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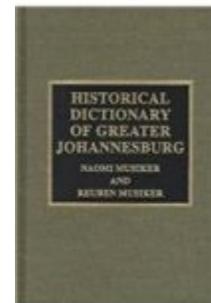
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Naomi Musiker, Reuben Musiker. *Historical Dictionary of Greater Johannesburg*. Lanham and Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 1999. 380 pp. \$98.50 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8108-3520-7.

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On Compiling Dictionaries

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“Neither is a dictionary a bad book to read—it is full of suggestion in the raw material of possible poems and histories”—Emerson.[1]

The conventional dictionary definition on dictionaries reads: “A book dealing, usually in alphabetical order with the words of a language or of some special subject, author, etc, wordbook or lexicon.”[2] Even in an electronic age, it remains a trusted, readily available source of reliable information. However, as said by Emerson, it is not a bad book to read; to the contrary, a book such as the Musikers’ *Historical Dictionary of Greater Johannesburg*, besides being a valuable reference, is a fascinating book to read. It is a proud successor of works such as, for example, Anna Smith’s *Johannesburg Street Names* or the more recent *Historical Dictionary of South Africa* by Christopher Saunders and Nicholas Southey.[4]

An up-to-date dictionary of Johannesburg is a welcome addition to the historiography, especially since much of what was written about the city during its very short history focused mainly on white civic histories, excluding the contributions of the black community. This dictionary goes a long way in balancing this hitherto unequal history with its overwhelmingly dominant accent on white achievements in the fields of mining, commerce, finance, manufacturing, arts and culture. In addition, as so aptly put in the editor’s foreword, this dictionary provides tangible evidence of Johannesburg’s biggest asset, “namely, opportunity, the possibility of starting at the bottom and rising.... It [this dictionary] recalls the earlier

times, the sacrifices and struggles that went into shaping a great city. And it shows, in numerous entries on significant persons, places, events and institutions what Johannesburg is and what it can do.”

However, the presentation of this story of struggle and sacrifice in the form of a dictionary leaves much to the imagination of the reader. It is indeed “raw material of possible poems and histories” which requires reading between the lines and assimilating information to fit together pieces of a puzzle which will reward the reader with a fascinating insight into the multi-cultural, dynamic city that is Johannesburg, warts and all. No judgement calls are made—it is up to the reader to use the information presented to form a picture of South Africa’s largest city and by far the youngest of the great cities of the world.

In keeping with the objectives of the Scarecrow Historical Dictionaries of Cities of the World series, the authors of the *Historical Dictionary of Greater Johannesburg* have focussed their attention on the more recent history of the city.[5] Events predating 1886, the official date of the establishment of the city, are briefly summarised in the chronology, which starts at 1100 AD with the establishment of Iron Age societies on the Witwatersrand. After 1886, major events and highlights in the history of the city are summarised by month.

This chronology in itself makes for interesting reading. For example 1888 is summarised as follows:

“January. Johannesburg Stock Exchange is opened.

March. First meeting of the Hospital Board under W. St John Carr. April. Braamfontein cemetery opened. May. Johannesburg Estate and Waterworks Company established. August. Charles G Serrurier replaces Shaw as Sanitary Inspector. First hospital staffed by Holy Family nuns is started. Wanderers' Club is started."

The apparent randomness of such an entry makes for interesting reading, because it gives insight into the way in which, in this case, local government functions and services were established in the mining camp. The very domestic nature of this chronology brings the reader to the heart of the city and demonstrates the explosive nature of its growth, that indeed the establishment of its stock exchange predates the establishment of its first cemetery, its waterworks company or even its hospital.

Likewise the chronology of the 1990s demonstrates how nationally significant events impinged on this domestic nature of the life of the city. Momentous events such as negotiations towards a peaceful political transition and the first democratic elections in South Africa are placed into a local Johannesburg context, demonstrating the significant role played by the city on the road to democracy. The brevity of the summary makes for chilling reading, especially since many local readers will be forcefully reminded of tense and dramatic times they themselves lived through.

"1994. January. Nelson Mandela calls for an end to the boycott of rent and service charges. February. Soweto's rent arrears are written off, leaving local authorities R1.84 billion in arrears. A monthly flat rate of R45 for essential services is introduced for Soweto. 28 March. Between 20,000 and 50,000 Zulus march through Johannesburg's central business district to support calls for Zulu sovereignty. Outside the ANC headquarters, Shell House, shots are fired. Clashes also take place in other parts of the city. Fifty-three people are killed and 250 injured."

"April [1994]. In the run up to democratic elections, members of the extreme right wing detonate bombs in the centre of the city and at Jan Smuts airport. Police arrest 32 members of right-wing organisations. May. The ANC are declared the winner of the elections."

The introduction, which follows the chronology, briefly summarises the history of the city for foreign readers who have little or no knowledge of Johannesburg and sets the scene for the dictionary entries, which follow.

By virtue of the nature of the book, the history of the city is fragmented into dictionary entries. These cover a wide range of topics ranging from housing, arts, music, culture, literature, exceptional personalities, places, suburbs, townships, landmarks and events. Whereas the work aims to be as comprehensive as possible, the authors add that "the decisions on what to include and what to omit were taken primarily with a view to an item's usefulness to readers." The authors stress that the book is aimed at the general reader and not the specialist seeking detailed knowledge and insight.

Nevertheless, many of the entries provide summaries and potted histories not readily available elsewhere and which would prove a daunting task for even the specialist to assemble. The short histories of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and the local mining houses, which all played such a significant role in the history of the city, are a case in point. It is worth recounting some of these in more detail.

In 1887, soon after the discovery of the Witwatersrand gold fields, mining magnates, prospectors and speculators established the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). At first, business was done on the corner outside Hermann Eckstein's offices. In 1888, the first stock exchange building was opened on the north-west corner of Commissioner and Simmonds Streets. The building consisted of a high-ceiling, single hall surrounded by offices, a structure which soon became the nerve centre of the mining camp. Mining magnate Barney Barnato became its first chairman. A second, larger exchange was erected on the same site and opened in 1893, but still proved too small and speculators and stock-brokers frequently conducted business outside in Simmonds Street. In an effort to contain the crowds gathered, police ordered that the street be cordoned off. This measure gave rise to the expression "between the chains" which was used by businessmen to refer to stock exchange business dealings. In addition, since Johannesburg had no city hall until 1910, local residents used the area between the chains to meet whenever a civic crisis arose.

In 1903, after the Anglo-Boer South African War, Lord Alfred Milner laid the foundation stone for a new, larger stock exchange building, erected in Hollard Street. With its opening, the financial heart of the city moved to the south-western portion of the inner city. The Exchange remained here for the next seventy years, after which it was replaced by a new building at 17 Diagonal Street. In 1996, daily brokerage operations at the Stock

Exchange became computerised or “screen-based,” a development which facilitated its move from the heart of Johannesburg to Sandton at the turn of the millennium.

For most of its existence, a small number of large and powerful companies owned most of the shares traded on the Exchange. By 1996, the mining house Anglo American Corporation, and the financial giants Old Mutual, Sanlam, Rembrandt and Liberty Life together controlled almost 80 percent of the JSE. Anglo American controlled almost 40 percent of shares listed, a matter of concern for the government. In an effort to benefit black empowerment groups, big business began a process of unbundling of interests. For example the National Economic Empowerment Consortium (NEC) led by Cyril Ramaphosa acquired the Johnnies Industrial Corporation (Johnnic). During the same period the firm New Africa Investment Limited acquired an interest in Johannesburg Consolidated Investments, which was also unbundled. By 1998, historically disadvantaged firms increased their control of shares on the stock exchange to 10 percent, which was valued at R111 billion. Smaller conglomerates and the financial and insurance sector increased their share of the market as well. By contrast Anglo American’s control of the share market dropped from 40.5 percent in 1995 to 19.1 percent in 1998.

Although the names of many mining magnates and mining companies have been relegated to the history books, the Musikers demonstrate how these enterprises created more than a century ago are still active in the world of commerce, albeit in altered forms. Especially relevant is how the Musikers cover the entire twentieth century, especially the 1990s and developments in the field of black empowerment in post-apartheid South Africa. Herein lies one of the major contributions of the book.

The Johannesburg Consolidated Investment Company (JCI) was formed in 1889 by Barnato as a holding company to administer the properties he had acquired in Johannesburg after the discovery of gold. Barnato, assisted by his nephew Solly Joel, invested the profits they had made on the Kimberley diamond mines in the Johannesburg waterworks, the South African Breweries, the establishment of Johannesburg suburbs such as Yeoville, Berea, Houghton and Doornfontein as well as a large number of gold mines on the Witwatersrand. These included Government Gold Mining Areas, Langlaagte Estates and Gold Mining Company Ltd., New State Areas Ltd. and Randfontein Estates Gold Mining Company Witwatersrand Ltd. By 1939, JCI administered seven ma-

ior gold mining companies, as well as interests in platinum and coal mines. In 1995, JCI was restructured into three separately listed companies to encourage black participation in mining and industrial financial groups: Anglo American Platinum Corporation, Johannesburg Consolidated Investment Limited, and Johnnic.

Another example is the Gold Fields of South Africa Company founded in 1887 by Cecil John Rhodes and C. D. Rudd. Rhodes became managing director and his two brothers board members. During the 1880s and 1890s the company provided Rhodes with a source of income to finance his imperial schemes in southern Africa, especially in the land north of the Limpopo, as well as to finance his share in the Jameson Raid. The gold mines controlled by the company included Simmer and Jack Mines Ltd. in Germiston, Robinson Deep Ltd. and Sub Nigel Ltd. Goldfields of South Africa later acquired mining rights on the farms of Daggafontein no. 9 and Vogelstruisbult, but in the 1930s the company owned only three small, depleted mines: Sub Nigel, Simmer and Jack, and Robinson Deep. However, when geophysicist Dr. Rudolf Kramer discovered a new gold reef, the West Wits Line and Goldfields invested in gold mining operations in the Orange Free State, improving the company’s fortunes. By the 1990s, the interests of Goldfields had diversified to such an extent that it only controlled two gold mines, Kloof and Driefontein. In 1997 Liberty Life, an insurance company, Rembrandt and Asteroid were the chief shareholders in Goldfields.

One of the greatest Johannesburg mining houses was Rand Mines Ltd., also known as the Corner House Group. This mining house was established in 1893 and initially controlled by Herman Eckstein. The group was later controlled by Wernher, Beit and Co. and operated from London. As the extent of the potential riches of the main gold reef became known, Rand Mines acquired all the shareholdings of Wernher and Beit in the richest gold mines. By 1938 the Group was reduced to two smaller companies, Central Mining and Rand Mines. By 1971 Rand Mines became part of the Barlow Rand Group, which also had interests in manufacturing, distribution, forestry and property.

Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, who had been a key figure in the Kimberley diamond mining industry, launched the financial giant Anglo American Corporation (AAC) in 1917 after he persuaded an American mining engineer WL Honnold that the East Rand held great mining potential. With his help Oppenheimer obtained financial assistance from the United States of America to begin ex-

plotting the mineral rights he had acquired in the area. By the 1930s Oppenheimer used profits from his venture to finance further developments on the newly discovered goldfields in the Orange Free State and the Far West Witwatersrand. By 1980, AAC produced 37 percent of South Africa's gold and began diversifying into the mining of uranium and platinum. The company also acquired a considerable stake in Johannesburg Consolidated Investments (JCI), which in 1995 split into JCI, Anglo American Platinum and Johnnic, when the chairmanship of JCI was taken over by Mzi Khumalo. By 1997, in response to the drop in the gold price, which made rationalisation of gold mining activities a necessity, AAC consolidated all of its gold mines into one operation, called Anglogold.

Considerable attention is also paid by the authors to a hitherto much neglected part of the history of Johannesburg, viz. the history of black people of the city. The history of existing townships such as Alexandra and Soweto as well as removed areas such as Sophiatown and Pageview are covered. Personalities are included such as Enoch Sontonga (1873-1905), writer of the new South African national anthem "Nkosi Sikelel i' Afrika" ("God Bless Africa"); Robert Sobukwe (1924-1978), founder of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), who lived and worked in Johannesburg before his arrest and imprisonment on Robben Island after 1960; and Herbert Isaac Dhlomo (1904-1956), a dramatist and poet after whom the Dhlomo Theatre was named. It was founded in 1982 by a group of actors in a converted warehouse as the first autonomous black theatre in Johannesburg. Scores of other black actors, writers, photographers, artists, politicians, trade union activists and entrepreneurs are also represented in the dictionary.

Equally, remarkable black and white women who played a significant role in the history of the city are represented in the dictionary. They include world-renowned figures such as the politician Helen Suzman; political activist Winnie Madikizela Mandela; trade unionists and activists Ruth First, Helen Joseph and Lilian Ngoyi; Miriam Makeba, well-known singer; as well as socialites of the early twentieth century such as Florence Phillips. Less well known are women active in the trade union movement of the 1930s and 1940s Hester and Johanna Cornelius, who were active in the Garment Workers' Union, University of the Witwatersrand academics such as sociologist Ellen Hellman, and anthropologist Agnes Winifred Hoernle.

The Musikers cover a range of topics such as education, theater, literature, music, hospitals, churches, and

houses. These are broad categories, which include a large number of references to people and places. For example, the survey of forms of literature relating to Johannesburg covers exponents of late-nineteenth-century genres such as "mining literature," white English-language literature, the writers of the black magazine *Drum*, post-1976 protest literature, and literature produced in Afrikaans. Although Johannesburg resident Nadine Gordimer, recipient of both the Booker Prize and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991, is mentioned in this section, she is unfortunately not covered in an individual entry. A search for an entry on Gordimer is therefore rather tedious, since the reader needs to find her under the associated keyword of literature.

Likewise, if information is needed on houses of historical interest such as Northwards, Emoyeni, Hohenheim, or Stone House designed by Sir Herbert Baker in 1902, the reader does not find a line entry where the alphabetical entry would have been found, but needs to look under the entry "Houses of Historical Interest." The reader is forced to select and search his/her own random key words in an attempt to find entries of this kind. A similar situation is found with regard to entries on schools, churches, theatres and the like. Individual places or persons are not included as entries with references to where information can be found. Although dictionaries are not provided with a key word index, an index or alphabetically arranged references from one item to the other would have greatly enhanced the accessibility of the information provided in this dictionary. In a few cases this has been done, such as in the case of the Brixton and Braamfontein cemeteries. The reader is referred to the item "cemeteries."

Despite difficulties of access and exploration, this dictionary represents a rich lode of history to be mined at leisure. It is indeed a book "full of suggestion in the raw material of possible poems and histories" and a welcome addition to the already extensive bibliography on the history of Johannesburg. It adds much needed access to the history of black people in Johannesburg and their contribution to the life of this great city. In perusing the selected bibliography the reader is reminded that the dictionary at hand is an excellent summary of these histories which cover not only scholarly historical work, but works on architecture, art, biographies, reminiscences, broadcasting and film, commercial development, travel, economic history, education, mining, political history, trade union and strikes, local government and many others.

Notes

- [1]. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.
- [2]. H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, eds., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 5th edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).
- [3]. Anna Smith, *A Dictionary of Street, Suburb and Other Place-Names*, (Juta, Cape Town, 1971); and Christopher Saunders and Nicholas Southey, *Historical Dictionary of South Africa*, 2nd edition (David Philip: Cape Town, 2001).
- [4]. Other cities covered in the series are Tokyo, Stockholm, Warsaw, Paris, Honolulu and Hawai'i, Guangzhou (Canton) and Guangdong, and Vienna.

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