

Homestead Histories The life of William Arthur Shuman (1871-1937) by Ken Shuman



(1871) Born on Brosdale Farm, Elliot district, Eastern Cape

(1878) William attended Elliot School First Trade William was raised by his grandparents Uriah and Johannah Dicks (Johannah born Torr) on the farm Brosdale in the Elliot district. It was here that he developed a strong passion for farming that would inevitably guide his future. His grandparents noticed this interest, giving him a sick calf, which he diligently nursed back to health. When it was half-grown, he astutely swapped it for two young calves. This shrewd exchange marked the beginning of his own cattle venture. Through repeated trades, William gradually built up a small herd, ultimately acquiring a full span of oxen by the time he finished school.

Brosdale Farm - Name Origin Brosdale, Uriah Dicks's farm, derives its name from a family connection. "Bros" is short for brothers, signifying the farm's origin as a family venture between siblings. The suffix "Dale" refers to the farm's locality, an area of low elevation bordered by higher terrain. Situated near Elliot in the Eastern Cape, Brosdale Farm nestles amidst deep valleys and towering mountains.

(1887) William - Tertiary Education: Practical Farming Expertise, Elliot William was raised by his grandparents in the Elliot district, where they taught him essential farming skills and instilled a strong work ethic. He learned crop cultivation, livestock management, and basic repair techniques. He gained valuable experience from local craftsmen, including carpenter's, wagon makers and blacksmiths. Their expertise broadened his understanding of agricultural practices, fostering practical knowledge. The insights gained enabled him to establish a fencing business, contracting with farmers in the Elliot district. Later, he expanded his operations by launching a transport service, catering to regional communities. William's experience in fencing and transportation prepared him well for his farming career. His diverse skills helped him manage his farm effectively and navigate local agricultural needs.

(1890) William married Martha Fletcher 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)

(1895) Merino Sheep Import

The Eastern Cape's wool industry experienced remarkable growth during the 1880's and 1890's. Peaking in production and export volumes, this wool boom significantly enhanced local sheep farmers' financial well-being, yielding profitable returns and improving economic prospects. The Elliot district has always featured an impressive Merino Sheep history. In 1895, William Shuman was presented with a "Sturgeon" Merino sheep advert, which led him to make enquiries about importation. Later that same year, he imported five Merino rams from Charles Sturgeon's farm "Elms Merino Stud", Grays, Essex, England. This shipment marked the third pure bred importation into the Eastern Cape. William Shuman's decision to import sheep was seen as a dynamic example. The stud rams' were described as having strong builds and fine fleeces, desirable qualities which could only benefit the flocks of local sheep farmers.

Harbour - Port of Tilbury Depart Date - 1st October 1895 Exporter - Charles Sturgeon South Ockendon Hall, Grays, Essex, England

Ship - SS Armenia (Steam Liner)

Cargo - Five Pedigree Merino Rams

Harbour - Port of East London Arrive Date - 15th October 1895 Importer - William Shuman Brosdale, Elliot, Eastern Cape, South Africa

The following article from the 1930's, reports on a London wool sale, focusing on South African wool exports. This success is thanks to the vision of farmers like William Shuman, who imported Merino sheep, improving the quality of flocks in the Eastern Cape. The article is written in a distinctive style, which is typical of 1930's British journalism.

U.K. Wool Market Remains Firm Prices Compare With Last Season's Rates The current series of the London wool sales, the first of the season, got off to a good start with a large number of buyers bidding keenly for most lots offered. The market appeared to be a little effected by the recent easiness at the Australian auctions and the prices generally were unchanged to 5 per cent. dearer, compared with the previous series. Topmaking wools received the best support among the South African selection, and were fully steady on the last season's closing rates. The competition for spinning sorts was rather more reserved, with the result that topmakings were relatively firmer than spinners. South African wools comprised 486 bales, out of 7, 528 offered. There was an average selection, comprising average spinners and good topmaking wools from the Eastern Cape districts, with many of 12 months' growth. A few lots, scoured locks and outskirts, made prices comparable to the former sale levels, but snow-whites were neglected and withdrawn. "The Farmers Gazette" - London Thames Valley Region - 1930's

(1899-1902) The impact of the Anglo-Boer War on William William's transport business and farm were devastated by British scorched-earth tactics, which burned crops, buildings and farms. He adjusted his lines and travel plans to evade British patrols and protect his assets. William worked tirelessly to maintain operations and ensure his family's survival.

(1896-1898) Cattle Plague Rinderpest Outbreak in Elliot District

The Rinderpest epidemic, sweeping across South Africa, has brought devastation to the Elliot district. This cattle plague has ravaged local farm's, leaving families destitute and livelihoods shattered. William Shuman, of Brosdale Farm, has lost nearly 80% of his herd, valued at thousands of pounds. "The financial loss is crippling," Shuman lamented. "Our entire existance depends on these cattle; seeing them suffer is heartbreaking." Alarming statistics reveal almost the entire districts cattle population has perished, with thousands more at risk. The epidemic's rapid spread has overwhelmed local veterinary services, worsening the crisis. As the public rallies around stricken farmer's, calls for government intervention grow louder. Experts warn that the situation will deteriorate unless effective disease management and veterinary services are established. "The Free Press" Queenstown Cape Colony 1897

(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. William had family ties to this area, as his mother Mary Dicks was from Hopewell farm in the Cathcart 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."

(1937) William died Sidespur farm, Coverside valley, Cathcart district, Eastern Cape. Buried in the Queenstown Cemetery.