

**Homestead Histories The life of Martha Maria Shuman - born Fletcher  
(1872-1947) by Ken Shuman**



(1872) Born on Grey Craig Farm, Queenstown district, Eastern Cape

(1879) Martha attended Tylden School Happy Times Martha Fletcher's childhood unfolded on Grey Craig Farm, where rolling hills and the winding Kei River formed a picturesque backdrop. As the daughter of Joseph and Mary Fletcher (Mary born Clayton), cattle and sheep farmer's, she grew up surrounded by nature's beauty. Together with her siblings, they rode ponies to school in Tylden, forging a deep connection with the land. Tylden school played a significant role in Martha's education, laying the groundwork for her future. Her rural origins instilled resilience, compassion, and a love for learning. With a solid foundation laid, Martha embarked on her life's journey, carrying cherished memories of her childhood on Grey Craig Farm, shaped by the people and experiences that defined her young years.

Grey Craig Farm - Name Origin Grey Craig, Joseph Fletcher's farm, derives its name from a Scottish land surveyor, echoing Scotland's rugged landscape. "Grey" represents the midpart hue between black and white, reflecting the cliffs distinctive colour. "Craig" originates from the Gaelic word "Creag", which is a term for a rocky hill or cliff. Situated near Queenstown in the Eastern Cape, Grey Craig Farm nestles amidst undulating hills and the meandering Kei River.

(1888) Martha - Tertiary Education: Wesleyan Mission School, Queenstown Martha attended the Wesleyan Mission School in Queenstown, where she pursued a teaching career. She completed a two-year teaching course and received a Teacher's Diploma, a qualification that laid the foundation for her future endeavours. The Queenstown Wesleyan Mission School (1900's) provided education and training in teaching, theology and vocational skills. It's program emphasised practical knowledge to prepare students for their subsequent pursuits. After graduating, Martha married William Shuman and relocated to Elliot, where they began a family. As her children grew, she utilized her teaching skills to tutor them at home, creating a farm school environment. In Elliot, Martha's teaching background influenced her family and community involvement. She instilled values and knowledge in her children, demonstrating the impact of education on their personal growth and character.

(1890) Martha married William Shuman in Dordrecht, Eastern Cape

(1891-1905) Eight children were born - Reaford Stanley Shuman (1891-1936) (married Alma Whittle) - Violet Mary Shuman (1894-1929) (married William Jakins) - Amy Benetta Shuman (1895-1977) (married Arthur Clark) - Gertrude May Shuman (1898-1984) (married Richard Haw) - Ernest Reuben Fletcher Shuman (1901-1979) (married Phyllis Filmer) - Zeta Amelia Shuman (1901-1980) (married Joseph Haefele) Ernest and Zeta were twins - William Kenneth Shuman (1904-1952) (married Edna Fletcher) - Iris Rhona Maud Shuman (1905-1990's) (married Lawrence Moorcroft)

(1892) Pioneer Spinning Venture Martha Shuman, a farmer's wife in the Elliot district began an interesting journey during the late 1900's. She transformed her passion for spinning wool into a thriving business, which supported the local community.

1892 - Martha began spinning wool as a pastime while raising her children. 1898 - She processed the raw wool then spun it into quality yarn. 1902 - Martha refined her skill

experience with natural dyes and weaving techniques. 1908 - She established her spinning business, crafting blankets, cosy jerseys and socks.

Among the family traditions passed down through generations is this delightful folktale, shared by Martha with her children during their formative years. This story originated from her mother Mary Fletcher. The moral is as follows: Fear and panic can lead to downfall, while courage and teamwork can ensure ultimate survival. As Martha's hands moved deftly at the spinning wheel, she'd regale her children with timeless folktales from the 19th century.

**The Straw, Bean and Coal Story** Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, an old woman settled down to cook herself a soup of beans. She lit the fire with a handful of straw, but one straw escaped and landed on the floor. She placed the beans into her pot, but one fell and landed beside the straw on the ground. After a short while a hot coal hissed and spluttered and also fell from the fire, landing beside the straw and the bean. Together the three decided to run away from their deaths before they were discovered and fled for their lives. After a short while they came upon a stream. Hatching a plan to cross, the straw laid itself down, bridging the stream, and the hot coal proceeded to cross. However, half way over the stream the hot coal found itself in a bit of a panic and froze at the sight of the swirling water which would drown it. Now matter how the straw urged, the coal would not move and before long the straw found itself burned in two and both he and the coal fell into the water, thus meeting their deaths.

(1899-1902) The impact of the Anglo-Boer War on Martha Marta managed the household during William's absences, coping with scarcity and uncertainty. She oversaw daily farm needs, dealing with food shortages, disease outbreaks, and maintaining essential domestic duties. Martha ensured the farm's continued operation despite these significant challenges.

(1914-1918) The Great War  
Local Farmer's Wife Supports War Effort

As South Africa contributes to the global conflict, Elliot residents are stepping up to support the war effort. The communities dedication and resilience are evident in the various initiatives underway. Martha Shuman, wife of local farmer, has been actively involved with the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD). Her teaching background has enabled her to support farm schools, providing education to rural children. This project ensures continuity of learning despite wartime challenges. Martha's VAD work extends beyond education. She coordinates clothing drives, organises local events, and assists with canteen services for soldiers. These efforts boost morale and demonstrates Elliots commitment to supporting those in need. Rev. J.H. Smith of the Elliot Anglican Church noted, "Martha's loyalty has positively impacted our town. Local farmers appreciate her ventures, citing benefits to their families. Her selfless charitable deeds embody the spirit that defines Elliot." As the war continues, Elliot remains committed to doing its part. Martha Shuman's efforts serve as a shining example of individual commitment in times of adversity. "The Elliot Gazette" Cape Colony 1916

(1918) The Shuman's demonstrated bold initiative by purchasing Strydfontein farm in the Bolotwa valley, Queenstown district, formally owned by the de Wet family, and successfully relocated their farming operation from Elliot to Queenstown. Martha had family ties to this

area, as her father Joseph Fletcher was from Grey Craig farm in the Queenstown district. Strydfontein is set against a towering mountain that slopes down into expansive plains. Summer rains cause these plains to flood, transforming them into lush grazing. The cattle and sheep thrived here as this is a very sweet thorn tree veld area. The Shuman's soon became one of the most extensive sheep farming family's in the Queenstown district. They formed a successful business with their three son's, which was known as "Shuman & Sons."

(1947) Martha died Strydfontein farm, Bolotwa valley, Queenstown district, Eastern Cape. Buried in the Queenstown Cemetery.