

KENCE

THE TRADE TOKENS OF STRACHAN AND COMPANY

BY

C.S. BALSON & C. GRAHAM

Scott Balson. C. Graham.

87/500



*With the Compliments of the Directors
of Strachan & Co. Ltd.,
October 1978.*

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The official coinages of Southern Africa are well documented, and collectors specializing in the coins of South Africa may assimilate most of the information available with relative ease; so much so that an ever-increasing body of South African numismatists is attracted by the challenge and wealth of research opportunity awaiting them in the field of trade tokens. The growing belief that tokens hold a legitimate position in the historical development of South African (or any other) currency add to the stature of the token as numismatic material, but old and new collectors alike feel the need for more literature and documentation in this field. However, the reasons for this shortage in information are soon apparent to intending researchers when they discover the frustrating elusiveness of original documentation. Even the Birmingham Mint, to whom the striking of a number of tokens has been attributed, admit to having kept no records of tokens they have struck, whilst their records of official coin strikings are exceptionally complete. The trade tokens of Strachan and Company which circulated in Nomansland (later East Griqualand) between about 1875 and 1932 suffer a remarkable lack of original documentation, but a unique opportunity for numismatic research was offered by Mr. Kenneth Strachan of Umzimkulu, who made available for detailed study the entire stock of Strachan and Company Tokens, intact, as they were withdrawn from circulation. There are four types of token, each type in four denominations, namely 3d, 6d, 1/- and 2/- . In this booklet we describe the four types and list the number of each type in the entire stock. In the absence of mintage figures these should be a good guide to the relative abundance of the different varieties.

The remainder of this work is concerned with outlining the history of Nomansland, especially with regard to trade and the development of Strachan and Company; and the circumstances necessitating the issue of the tokens are reconstructed as far as possible. Out of this history emerges a figure of central importance in the person of Donald Strachan, a man of towering personality, integrity and talent who earned for himself and his Company the affection and respect of the local inhabitants, black, white and coloured.

TYPES OF TOKEN

The word 'token' is derived from the Anglo-Saxon 'tacen', for a sign or a symbol. Strictly speaking most of the world's present-day coins are tokens for they do not have the full intrinsic value they purport to represent, and are really symbols. However, the commonly accepted numismatic definition of a token is a piece of metal or plastic, resembling a coin in size, shape and type but issued privately, usually without Government authority, for use as a substitute for the official coinage; generally as a pledge to be redeemed either in goods to the value it represents or in corresponding coin of the realm. Since the majority of British and South African tokens were issued in times of acute shortage of small coin of the state there seems to be little effort in the literature to recognise the many other purposes for which tokens were (and are) issued, and to classify tokens accordingly. We believe that certain classes of token have greater numismatic merit than others, and feel that the following basis for classification may be useful.

1. Trade Tokens. These are bona fide private coins issued by traders in times of acute shortage of coin of the state to enable normal trading activities to proceed. The token is a pledge redeemable in goods or in coin of the state, i.e. either in small coin when it should become available, or in available coin of larger denomination if redeemed to equivalent face value. There is no intended element of coercion or inducement for customers to use a particular trade outlet.
2. Barter Tokens. These are issued by a trader in payment for goods (usually agricultural products) with the agreement that they will be redeemed in goods to an equivalent value at the trader's own outlets. The transaction is therefore one of barter, with the tokens playing a role of convenience, allowing the seller to receive his goods at a rate and time convenient to himself. Trade tokens often change slowly and subtly into barter tokens, as evidenced by the continued circulation of former trade tokens when the need for their use has passed.
3. Monopoly Tokens are issued by traders to their employees in payment of part or all of their wages without the option of the employee to elect payment in official coinage only. By this practice the trader ensures that his employees obtain at least some of their requirements from his own outlets, so that he effectively holds a monopoly on these commodities. Here again, there is often a shift in emphasis and what were intended as trade or barter tokens have been used in this manner. Closely related to the Monopoly token is the credit token.

4. Credit Tokens are issued to employees to allow them to purchase goods to the equivalent face value from a specified supplier, the tokens to be redeemed when the employee receives his salary.

Monopoly and credit tokens were seen as "unfair practices" especially in the manner they were issued to black employees, and generated opposition to tokens in general, leading to their ultimate abolition.

5. Discount Tokens were issued by traders as a discount in cash transactions, and could be used in part or full payment in later transactions. The purpose was to induce the customer to return to a particular trader for his requirements.
6. Canteen Tokens are really meal tickets, to enable an employee to purchase food of his choice in a company canteen up to a specified amount.
7. Prison Tokens (which are particularly common in the United States) are issued to prisoners and are used like money in prison shops. The purpose is to limit a prisoner's spending to a specified level by rendering useless any outside money the prisoner may acquire from relatives or friends.
8. Staff Tokens are issued to employees of firms who are allowed a limited amount of discount buying from the firm's own stocks. Instead of keeping accounts of all discount purchases the firm sells its staff a supply of tokens at a discount rate, and the employees then use them as normal money at the (greater) face value.
9. Commodity Tokens, like milk tokens, are sold by a supplier of a given commodity to alleviate small change and security problems in small transactions which occur regularly. These are closely related to
10. Coupon Tokens which are issued by a supplier of services (e.g. bus companies) to avoid the difficulties of handling inconvenient amounts of small change in difficult circumstances.
11. Machine Tokens are provided by the owners of slot machines which were made (often in foreign countries) to accept coin sizes incompatible with the available coinage.

Figure 1
The Tokens of Strachan and Company

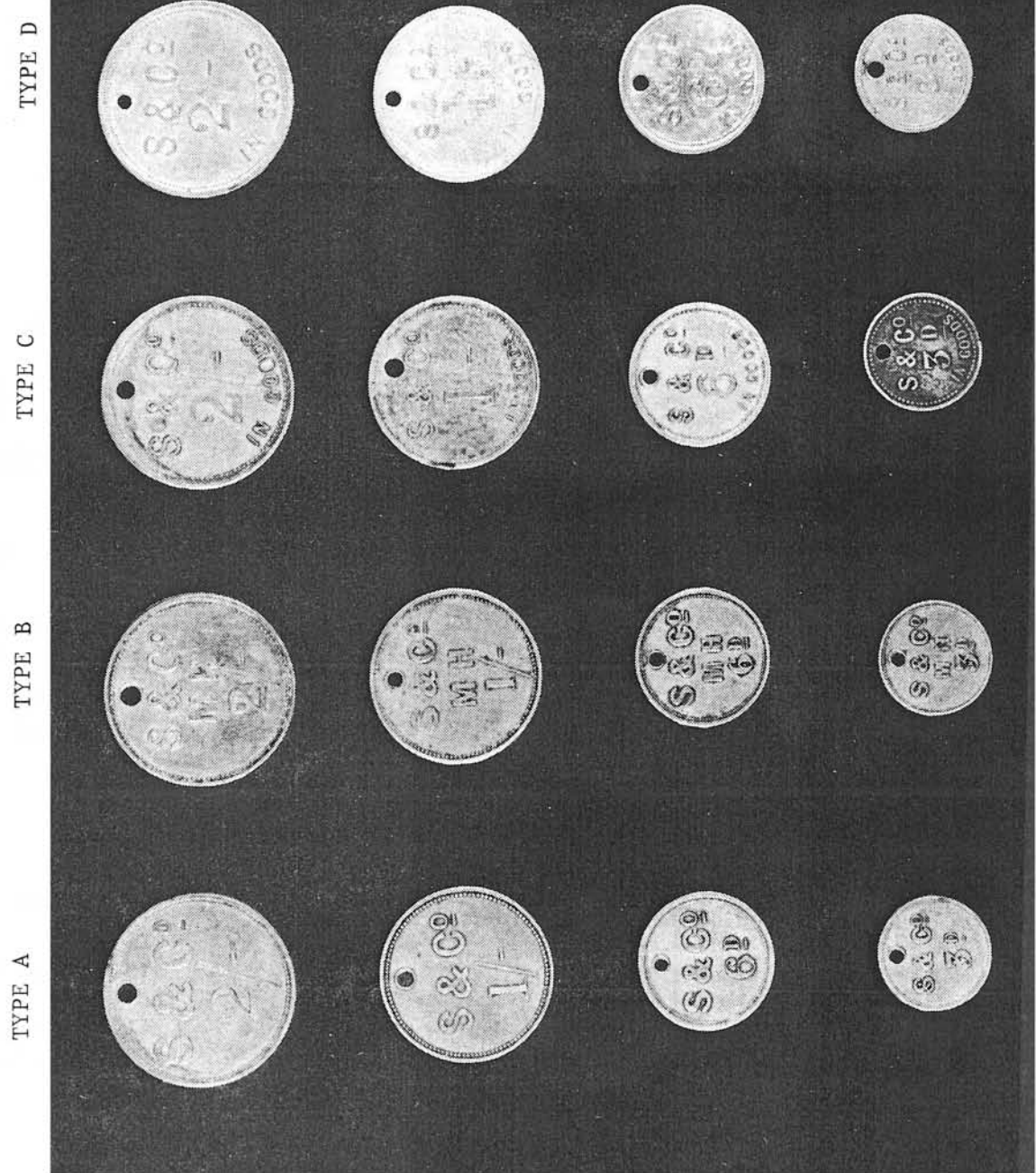
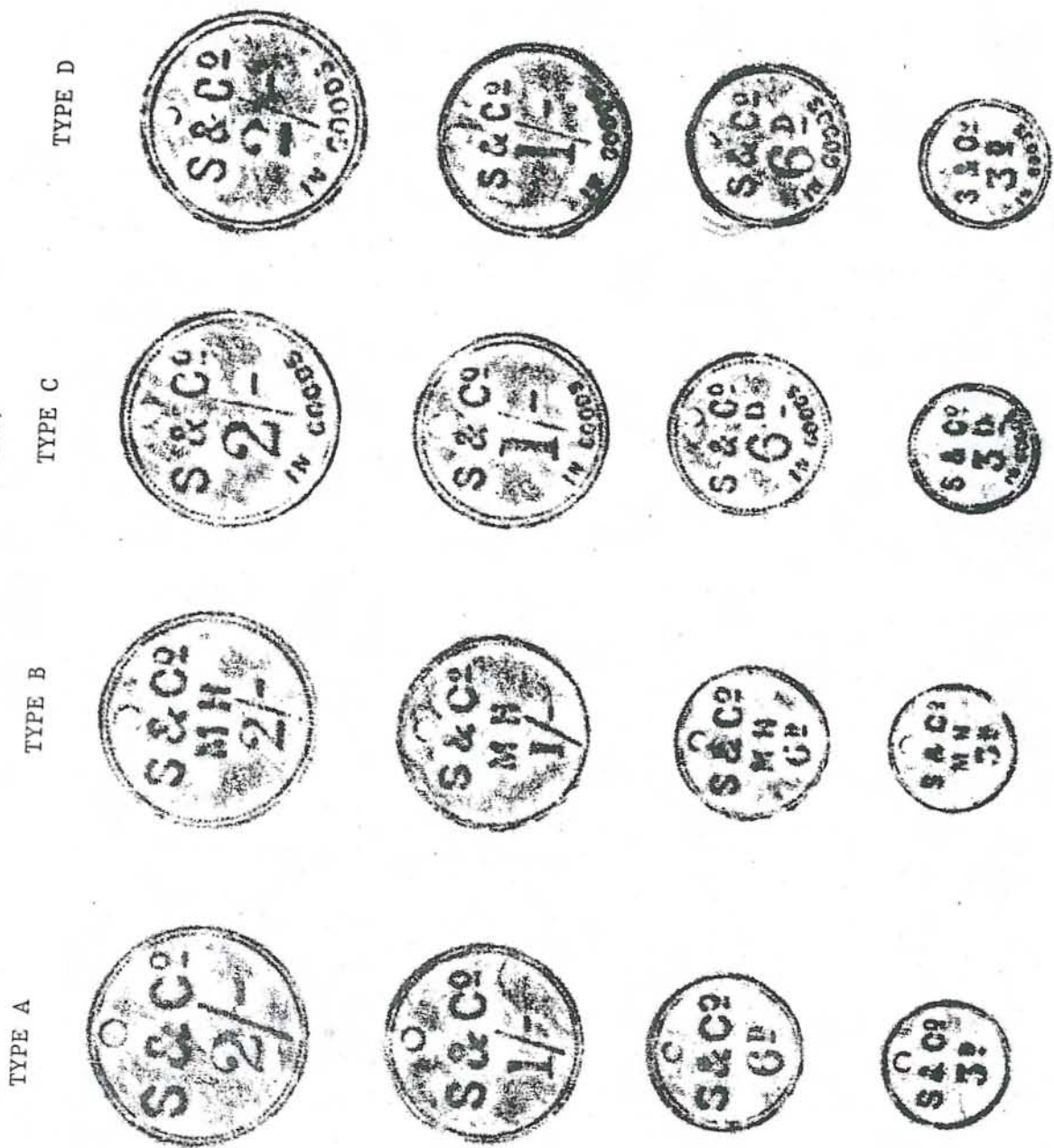


Figure 2

The Tokens of Strachan and Company
(Rubblings of the Set)



NUMISMATIC DETAILS OF THE STRACHAN AND COMPANY TOKENS

(a) General

There is no record of the separate mintings of Strachan and Company tokens, but it was clearly evident from our examination of the Strachan stock that there are four distinct types, each in the denominations 3d, 6d, 1/-, and 2/-. The four types are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2, and are designated A, B, C, and D.

Type A was clearly the most worn variety, and hence presumably the oldest. It is argued later in this work that these were almost certainly pure trade tokens (as defined in the previous section) and that a shift in emphasis towards barter tokens led to the addition of the qualifying words "In goods" to the later issues, types C and D. Type D was clearly the most recent issue, many of the specimens handled being almost in uncirculated condition. The "MH" variety, type B was minted specifically for use in the Mountain Home store of Strachan and Company, which was up in the mountains 9 miles from Umzimkulu. Its induction was solely to satisfy the desires of an independent-feeling shareholder Mr. Rupert Jackson who ran the Mountain Home store. Judging from the extent of wear of the specimens handled, we believe that the designations A, B, C, and D are in the correct chronological order of the dates of issue. For this cogent reason we have deviated from the designations Types I, II, and III used by E.J. Maynard in his description of three of the four types (Tokens of Southern Africa, a Catalogue based on the collection of the Africana Museum, compiled by E.J. Maynard). For comparison purposes the following are corresponding designations.

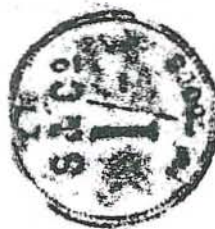
<u>This work</u>	<u>E.J. Maynard</u>
Type A	Type II
B	Type III
C }	Type I
D }	

E.J. Maynard makes no distinction between the two "In Goods" varieties, our types C and D, which differ mainly in form of the number specifying the denomination. Differences which characterize types C and D are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3
Comparison of Types C and D

TYPE C

TYPE D



The most striking difference lies in the figure 2. Type C has a large 2, type D a small 2 with a more pronounced bulb at the top.

Type C has a short fat figure 1, type D a long thin figure 1.

The figure 6 is small and plain in type C, but in Type D it is larger and has a bulb at the top.

The most characteristic feature of type C is the low line under the letter D of 3D; in type C the line lies much closer to the D.

(b) Technical details

Type A. Brass, uniface, plain edge raised rim with pearly border pierced at 12 o'clock. Inscription across the field in two lines, "S and Co", and the value, 3d, 6d, 1/- or 2/-. The dimensions are given in the table below.

denomination	diameter (mm)	thickness (mm)	mass (grams)
3d	19.4	1.2	2.466
6d	23.3	1.25	3.663
1/-	29.6	1.2	6.030
2/-	32.6	1.2	7.255

Type B. Brass, uniface, plain edge, raised rim with pearly border pierced at 12 o'clock. Inscription across the field in three lines, "S and Co", "MH" and the value, 3d, 6d, 1/- or 2/-. The dimensions are given below.

denomination	diameter (mm)	thickness (mm)	mass (grams)
3d	19.6	1.25	2.631
6d	23.4	1.25	3.935
1/-	29.6	1.2	6.008
2/-	32.6	1.25	7.346

Type C. Brass, obverse and reverse the same, plain edge, raised rim with pearly border pierced at 12 o'clock. Inscription in two straight lines "S and Co", the value, 3d, 6d, 1/- or 2/- and below, in a curved line "IN GOODS". The dimensions are given below.

denomination	diameter (mm)	thickness (mm)	mass (grams)
3d	19.8	1.25	2.598
6d	24.3	1.3	4.310
1/-	29.1	1.5	7.264
2/-	32.6	1.6	9.032

Type D. The basic description is the same as for type C, but there are differences in the form of the lettering, and the spacing of "S and Co", which are shown in Figure 3. The dimensions are given below.

denomination	diameter (mm)	thickness (mm)	mass (grams)
3d	19.8	1.5	3.409
6d	24.9	1.6	5.429
1/-	29.25	1.45	6.626
2/-	33.0	1.6	9.512

Figure 4

A certified extract from the notes on Strachan and Company, prepared by Mr. Douglas Strachan, son of Donald Strachan, co-founder of Strachan and Company.

The first minting was, like the others, done in England, and it is thought to have been prior to 1880, probably as early as 1870. This was not a success as it had no hole near the rim and could not be strung on a string round the owners neck - the natives having no purses in those days. This was soon replaced by the tokens showing values and the name "S. & Co.". The third issue, printed like the second on one side only, had the additional letters "M H", these represent a Branch of the Company - "Mountain Home" - and were primarily intended for use there. The fourth and last issue are printed on both sides and have the words "In Goods" added. This series of tokens is said to preceed those of James Cole by many years and were in general use throughout this area and Southern Natal until withdrawn in about 1927 or 1928. These tokens were accepted everywhere - including Church collections - but are seldom, if ever, seen these days."

*Certified a true extract from the notes by
Douglas Strachan.*

H. W. Strachan.

(c) Mintages

No official mintages are known but counts were taken of each of the sixteen different tokens present in the Strachan Stock and are recorded in the table below. If we bear in mind the relatively high purchasing power of these tokens during the period of use (1875 to 1932) it seems unlikely that many specimens would have been retained by customers as mementos. The figures given below are therefore believed to be a good indication of the mintages, and an excellent indication of the relative abundance.

<u>Type</u>	<u>3d</u>	<u>6d</u>	<u>1/-</u>	<u>2/-</u>
A	2739	1627	452	342
B	109	85	81	85
C	932	802	61	365
D	4209	5902	1365	1830

The M.H. variety, type B is therefore the rarest set; the type C 1/- is the rarest token of the series, and the type D 6d by far the most common. Of the 5902 specimens of the type D 6d, 888 were of a variety in which there was a missing border pearl between 3 and 5 o'clock.

(d) Dates of Issue

A prolonged search through early documents of Strachan and Company, the Natal Archives and various libraries, as well as enquiries to the Birmingham Mint, have yielded no first-hand record of the dates or place of minting of any Strachan and Company tokens. Our most direct evidence is a certified extract (Figure 4) from notes on Strachan and Company prepared by Douglas Strachan (son of the co-founder of S and Co. and issuer of the tokens, Donald Strachan) which reads:-

"The first minting was, like the others, done in England, and it is thought to have been prior to 1880, probably as early as 1870. This was not a success as it had no hole near the rim and could not be strung on a string round the owner's neck - the natives having no purses in those days. This was soon replaced by the tokens showing values and the name "S & Co". The third issue, printed like the second on one side only, had the additional letters "MH", these represent a branch of the Company - "Mountain Home" - and were primarily intended for use there. The fourth and last issue are printed on both sides and have the words "In Goods" added. This series of tokens is said to precede those of James Cole by many years and were in general use throughout this area and Southern Natal until withdrawn in about 1927 or 1928. These tokens were accepted everywhere - including church collections - but are seldom, if ever, seen these days".

An interesting point arising from these notes is that reference is made to a set of tokens (an unholed type) which has never been reported and of which we have found no trace. There is also no record of their destruction or modification by holing, so that if we discount any likelihood of an error being committed by Douglas Strachan, specimens of an earlier type may yet turn up.

We notice, also, that no reference is made to two separate mintings of the "In goods" varieties, types C and D; but these two issues could understandably be treated as one in view of their very strong similarity.

It has been pointed out by Mrs. Margaret Rainier of East London, a descendant of Donald Strachan who is now preparing a book on her distinguished ancestors, that the first use of the actual term "Strachan and Company" in legal documents is made in 1874, even though Thomas and Donald started their trading activities in Umzimkulu in 1859. The first issue of tokens bearing the inscription "S & Co" is therefore likely to have taken place only after 1874 but probably before 1880, as argued below.

The region of Nomansland in which Thomas and Donald traded was seriously isolated from supplies of goods and coin: our historical outline in later parts of this work shows how the road to the Cape was a long and dangerous one, whilst the perilous Umkomaas valley was a formidable barrier between Nomansland and supplies in Natal. Of the two evils the Nomansland settlers preferred to brave the Umkomaas valley, and strong ties were developed with Natal. However, in Natal itself during the early period of its history under European settlement there was no official currency, and though British gold and silver coins were the only coins in circulation (and are given recognition in the official Natal Government handbooks of the time), it was only in 1882, by the application of the Imperial Coinage Act, that Natal's currency was legally established on a Sterling basis. In about 1860 there was such a dearth of small change that tokens and good-fors were issued in Durban stores; and as late as 1876 M. Franklin and Company issued the Maritzburg token penny since at that time copper pennies were very scarce in Pietermaritzburg. Moreover, in 1870, speculators tried to take advantage of the shortage of coin by importing from Mauritius, and putting into circulation, Indian rupees to pass as two shillings. "They were unpopular with banks and the government refused to accept them, so in ten years they had disappeared from circulation." That they should have survived at all affirms our belief that coin was scarce in the period of about 1874 to 1880, particularly so in an area cut off from the main centres of commercial activity by poor communications. Prior to establishing their store in Umzimkulu Donald and Thomas Strachan had engaged in

Figure 5

Letter dated 24th July, 1907, being one of the first known references to the tokens of Strachan and Company.

442
141

24 July 7
J. L. Thring Esq
Tropo

Dear Sir - Should any of the new
accounts now are dealing with
tokens and of our tokens in payment
will you please accept them at their
face value i.e. 3, 6, 9, 7 1/2 as
marked. All are brass &
amped. I think above the marked value
if these tokens are to be accepted
in payment of our accounts
Yours faithfully
J. L. Thring

Mr Alex. Swaidie
Inverwood

Dear Sir

Referring to our letter
of the 27th ult.

Will you please return
the two statements we sent
you with the information
asked for in ours of the
25th & 27th inst. you will then
be able to look up the
way bills you require.

Certified a true copy

Yours faithfully
J. L. Thring

STRACHAN & CO. LTD.
J. L. Thring
Managing Director

J. L. Thring

transport riding between Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Nomansland, and had had first hand experience of the token as a practical solution to currency problems. That Donald, a man of immense personality and drive would suffer the inconvenience of a shortage in small change without positive action along lines which were becoming common practice is almost inconceivable. Historical evidence is therefore in full support of Douglas Strachan's recollections that the first, and probably the second, issue of Strachan tokens took place before 1880. That they were used as trade and barter tokens is also evident.

The circulation of Strachan tokens continued after the shortage of coin had evidently receded. In a letter dated 8th July, 1907 addressed to J.P. Bouverie Esq., a representative of Strachan and Company writes,

"Dear Sir,

Will you kindly oblige us by obtaining from the Bank and sending to us by return cart Fifty pounds of silver coin say £20 of half crowns £10 of florins £15 of shillings and £5 of 3ds and 6ds. The driver has £50 gold coin with him to hand to you to exchange.

Yours faithfully,

Strachan and Co,

E.E. Rieher."

There is no allusion to any shortage of coin or any question that the large quantity required may not be available. Yet, on 27th July, 1907 the same author wrote the following letter (Figure 5) to F.L. Thring Es., of Ixopo:

"Dear Sir,

Should any of the men whose accounts you are dealing with tender any of our tokens in payment will you please accept them at the face value i.e. 3d, 6d, 1/-, and 2/-, as the case may be. All are brass and stamped S & Co above the market value as these tokens are to be accepted only in payment of our accounts.

Yours faithfully,

Strachan and Co. "

This letter makes no reference to the inscription "In Goods", either because it had not yet appeared on Strachan tokens, or because it was irrelevant to do so on an occasion when the author wished to emphasize the identification marks. In any event it seems apparent that the Strachan and Company tokens experienced a shift in emphasis, away from trade tokens towards barter tokens, a shift emphasized by the addition of the qualifying words "In goods", pre-

sumably to make it clear that the token was not redeemable to an equivalent face value in coin.

The success and acceptance by the natives of Strachan's tokens was insured because of his popularity and the high esteem in which he was held by the local tribes (as can be seen later in this work). This acceptance is further demonstrated by the abundance of trading tokens issued by various trading stores in later years. In 'Tokens of Southern Africa' compiled by E.J. Maynard in 1966, no fewer than 3 other types of tokens are listed in this area - James Cole, Dawood Amod and G. Roe Scott. Further to these tokens, three other types have since been discovered, originating in this area:-

H.J. Creighton, being listed in the S.A. Numismatic magazine in an article by Lt. Col. J.L. Knobel on the Tokens of Southern Africa.

F.C. Larkin (which were discovered in 1977 by Mr. Scott Balson during research into the tokens of Strachan & Co.) being issued in 1906 by a woman.

Lastly,

St. Faiths, a brass token in Mr. Scott Balson's collection which is the only known specimen to date.

Further tokens from this area could conceivably exist, awaiting discovery!

KENCE

Mr. Ken Strachan tells a fascinating tale of how the tokens of Strachan & Co. were given the name 'Kence' by the natives. As these tokens were strung around their necks they often knocked together emitting a noise. It is after the noise emitted that these tokens are named kence (pronounced kenhjle).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STRACHAN AND COMPANY TOKENS

(a) Early days in Nomansland

The geographical region on which we focus our attention is Nomansland, shown in the map of Figure 6; and, in particular, we study the early history of Umzimkulu (formerly The Drift), where Thomas and Donald Strachan were to commence trading activities in 1858.

Before the arrival of settlers in this year the territory was literally a "Nomansland" in more senses than one: for, bounded as it was in the north by Natal, in the south by the Cape, in the west by Basutoland and in the east by the sea, it formed no part of any sovereign state; whilst in addition it was virtually denuded of people. The area had indeed been populated by the AmaXhosa who filtered across the Umzimkulu River at the beginning of the Seventeenth century, and later by the Amambo (today known as the Mpondo and Mpondomisi), but these people had later settled in the warmer coastal areas. Few settlements braved the extremes of climate under the inland influence of the Drakensberg, or "Quathlamba" (barrier of up-pointed spears). Then in the period 1783 to 1823 Chaka, chief of the Zulus, reduced the black population north, south and west of Zululand from about one million to a few hundreds, leaving Nomansland more desolate than ever. One might wonder what prospects there were for a trading enterprise to flourish without any customers. However, by 1858 settlements had grown, and had been augmented by the Amaxama or "Wanderers" who crossed into Nomansland from Natal to settle near the junction of the Ibisi and Umzimkulu rivers. From the trading point of view these people were an important acquisition, for they had acquired a taste for the white man's goods in Natal and were keen to barter their agricultural products for items such as blankets, cooking pots and hoes. Also potential customers were the coloured people of Pearcetown under the guidance of a Wesleyan Minister the Reverend Pearce.

(b) The first coming of the White man to Nomansland

The first descriptions of this area by a white man were made by Bishop Grey, the first Bishop of Cape Town, who in 1850 made a tour of his diocese. Travelling by Cape cart with four horses driven by his coloured driver and accompanied by three black guides he travelled from Cape Town to Pietermaritzburg and back - a distance of four thousand miles covered in nine months. It was on his return journey that he went through Nomansland, pioneering a route which was later to be known as "The great wagon road".

(c) The first trading activities in Nomansland

The history of trade in Nomansland starts with the brothers Thomas and Joseph Hancock, two London-born sons of 1820 Settlers who grew up in Port Elizabeth. In 1850 these two men retraced the pioneering trail of Bishop Grey, and entered the hinterland to seek a new life with a small nucleus of stock and a few wagon loads of goods to conduct barter-trade with the indigenous people. Their journey finally ended in 1857 when they settled in Northern Natal, but the intervening seven years were to be spent in barter activities throughout South-eastern Nomansland. Glass and metal beads, brass wire, chain, looking glasses, blankets, cloth, needles and thread were exchanged for ivory, skins, hides, wool, gum and livestock. To replenish stocks and to sell bartered goods, one or other of the brothers had to undertake the rigorous, and later dangerous wagon trip back to the "Old Colony". The brothers often found themselves cut off from supplies by incessant native wars and Hottentot rebellions, but with the typical resourcefulness displayed by some of the early settlers, Thomas arranged the charter, and later a half share of the purchase of a schooner, large enough to survive the rough seas of the dangerous coast but with a draft small enough to cross the shallow bar of the St. John's River. Thus a sea-route was kept open to Algoa Bay in the Cape until the schooner was lost in a storm, the sole survivor being Thomas Hancock who spent four hours in the water before reaching shore. Continuing troubles on the Cape frontier, and a new appreciation of the dangers of the sea now induced the Hancock brothers to turn their attention northwards, to Natal. With a view to opening a new supply route to Pietermaritzburg they moved northwards, crossed the Umzimkulu at a point subsequently known as Hancock's Drift, and settled in Southern Natal in 1857. Their arrival from the south slightly preceded the arrival in 1858 from the north of the brothers Donald and Thomas Strachan.

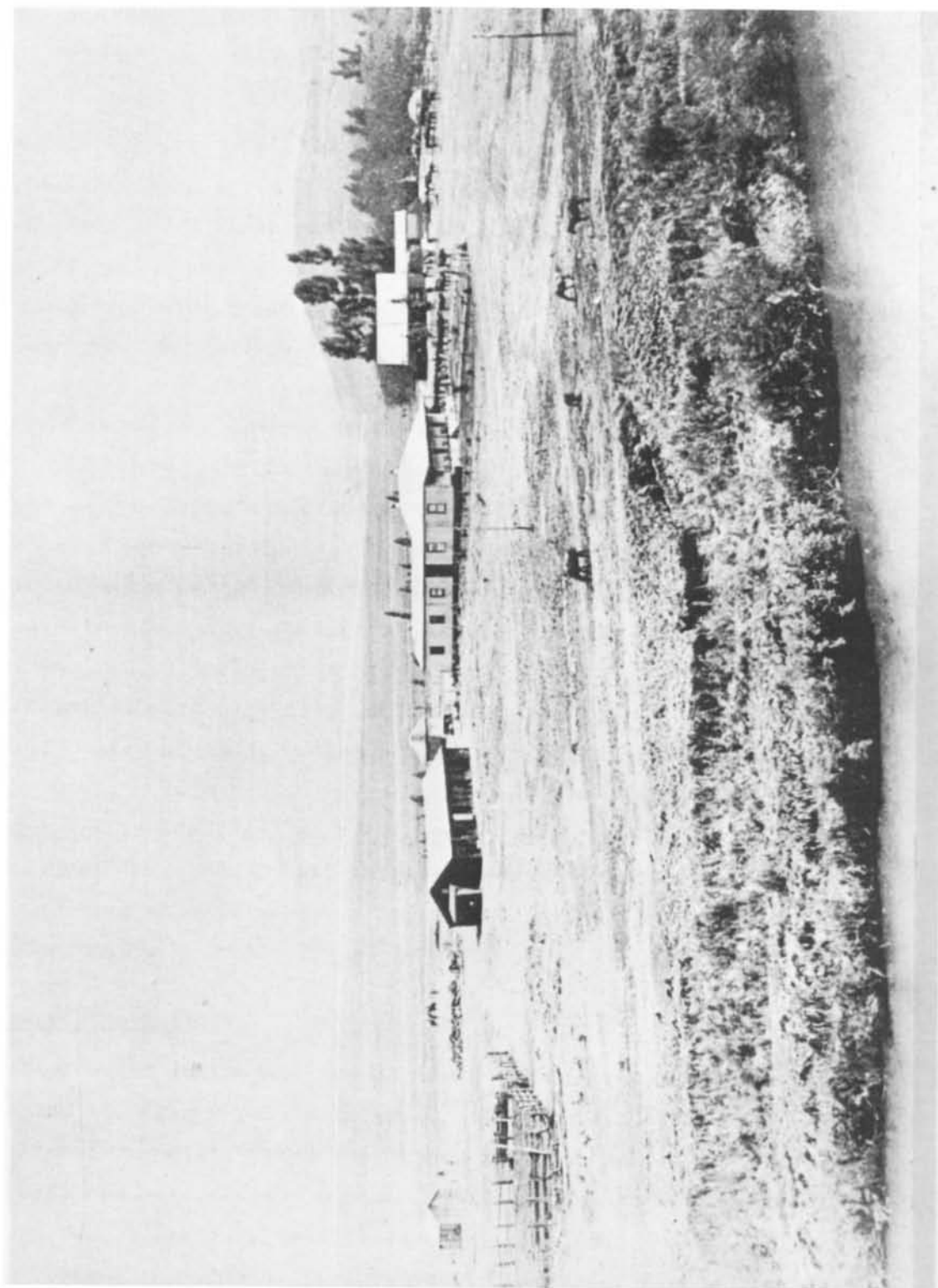
Also present in the region at this time was another trader, John James Jackson (later General Jackson) but there is little authentic record of his activities in this area.

(d) The early days of Donald and Thomas Strachan

The parish records of Campbeltown on the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland record the birth on the 29th January 1838 of Thomas Strachan, and on 22nd May 1840 of Donald Strachan. The young boys were only ten and twelve respectively when in 1850 their father and mother, Robert and Mary Strachan, brought them to Natal in the "Unicorn" as participants in the Byrne emigration scheme. The family was to have received a land grant of 60 acres in the Illovo district, but Robert Strachan either found the land unsuitable, or became a

Figure 7

The oldest photograph of Umzimkulu, taken in 1883. The original Strachan and Company store can be seen on the right in the background, with the Hotel situated in front of it.



victim of Byrne's bankruptcy in 1850, and they settled in Durban instead. It is said that Robert had decided on the journey to South Africa after taking medical advice on the health of his wife Mary; but the rigours of the long journey, and, no doubt the disappointment at its end, led to her death not long after their arrival. Then, on 2nd February 1852, Robert himself was killed in an accident while helping to erect the first double-storey building in Durban.

The orphaned boys, now only twelve and fourteen years old, were befriended by a faithful Zulu servant Simon (later to become a chief in the Nomansland area), and found employment with Mr. James Kinghurst, first in his Durban butchery and later as transport riders conducting his wagon trains between Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Nomansland. The reasons for excursions to Nomansland are not clear unless to provide supplies for the Reverend Pearce or John James Jackson; for there is no record of such services in the fairly well documented lives of the Hancock family. It has also been suggested that the Strachan brothers went much further afield in the profitable transport-riding excursions to the land-locked Dutch Republic in the interior, but this is not corroborated by Mrs. Bessie Kannemeyer, the last of Donald Strachan's family to marry and his constant companion for many years. In any event the brothers were able to accumulate sufficient capital to open a trading store at Drift (later Umzimkulu) just inside Nomansland in 1858. The original Strachan and Company store can be seen in Figure 7, the oldest known photograph of Umzimkulu taken in 1883. (The name of the village Drift was changed to Umzimkulu in 1880). This trading adventure was a remarkable achievement for two young men a mere eighteen and twenty years old; but we shall appreciate, as our story unfolds, that Donald in particular was a man of exceptional talent and personality, whose life was a continuous saga of achievement and service to the community.

(e) The arrival of the Griquas

An important event in the history of the Nomansland area was the arrival of Adam Kok III and his Griqua people in 1863. The story of the Griqua nation is a tragic saga in four acts: first the growth into nationhood in Griqualand West of a heterogeneous aggregation of freed slaves, coloured descendants of Boer frontiersmen, and black African tribesmen detached from their people by war or by choice; then the clashes of this people with Boer farmers on the Orange Free State frontier; followed by the epic trek of the Griquas across the virtually impassable Drakensberg to Nomansland; and finally the decline of the nation from a wealthy, noble, self-possessed people into an indolent, poverty-stricken group that lost its self-respect and identity.

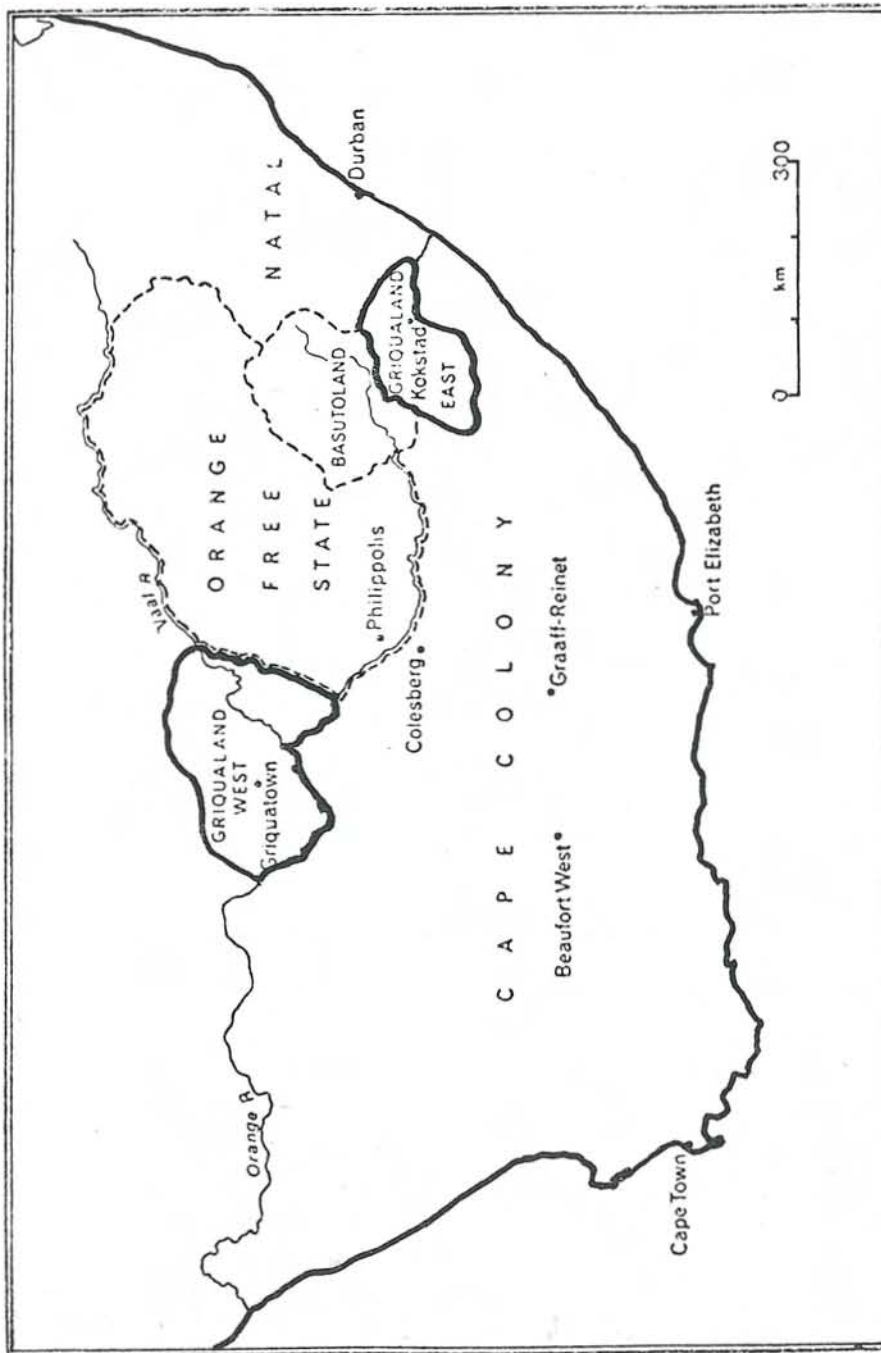


Figure 8
Griqualand East and Griqualand West.

Adam Kok I, formerly a cook (hence Kok) on a Dutch East Indiaman, and subsequently a slave at the Cape Colony was rewarded by his master, for good conduct and efficiency, with his freedom and with stock which he farmed on land given to him by the Cape Government. With the help of early missionaries he welded into a nation the heterogeneous peoples, first known as the basters, and then as the Griquas. The new people settled in Griqualand West (Figure 8) where they suffered many onslaughts on the tenure of their land, uncomfortably sandwiched between the Cape with its liberal British administration, and the Orange Free State with its energetic Boer frontiersmen. By the time Adam Kok III took over the leadership, much of the Griqua territory was held on leasehold by the Orange Free State farmers in return for cash compensation to Adam Kok; on the understanding that the Griquas pay compensation for improvements when leases terminated. This the Griquas were often unable to pay and there was continuous trouble on the Frontier. Sir George Grey, the Colonial Governor of the Cape Colony at this time, regarded Nomansland as a wasteland at his disposal; and conceived the political manoeuvre of suggesting to Adam Kok III that he sell his lands to the Orange Free State, and trek with his people to Nomansland where he could settle in peace. Little persuasion was required and in 1860 Adam Kok set out with a hundred horsemen on the difficult journey across the Drakensberg to inspect the proposed territory. They were favourably impressed and in 1861 2000 Griqua people set out on the journey across the Drakensberg in 360 wagons and carts, taking with them about 20 000 head of large and small stock. To all but the most adventurous observers the precipitous crags and slopes of the Drakensberg range they had to cross would have seemed impassable, even on foot. The heroic achievement of the Griqua people in bringing great numbers of wagons and herds of cattle through "the barrier of up-pointed spears" deserves an abiding place amongst the dramatic treks of history. Slow progress was made with the pick, crowbar, hammer, powder and fuse, until in 1863 the Griqua people arrived at Mount Currie in Nomansland, leaving behind them a trail of broken wagons and bleached animal bones. Drought, which had so severely struck the economy of Natal and the Cape in the early 1860's, had added to the intolerable burdens of the travellers, and they arrived in the promised land with their spirits all but broken. After their arrival they set up a laager, which did not impress the visitor: A.F. Hattersley in Later Annals of Natal records the reaction of one observer:-

"To our disgust and disappointment we found it (the laager) a very dirty place, consisting of about 200 mudhuts, a few old wagons, and a lot of dirty Griquas sitting or lying outside their dens. A small church and a Fort in the middle of the village and Adam Kok's house

at one end. Adding to the miserable appearance of the laager a number of houses are only half built and allowed to remain with their four walls standing. It is, indeed, as one of our party called it, a village in ruins before it was built."

Yet the arrival of the Griquas was viewed with great approval by the trading fraternity. At least one man, John Barker, crossed the Drakensberg with the Griquas because his experiences in Griqualand West had convinced him that Griquas meant good business. Mr. Scott, another trader wrote that "whatever faults the Griquas had, they had one good quality for traders; they would buy anything". He never hoped, however, to persuade them to work for him. Before we cynically dismiss the Griqua people we must recall their nobility as seen by the Reverend John Campbell (who likened them to Greeks); and we must bear in mind their heroism and courage in negotiating the almost impenetrable Drakensberg. These positive qualities were still alive and Adam Kok set about, in the highly adverse conditions, to re-awaken the self-respect of his people. The administration of Nomansland was now in his hands, and effective machinery of Government had to be established. There was no more effective way of advancing these ends than enlisting the aid of a local leader who commanded the respect and affection of all the local inhabitants. It is therefore significant that shortly after his arrival, Adam Kok rode down to the Drift (later Umzimkulu) to ask Donald Strachan to act as Magistrate for the Griquas. Without exception historians acclaim this decision as a wise one: and we now retrace the events and circumstances which led to the emergence of Donald Strachan as an exceptional man amongst exceptional men.

EARLY LIFE ON THE FRONTIER

An overriding feature of life on the frontier was the extreme isolation and the dangers to life and limb generated by a lack of immediate access to medical help, or physical aid against the attacks of marauding thieves or warring tribesmen. The community in and around the Drift was a small one: the Hancock and Strachan brothers were joined by Edward Barker; a surveyor from Mauritius; two sailors Davidge and Biddiscombe who deserted ship to start a mill at the Drift, and the Reverend Richard Hulley who left his mission station at Shawbury with his family in 1864 to settle at Drift. In its more peaceful moments life consisted of barter trade, tending the cattle herds and fields of wheat and corn; and (for the women) the task of growing, collecting and preserving otherwise unobtainable vegetables and provisions, in addition to the normal multifarious duties in a household with children. From time to time wagons were loaded with produce and the extremely difficult and dangerous trip

to Pietermaritzburg had to be undertaken to replenish personal provisions, and stock for trading. And yet, even in the more peaceful moments the gun was kept close at hand, for sudden danger was a fact of life long-since taken for granted. We therefore see in the Frontiersmen a hardy, energetic, brave, self-reliant breed which would put many modern-day men to shame. Nevertheless, Donald Strachan was to emerge as an exceptional person even amongst men of this calibre.

Donald, the man

Probably one of the most important factors in Donald's rise to leadership was his exceptional linguistic ability. As a young transport rider he not only spent his evenings after outspan, poring by the light of campfire over the poems of Byron, but he set out with outstanding success to learn the languages of the black people with whom he worked. So great was his command of the native languages that the story is told of an experiment in which he was concealed in a hut, and unsuspecting members of different tribes were invited to hold conversation with him in their own languages, including Sesutu, Xhosa, Zulu, etc. Each was convinced by the fluency, idiom and intonation, that he was speaking with a member of his own tribe, and their astonishment was unbounded when a single white man was finally revealed.

But leadership cannot spring from linguistic ability alone, nor could it spring simply from Donald's exceptionally keen intellect, of which his linguistic feats were only one manifestation. His additional gift, which allowed his intellectual talents to come to fruition, and which led to his unconditional acceptance by all races, was a kind and sympathetic nature. Cold facts and anecdotes, alike, speak for his generosity, both in large financial matters and in small personal interactions. Donald sacrificed valuable property at a nominal fee to allow the establishment of Clydesdale mission; in 1900 when a plague of locusts devastated the countryside, and death by starvation was a real threat, he sent wagons far and wide to forage for anything edible and distributed food without regard to the financial implications. The story is also told of a bridal party crossing the river at Umzimkulu when a sudden movement of the pont plunged the box containing the wedding cake into the river. The incident was observed by Donald, who was a strong swimmer: he jumped into the river, reached the box, and brought the precious cake back to safety, his one hand holding it high above the water. Recognition of Donald's exceptional qualities was widespread: by no means the most important, but certainly amongst the most touching tributes being his appointment as a Baca chief, and the use of the name "Madonela" (Donald's name amongst the black

people) for the Railway station outside Umzimkulu.

Donald Strachan's political role

Donald Strachan's acceptance and influence amongst all races of his community made him a useful political and administrative figure. Before the arrival of the Griquas it was the policy of the British Colonial Government of the Cape to use the good influence of locally accepted leaders to maintain peace on the isolated frontiers. The cost of maintaining units in far flung areas, as well as the sense of military intrusion could thereby be avoided. Accordingly the Cape Government appointed Donald as Superintendent of Native Affairs for the district. In time he was able to raise from the surrounding tribes his own trained military unit who were known as the "Abalondolosi", or "The Protectors". Donald's men could be likened to a district police force, and records of the time are filled with praise and gratitude for the services they rendered, often in the most desperate circumstances.

The "Abalondolosi" were retained under the Griqua administration, and continued to do loyal service even after the annexation of East Griqualand to the Cape in 1879 when a military presence in the territory became more frequent. Throughout this period Donald proved to be an outstanding soldier: and his important contribution towards ensuring the security of the vulnerable frontiersmen redoubled the esteem in which he was held. The ultimate honour, in recognition of a lifelong period of talented service was bestowed in 1905 when Donald was elected a member of the Legislative Council at the Cape. He died in 1915, esteemed and loved by all.

Great as they may be, we must not allow Donald's political achievements to overshadow his considerable success in the commercial world. In the remainder of this work we retrace the development of Strachan and Company's business interests. Also included is a brief summary of the history of Nomansland after the arrival of the Griquas.

Nomansland after the arrival of the Griquas: the growth of Strachan and Company

In 1866 Adam Kok changed the name of Nomansland to East Griqualand, a name retained until the homeland of Transkei was formed in 1976.

With the population of this territory considerably enhanced by the arrival of the Griquas, the volume of traffic between the frontier and Natal grew rapidly. The Griquas built a pontoon across the Umzimkulu to allow access to the North during times of flood when the drift was impassable, and the wagon tracks to Natal became roads. A feature of the new improved com-

munication was the establishment of a postcart service by Strachan and Company to convey passengers and goods to and from Port Shepstone, Kokstad, Harding, and Richmond. These postcarts have been described as "two-wheeled contraptions with a Coloured driver and drawn by six horses". They held seven passengers comfortably, but on occasions fourteen passengers have been known to squeeze in. The cart from Richmond arrived at Umzimkulu at 4.00 pm each day, and left again for Kokstad at 3.00 am. Punctuality was a byword, for it is reported that a £5 fine awaited a driver for each hour he was late. Moreover, at times (like in 1906) when the territory was in ferment, Donald merely gave the warring chiefs word that his carts would be entering their territory, and they passed through unmolested - yet another indication of the high esteem in which he was held.

By 1879 many outspans had been proclaimed on the road between Umzimkulu and Pietermaritzburg, and the passage of time saw the growth in importance of Richmond as a supply centre. Many travellers preferred to go only as far as Richmond to replenish supplies, and undertook the additional journey to Pietermaritzburg only on special or important occasions.

Umzimkulu became a busy and important stage post. The local hotel, owned by Strachan and Company, was described as "the hotel which never sleeps", for men would joke, drink and play cards throughout the night as they waited for the next cart to depart.

Until 1879 Donald was assisted in his trading and business activities by his brother Thomas, but in that year Thomas died. Henceforward the whole burden of political and business affairs rested on Donald, but he reacted with typical energy by extending the interests of the firm. In keeping with his interests in transport and the hotel, he built a factory for the construction of wagons, and started a soda water factory. The story of how Donald established his own bakery in Natal is itself a minor character study of the man.

Before Union in 1910 duties were levied on certain goods entering East Griqualand from Natal. Donald shrewdly noticed the anomaly that there was a tax on flour, but not on bread, and arrived at the obvious solution that bread baked from "imported" flour had to be processed on the Natal side of the Umzimkulu. Unfortunately the only available land suitable for the establishment of a bakery belonged to an avidly puritanical, adopted son of the now deceased Thomas Hancock, who strongly disapproved of the drinking, swearing and gaming which went on in the Drift Hotel. Sensing the futility of a direct approach Donald arranged for a law agent, Mr. Francis, to purchase the land in his name. Hancock's stepson continued his expression of disapproval for Strachan by insisting, in the deed of sale, that the transaction should be conditional to

Figure 9

Mr. Donald Strachan (Central, Seated) together with his five sons from Left to Right (Top Row): Wallace, Douglas, Charles. Seated: Frederick, Robert.



Francis not letting the land to Strachan. Mr. Francis easily circumvented this minor point by selling the property to Donald and the bakery was built.

The growth of Strachan and Company's commercial interests continued despite political unrest in East Griqualand. Trouble appeared on the horizon when it was realized that a suitable obvious successor to Adam Kok had not emerged amongst the Griqua people. Two factions supporting different successors developed, and the local population feared that the death of Adam Kok could plunge the area into political chaos. When suggestions were made to the Cape Colonial Government to extend its influence into East Griqualand they were more than enthusiastically met by expansionists like Mr. Orpen who felt that the 'rightful' position of the British as overlords in East Griqualand was being usurped by the Griqua people. Political pressure along this direction led to the summary annexation of East Griqualand in 1873, without any consultation with the Griquas. They were outraged, and insult was added to injury by the appointment of Mr. Orpen as British resident in Nomansland. Discontent ran high, and when Lodewyk Kok was arrested by Captain Blyth on 20th February, 1878 and sent to the 'trunk' for six months on a charge of using treasonable language, they deemed that interference in their affairs had become intolerable. In what is known as "The Griqua Rebellion", Adam 'Muis' Kok, a not-too-close relation of Adam Kok led a party of men against Captain Blyth on the slopes of Mount Currie. They were defeated in an engagement which claimed a total of 31 lives. Thereafter in 1879, East Griqualand was incorporated into the Cape Colony, and the Griquas effectively lost their independence. During this turmoil Donald Strachan was appointed first Justice of the Peace and Acting Chief Magistrate, and his farm Bizweni (meaning assembly of officials) became the centre of officialdom.

Despite the troubled atmosphere Strachan and Company prospered. At the time of Donald's death in 1915 Strachan and Company owned fourteen trading stores, namely:-

Border Cash
Bossenfontein
Brooklands
Cabane
Clydesdale
Gugweni
Ibisi
Kromhoek
Mahobe
Memeza
Mfulamuhle
Mountain Home
Plain Hill
Riefvlei

Figure 10

The Staff of Strachan and Company in about 1903. Donald Strachan is seated in the centre, and Douglas Strachan is seated on his left.



Three other stores were later purchased from Mrs. F.C. Larkan in 1929, these being:-

Bont Rand
Cancele
Cupar

Ownership of Strachan and Company passed to Donald's five sons, shown together with their father in Figure 9.

The staff of Strachan and Company in about 1903 is shown in Figure 10. Donald Strachan is seated in the centre and Douglas is on his left. The Indian has been identified as Mr. Abdool Gani Adam (the first Indian resident in East Griqualand), who opened his own store in 1929 after serving Strachan for 27 years. It is now known as A.F. Stores.

In closing it is of considerable interest that the Umzimkulu settlement which originated as the Strachan brothers stores in 1858 (an indication of the original size can be seen in Figure 7) is now one of the largest towns in the Transkei consisting of a high population density. This settlement has developed around the Strachan stores which in turn for 60 years relied heavily on these tokens. A sure pointer to Donald Strachan's amazing capabilities coupled to the high level of success achieved is the use of these tokens as a replacement media to the official coinage.

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