

Recording Of The Primrose Cemetery

26° 11' 45,24" S 28° 8' 47,02" E

By: Ken R Mutch (SEWFHS cemetery co-ordinator)
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The South East Witwatersrand Family History Society

(www.geocities.com/SEWFAMHISTORY)

is located in Germiston, Gauteng Province, South Africa. The members research family histories, promote genealogical skills and take a keen interest in participating in the Genealogical Society of South Africa's Cemetery Recording Project (www.gensa.info). Members have visited numerous cemeteries capturing thousands of tombstone recordings.



The SEWFHS recording team

One of the best things about cemetery recording is that all ages can participate and discover. Some, like Peter Moss, even relax at it.



In 2004 the society embarked on their largest challenge to date ... the recording of Primrose cemetery – an estimated 20 000 graves!



Oldest tombstone.

The cemetery is located in the suburb of Primrose, Germiston and dates back to 1882. For over a hundred and twenty years it was the main cemetery of one of the most important gold mining and industrial areas of South Africa. This major addition to the GSSA Cemetery Recording project contained a wealth of genealogical information.

Adele Schoombie started the recording on a bright and cool morning in August 2005. For the next two years, society members would assemble once a month and record tombstone inscriptions.



Adele taking the first recording

Recording sessions typically started at 8am on a Saturday morning and lasted until 10am tea. Our refreshments convenor, Eileen Latila boosted morale with scrumptious cookies. Recording would then resume until lunch of cold meat & salads, hotdogs or a cup of hot soup on the colder days.



Lunch

Passing motorists often gaped at the happy bunch of people gathering in a cemetery for a picnic lunch. To the group it was a time for reflection and sharing of some of the more interesting and unusual recordings of the day.

Many interesting tombstone inscriptions were encountered and in some cases necessitated enlisting the skills of an interpreter.



**Roz & Costa
(Greek interpreter)**

Of the more interesting graves at Primrose is that of Dr. Spaulding. He was a doctor from the USA and died in the Germiston hospital from the very epidemic he so ardently fought.....the 1918 flu epidemic.

Dr Spaulding was a prominent East Rand resident from 1895 – 1918. He was buried by Rev. Wood & Rev. Munn assisted by J Girdler after which, the grave site was covered by hundreds of wreaths from the residents of Germiston.



Photo of Dr Spaulding courtesy of the "East Rand Express."

Other interesting graves include the town's first mayor; prominent businessmen; church leaders and Boer Generals. There is a large military section honouring those who fought in the Anglo-Boer war.

After the team had devoted some 2 000 man-hours to recording, Roz du Plessis captured the records in Excel spread sheets.



Recordings being proof read

The daunting task of proof reading the typed data was usually undertaken on a Saturday afternoon in the library of the retirement village where another member, Mary Brislow, lives. Discussions on all matters genealogical abounded during the tea & cake breaks.

After proof reading had been completed, Roz updated the database.

In January 2008, Wynand Deyzel made the final recording.

This left only two tasks outstanding, namely the compilation of the paper documents or manuscripts into bound volumes and final formatting of the Excel files onto CD.



Wynand doing the final recording

Ken Mutch handed over the completed project, on behalf of the SEWFHS recording team, to Peter Moss from GSSA on 8 March 2008.

The South East Witwatersrand Family History Society (SEWFHS) achieved its objective.....we are the record holders for recording the largest cemetery (18 455 names) in South Africa!



Peter Moss receiving the Primrose data

Their next project is the recording of Boksburg cemetery which also holds an estimated 20 000 graves. Once again they are looking for any volunteers who would like to get involved with this project, so why not join in and become part of a great team ? Simply email or call Ken Mutch at ken.famhistory@gmail.com or 082 806 7693.

On completing a project of this magnitude, it is worthwhile to review and share what was done right and what can be improved.

- Probably the biggest lesson learned is that it is critical to engage the largest number of recorders possible for the projectvery simply, it is people who do the work!
- Another consideration is safety in numbers. It's not the ghosts that are of concern, but rather vagrants and the like that often frequent these areas.
- Keep up the enthusiasm and the enjoyment levels! This makes the tremendous effort required seem fun and worthwhile. Take time out for tea and lunch and a little nattering.
- On the logistics front: make a map of the area; preprint recording sheets; and teach all members what to record (i.e. Names, dates, places and other informative genealogical information such as cause or place of death and family relationships - parent, sibling etc.)
Most important of all: **Record what is on the tombstone and not what you think it should be**.....Record errors in dates and misspellings as they appear.
- Avoid the temptation to complete the physical recording and then to do the administration. Process the recorded data into Excel, proof read the database, make necessary corrections in the data entry and bind the manuscripts piecemeal as soon as possible after each recording session.
- Ensure that members are suitably equipped: a chair, clipboard, pencil and protection against the harsh African sun.