hubert) Wentzel (Herbst 2013).

¹⁰ WCARS: SO 6/94: 137.

If Galiel Wentzel had been born into slavery, then he would most probably have been listed in the slave registers of 1816–1834 under another name. Considering the coinciding dates of birth of Jephtha and Galiel, it is a quite credible deduction to conclude that Jephtha was Galiel's name when he was still enslaved. One could propose that he was given the name of Galiel after emancipation when he settled at Mosterd Bay and embraced Islam. In a previous study, I showed that the slave forebears of the Muslim Rhodas of the Strand (namely, Kandaza and her sons, Leander and Jacobus) embraced Islam after emancipation and were given the names of Jaaria, Fagedien and Samodien respectively (Rhoda 2014, 103).

Galiel Wentzel and Jasmena Wanza probably married in 1838 because their eldest daughter, Jamiela, was born in 1839.¹¹ The fact that Jamiela was born at Mosterd Bay in 1839 presupposes that the Muslim Wentzels of the Strand settled at Mosterd Bay either prior to or just after emancipation in 1838. At emancipation, Galiel would have been 23 years old and Jasmena 20 years.

In 1882, Galiel Wentzel and Joemat Rhoda were given joint legal title to Lot 5 by virtue of the Mosterd Bay Crown Lands Act.¹² Jamiela died at Geeringh's Cottages in the Strand in 1909.¹³ Her eldest brother, Ismodien, was born in 1846 at Somerset Strand (Mosterd Bay).¹⁴ Galiel and Jasmena's remaining children, namely, Gamat,¹⁵ Asa,¹⁶ Lyla,¹⁷ Oesman¹⁸ and Kaliel (Cala on the Death Notice), were all born in Somerset Strand (Mosterd Bay).

Biological Evidence: The Third Generation

Further biological evidence that CDW probably fathered Galiel is to be found among the third-generation descendants of Galiel and Jasmena Wentzel. According to 90-year-old Marra Fanie (nee Wentzel) and 87-year-old Ragiema Mathews (nee Rhoda), Janap Wentzel (Sies Nappie) was fairly light-skinned and had blue eyes. In fact, Marra's exact words were: "*Sy was spierwit met potblou oë en ligte hare.*"¹⁹ Janap is the granddaughter of Galiel and Jasmena Wentzel.

¹¹ WCARS: HAWC 1/3/43/7/1. Death Registration of Jamiela Railoun, nee Wentzel.

¹² WCARS: Quitrent Register QQR, Volume 195.

¹³ WCARS: Quitrent Register QQR, Volume 195.

¹⁴ WCARS: MOOC 6/9/324, folio 19. Death Notice of Ismodien Wentzel who died of leprosy in the leper ward on Robben Island in 1893.

¹⁵ WCARS: MOOC 6/9/403, folio 2071. Death Notice of Gamat Wentzel who died in the leper ward on Robben Island at the age of 26 on May 27, 1900. He was the brother of Ismodien.

¹⁶ WCARS: HAWC 1/3/43/7/1. Death Registration of Asa Brinkhuis, nee Wentzel.

¹⁷ WCARS: HAWC 1/3/44/5/1, entry 320. Death Registration of Leila Sadan, nee Wentzel. Her brother, Oesman, was the informant.

¹⁸ WCARS: HAWC 1/3/43/5/3, entry 160/39. Death Registration of Oesman Wentzel.

¹⁹ The information was obtained from Marra Fanie in an interview conducted by Amina Rhoda on Wednesday, August 30, 2016 at the residence of her daughter, Kulsum Africa, at Hawaii Street, Macassar. The information was passed on to me by my eldest sister, Ragiema Mathews, over the

The writer can recall that the daughter of Oesman Wentzel, Nakiela Wentzel (Sies Nakkie), was very light complexioned.



Figure 5: Janap Bagus, nee Wentzel.
Photo, courtesy of Jogera Bagus.



telephone on August 31, 2016. She resides in Rondebosch East. Incidentally, Janap Wentzel married Mohammed Bagus. She died whilst on pilgrimage in Mecca in 1947.

Figure 6: Nakiela Jabaar, nee Wentzel.

Photo, courtesy of Tougieda Petersen.

His own aunt, Fatima Temoor (nee Rhoda), the daughter of Jogera Rhoda (nee Wentzel), was also very fair skinned. These factors enhance the contention that, because of the European or Caucasian features of the aforementioned women, Carel David Wentzel could indeed have been the patriarch of the Muslim Wentzel family of the Strand.

The Lepers at Mosterd Bay

The first lepers were moved from Hemel en Aarde (near Hermanus) to Robben Island, and housed in existing buildings in 1846 (South African History Online 2011).

On February 18, 1892, Ismodien Wentzel, Gamat Wentzel, Mea Lamara, Fritz Diedericks and Sophia Lucas were identified as lepers at Mosterd Bay who would be sent to Robben Island.²⁰

Early in 1893, the Assistant Resident Magistrate (ARM) of Somerset West²¹ approached the leper sufferers residing in the settlement of fishermen at Mosterd Bay (later Somerset Strand) on the False Bay coast. Among the lepers were 46-year-old Ismodien Wentzel and his 19-year-old brother, Gamat.²² The ARM was trying to persuade Ismodien Wentzel and some other lepers at Mosterd Bay to go to Robben Island for the treatment of their leprosy. Gamat, a young fisherman, was not married. Ismodien was about 31 years old in 1877 when he married 29-year-old Momena,²³ the daughter of Faggiedien Rhoda.²⁴ Their children were Akieldien (aged 15), Joggara (aged 11), Galema (aged 9), Sarah (aged 7) and Gamat Sardik.²⁵

The Leper Hospital on Robben Island

Between 1846 and 1931 there was a hospital on Robben Island for patients suffering from leprosy, mental instability and chronic illness. This was because the island created the perfect place to keep these patients isolated from the community, preventing the spread of the illnesses (South African History Online 2011).

²⁰ WCARS: 1/STB, Volume 20/13. Letters received from Resident Magistrate and Civil Commissioner.

²¹ WCARS: 1/STB, Volume 10/28. Letters received from Resident Magistrate, 1857–1893. Information obtained from the Assistant Magistrate’s Report enabled the writing of the narrative of Ismodien and his brother Gamat.

²² The source of Gamat’s age is the Leper Case Book, R.I., Volume 155: 3.

²³ WCARS: HAWC 1/3/43/5/1. Death Registration of Momena Wentzel who died at the age of 65 in 1914.

²⁴ WCARS: HAWC 1/3/43/6/1. Death Registration of Faggiedien Rhoda who died at Somerset Strand at the age of 93 years in 1912.

²⁵ WCARS: 1/STB, Volume 10/28. Letters received from the Resident Magistrate, 1857–1893. Details of Ismodien’s children and their ages were obtained from the Assistant Magistrate’s Report.

The information provided by Momena Wentzel on the Death Notice of Ismodien Wentzel²⁶ confirms the narrative of their offspring and Ismodien's siblings as related by my 90-year-old aunt, Ragiema Crombie (nee Rhoda).

The ARM found it difficult to persuade the lepers at Mosterd Bay to go to Robben Island. He came to know that originally the lepers had been assembled at the Strand Lock-Up (jail), which, according to my late father, Oesman Rhoda, was in Pickle Street.²⁷

The ARM found the lock-up to be a most uninviting-looking place. This made the lepers believe that they were treated as "bandetta" (prisoners), and that they would be sent to the prison on Robben Island. The ARM had a difficult time trying to dispel this idea from their minds. He explained to the lepers that they would be nursed in a hospital on the island. The lepers were given the assurance that their families would be allowed to visit them. The ARM pointed out that they stood a chance of being cured as they would be cared for, and their suffering would be greatly reduced. If they obstinately remained where they were, they could only hope to suffer and die from the disease.

Despite all these assurances, Ismodien Wentzel refused point-blank to go to Robben Island, and he stated that if force was used, he would take his own life.

From the ARM's correspondence, one can gather that he showed great patience; he indicated that he would try again to persuade them to go to Robben Island. Only as a last resort would he use the strong arm of the law. The Governor of the Colony had the power to remove them from the community and then recover the cost of maintenance from their property.

On January 30, 1893, the ARM wrote that he had met with all the lepers at the Strand. This time his approach was different; he sat down with each one of them individually. He assured them that they were not going to be sent to a jail, but to a hospital where they would be treated medically. The ARM pointed out that he realised that it would be hard on them to be separated from their families, and assured them that their families would be allowed to visit them at stated times. In addition, he said, they would enjoy more freedom on the island than anywhere on the mainland. The ARM's patience paid off. The lepers agreed to go to Robben Island.

²⁶ WCARS: MOOC 13/11196, ref 157. Liquidation and Distribution Account of the Estate of Momena Wentzel.

²⁷ In December 1988, Mohaan Ramotar from Durban, the son of Jaaria Ramotar (nee Rhoda), was on holiday with our family. He wanted to know where his mother was born. It was on this occasion that my father pointed out the site where his mother had been born. He then also showed us the building where the jail used to be on the corner of Pickle and Abegglan Streets.

Amended Death Notice. D.S. 19/1894 (75)

PURSUANT TO THE PROVISIONS CONTAINED IN SECTION 9, ORDINANCE No. 104.

1. Name of the Deceased Ismodien Wentzel

2. Birthplace of the Deceased Somerset West Strand

3. Names of the Parents of the Deceased. { Father Kaluel Wentzel
Mother Diamina Wentzel

4. Age of the Deceased 47 years _____ months.

5. Condition in life (occupation) Fisherman

6. Married or Unmarried, Widower or Widow. } Married according to Mahomedan Custom

(a) Name of Surviving Spouse Momena Wentzel born Rhode

(b) Name or names and approximate dates of death of previous Spouse or Spouses } Not previously married

7. The day of the decease: on 30th December 1893

8. At what House or where the person died Leper ward, Robben Island

9. Names of Children of Deceased, and whether majors or minors } Akheldien Major
Joggara, married according to Mahomedan Custom to Leeli Rhode
Galima (minor)
Gamat Sardick (minor)

(Stating separately those born of different marriages)

Names of brothers and sisters of deceased

1. Jamiela Wentzel major

2. Gamat

3. Asa

4. Osman

5. Kaluel

10. Whether Deceased has left any Property, and of what kind } Yes, share in Erf at Somerset Strand

11. The Deceased has left No Will. Witnesses to mark

12. Dated at Leper Down John Ward Momena x Wentzel
this 17th day of April 1894 Marks

State in what capacity.
Surviving Spouse

This Notice must be filled up and signed by the nearest Relative or Connection of the Deceased who shall at the time be at or near the place at which the death occurred; or, in the absence of such near Relative or Connection, by the person who shall have the chief charge of the house or near the place at which the death occurred, and must be sent either to the Master of the Supreme Court, in Cape Town, or, if the deceased resided in the Country Districts, to the Resident Magistrate of the District in duplicate.

Figure 7: Oral history of Ismodien's children corroborated.
Source: WCARS: MOOC 6/9/324, folio 19.

It was then agreed that they would all meet on a day at a certain time at the Somerset West Railway Station. The railway line to the Strand was only completed in 1905 (Heap 1993, 102), which meant that the lepers had to be taken by horse-drawn cart to Somerset West Railway Station. The ARM made the transport arrangements with the Railway Traffic Manager. He also informed a medical officer at the old Somerset Hospital of the day and hour when they might be expected to arrive in Cape Town en route to Robben Island.

Lepers on their Way to Robben Island

On 15 February 1893, the ARM of Somerset West cabled a telegram (see Figure 8)²⁸ to the health authorities in Stellenbosch, informing them that the lepers had left Somerset West by train for Cape Town.

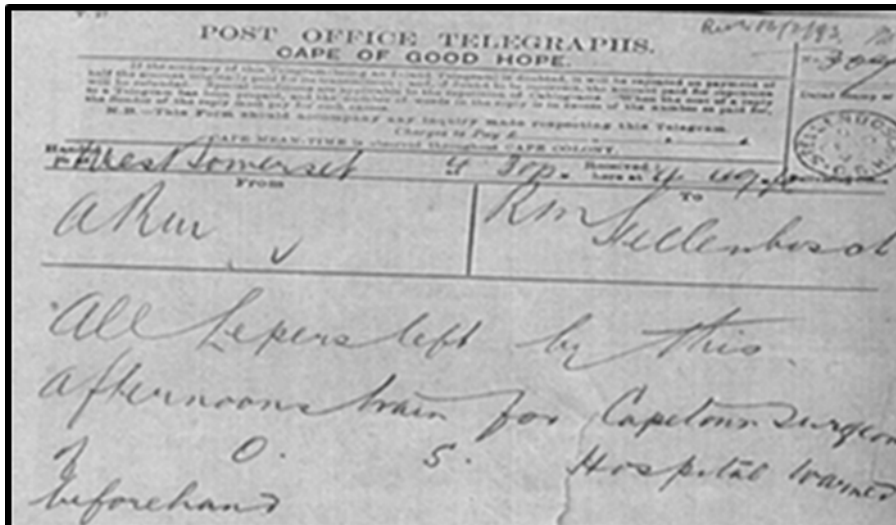


Figure 8: Telegram indicating the lepers left by train for Cape Town.

Source: WCARS: 1/STB, Vol. 20/13. Letters received from the Resident Magistrate and Civil Commissioner.

²⁸ WCARS: 1/STB 10/28. Letters received from the Resident Magistrate, 1857–1893. Information and copy of telegram obtained from the Assistant Magistrate’s report.

LEPER HOSPITAL, ROBBEN ISLAND.			
Total Beds in Wards on	17 th February 1893	Male	Female
do. Beds in occupation		320	133
do. Beds Vacant		290	113
		30	—
Patients Admitted from	11 th to 17 th Feb 1893	Male	Female
do. Died from	11 th to 17 th Feb 1893	4	0
		3	1
Beds Vacant on	17 th February 1893	30	—

by Colbee 2/17/93

ARM

Medical Superintendent

Figure 9: Lepers on Robben Island on February 17, 1893.
Source: WCARS: CO 1586, Robben Island.

I suspect that Ismodien’s younger brother was among the group who left by train because in the Leper Case Book (volume 155, page 3), it is indicated that Gamat Wentzel, who was then 19 years old, was admitted on February 17, 1893.²⁹ Also admitted to the leper ward on the same day from the Stellenbosch area, were Fritz Frederick, Ismodien Wentzel, Gideon Syster, Johannes Frederickss and Mea Lamara. The table (inserted as Figure 9) reflects the numbers of lepers who were treated in the Leper Hospital on the island on February 17, 1893.

The ARM was aware that by sending the fisherman, Ismodien Wentzel, to Robben Island, Momena and their children would be without a breadwinner. How would this family survive?

The Compassion of the Assistant Resident Magistrate

The ARM leaves the impression that he was genuinely concerned about the welfare of Ismodien’s family because, in his correspondence of January 23, 1893, he mentioned that Ismodien had rejected the initial proposal that they should accept rations from the state to sustain the family. From this we can gather that both Ismodien and Momena’s family must have been very supportive in such trying and difficult times.

Just one week after Ismodien had left for Robben Island, the ARM stated in his letter of February 22, 1893 that he had tried to induce the children of the lepers to be employed as

²⁹ WCARS: R.I. Leper Case Book, Volume 155, 3.

“apprentices” to farmers or others in the area. This implied that 15-year-old Akieldien and 11-year-old Joggara would have had to work as servants of these people.

Momena, I am sure, and the other members of the lepers, would not hear of such a thing as hiring out their children. The ARM finally conceded that the families at the Strand be left alone as it seemed they were now more reconciled to the idea of their loved ones being on Robben Island. The cheerful letters they received from those on the island surely made things bearable.

Ismodien Wentzel, the father of the writer’s paternal grandmother, Jogera Rhoda (nee Wentzel), spent ten and a half months on Robben Island where he died in the leper ward on December 30, 1893.³⁰ The records indicate that his brother, Gamat, was afflicted with the disease at the age of 15 in 1889. Gamat was treated for seven years and three months in the leper ward on the island and died at the age of 26 on May 27, 1900.³¹ The leper wards on Robben Island were closed down in 1931 (South African History Online 2011).

At the time of his death, Ismodien Wentzel and Gafaldien, alias Kamies, were joint owners of Lot 30 at Mosterd Bay.³² In the 1950s, this erf would have been on the site where Friedman and Cohen had its coal store, and this would have been near the corner of Abegglan and Terhoeven Streets. Today, in 2018, business premises occupy the site where Terhoeven Street had been closed down.

Ismodien’s wife, Momena Wentzel (nee Rhoda), died in 1914 at the age of 65 years, and her son, Gamat Sardick (Aboetjie Sarriek), was the informant of her death.³³

Jogera Rhoda (nee Wentzel)

Jogera Rhoda, the writer’s paternal grandmother, died in 1917 at the age of 35 years while giving birth to her eleventh child. Only three of her children survived, namely, Ragiema (1900–1990), Oesman (1906–1996) and Fatima (1903–1988). The remaining eight children have all been traced in the records of the Western Cape Archives Records Service (WCARS) in Roeland Street, Cape Town.

³⁰ WCARS: MOOC 6/9/324, folio 19. Death Notice of Ismodien Wentzel who died of leprosy in the leper ward on Robben Island in 1893.

³¹ WCARS: MOOC 6/9/403, folio 2071. Death Notice of Gamat Wentzel who died in the leper ward on Robben Island at the age of 26 years on May 27, 1900. He was the brother of Ismodien.

³² WCARS: Quirent Register QQR, Volume 195.

³³ WCARS: HAWC 1/3/43/5/1, p.108. Death Registration of Momena Wentzel.



Figure 10: Joger Rhoda with Ragiema, the narrator, Oesman, the writer's father, and Fatima, with a baby on her lap.
Photo, courtesy of the Rhoda family.

Galiel Wentzel died at Mosterd Bay in 1885 and was buried in the Malay Cemetery, the site of which today, in 2018, is occupied by the Strand Post Office. His wife, Jasmena, who died in 1903, was buried in the new Malay Cemetery in Lower Gordons Bay Road.

The present-day Muslim Wentzels of the Strand, from the line of Galiel and Jasmena, are the seventh generation.

Glossary

- voorleser:* person who reads texts from the Bible at a church service
- opgaafrol:* census of a ward in a district
- meester:* teacher
- kerkraad:* church council
- Aboetjie:* respectful way of addressing an elderly man
- apprentices: Slaves were referred to as apprentices after emancipation in 1834. The apprentices were waged labourers. Slaves were actually set free on December 1, 1838.

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