

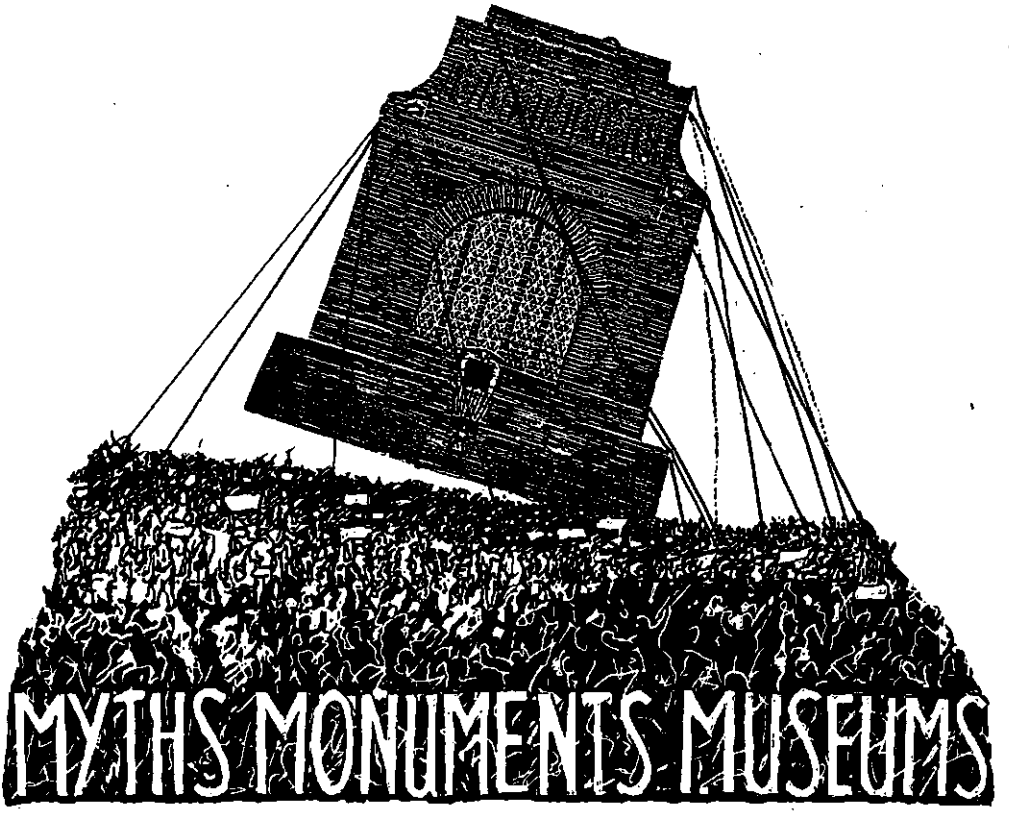
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Making history in Mamre: community participation and response in the Mamre History Society Project

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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
HISTORY WORKSHOP



MAKING HISTORY IN MAMRE:
COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND
RESPONSE IN THE MAMRE HISTORY
SOCIETY PROJECT

Kerry Ward
University of Cape Town

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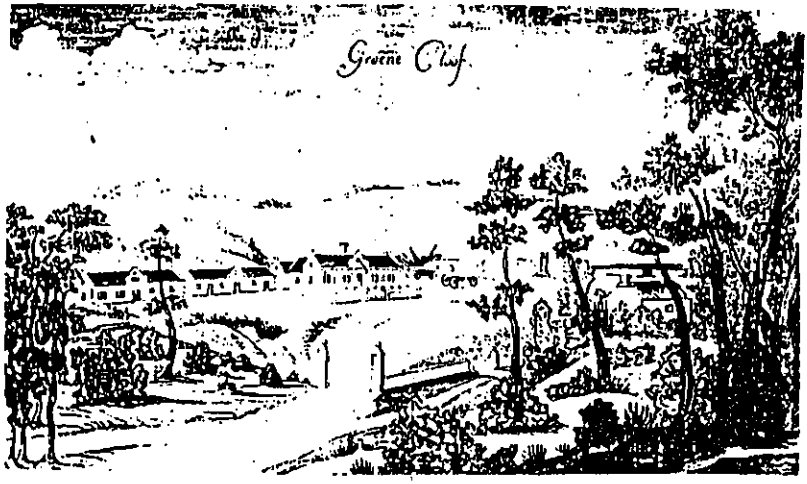


The people who first lived on the land with their cattle called themselves Gouraiqua. Then from across the sea came people who called themselves Dutch. It was at time which the Dutch imagined was the 'Year of the Lord 1652'. At first the invaders clung to a fortress settlement which they named the Cape of Good Hope. They traded for cattle with the people they found on the land, whom they called Hottentots.

'The Hottentots are of a phlegmatic disposition, and sleep much in the day time. In a moonlight night they amuse themselves dancing caper-cutting and singing and at the same time watch over their flocks... They neither plant sow nor cultivate the ground, but rove from place to place, wherever they can find the greatest quantity of provender. There they set up five or six tents under the control of a captain.'
George Schmidt, Periodical Accounts, 1737.



But the Dutch claimed the right to possess the land of the Gouraiqua, and called it the Zwartland, because of the black bushes which grew there in natural abundance. The Dutch, who also called themselves European to distinguish themselves above all others in the land, particularly the Asian and African slaves and Hottentots they pressed into their service, came to the Zwartland and divided it amongst themselves. In 1700 Henning Huessing was given permission who was of his kin, to use the land now called Groene Cloof on account of its good supply of water and pasture. Then the Dutch invaders, who thought of themselves as farmers, came to plant sow and cultivate the land, and desired protection from those people who had lived there before, whom they called 'marauding Bushmen'. And so, in 1708, the Governor Willem Adriaan van der Stel ordered a military settlement to be built on Groenekloof, and called it De Kleine Post.

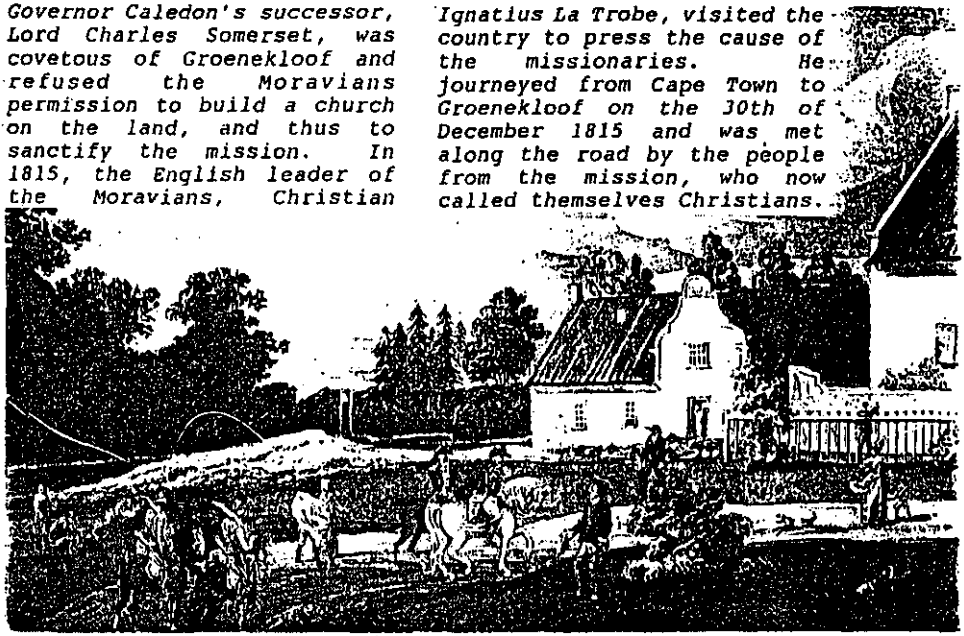


In 1791 when the soldiers left Kleine Post it became yet another farm. The next year, other Europeans who called themselves Moravians came from Europe across the sea to bring to the Hottentots their version of civilization, which they called Christianity. The Moravians established their first mission settlement at Genadendal, amidst the mountains on land about three days ride from Cape Town.

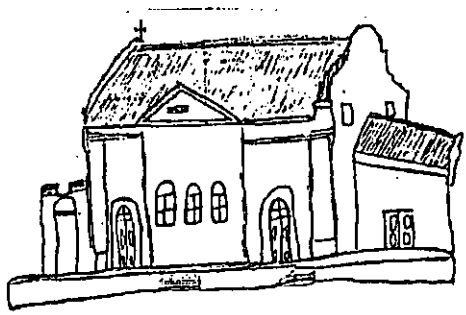


'In 1808, the Earl of Caledon, then Governor of the Cape, having observed the benefits arising to the Hottentot nation from Christian instruction, prevailed upon the [Moravian] Brethren's missionaries at Gnadenthal to form a settlement at this place [Groenekloof], where many facilities existed for the maintenance of a congregation of Christian Hottentots... The Brethren were put in possession, and a number of Hottentots soon flocked to them from various places, both in and out of the colony.'
Reverend C.I. La Trobe, 31/12/1815.

Governor Caledon's successor, Lord Charles Somerset, was covetous of Groenekloof and refused the Moravians permission to build a church on the land, and thus to sanctify the mission. In 1815, the English leader of the Moravians, Christian Ignatius La Trobe, visited the country to press the cause of the missionaries. He journeyed from Cape Town to Groenekloof on the 30th of December 1815 and was met along the road by the people from the mission, who now called themselves Christians.



'The whole procession now moved forward, some of the Hottentot women in an open bullock waggon, which they had brought with them, the rest, with the men, partly on horseback and partly on foot. The settlement is seen like a fruitful field in the midst of a desert, and the road to the missionaries houses lies through a small poplar wood.'
Reverend C.I. La Trobe, 30/12/1815.

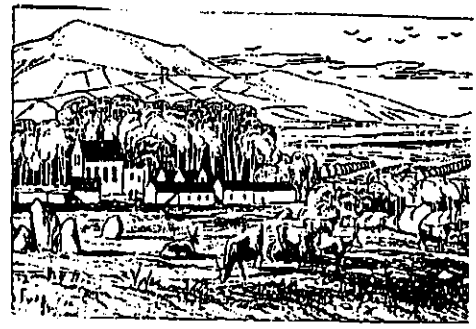


The next year, the foundation stone of the Church was laid and La Trobe saw his journey end in success. 'September 2nd was the day, when I expected to close my abode at Groenekloof... Jacob Conrad, a Hottentot, of his own accord, offered his spann of eight horses, to convey me and my travelling companions to Capetown...'

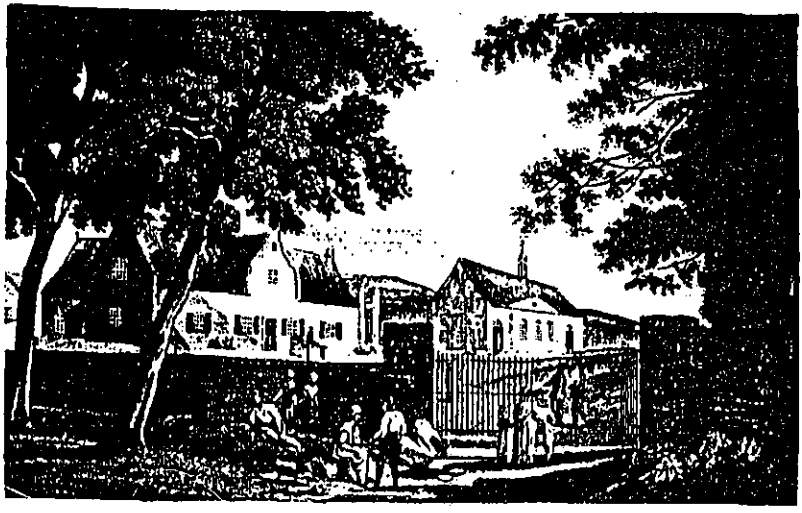
Reverend C.I. La Trobe 2/9/1816.

Amongst those who came was the Khoian woman Rosetta Klapmuts, who was the sister of captain Hans Klapmuts. He was the leader of the Gouraiqua at Louwskloof, which was one of the three farms that was now known by the Europeans as the grant-station Groenekloof. Rosetta was baptized in 1813 along with her children, and she took a new name, Benigna, and became known as the "mother of Mamre".

On December 2nd 1838, the emancipation of those people who had been called slaves at the Cape was celebrated in Groenekloof. '...being Sunday, we had a special meeting in the morning in which we brought our thanksgivings to God, for the admission to unrestricted freedom of more than 40,000 of our fellowmen, which took place the preceding day...there were many tears of joy and gratitude.'
Groenekloof Diary for 1838.



'The emancipation of the slaves in this colony, December 1st, 1838, has been followed by important results for our congregations also, some hundreds of these freedmen having sought admission in them, and promising to be attentive learners of the Gospel and valuable inhabitants.'
Survey of the missions at the close of Year 1839.



It [Mamre] is of much interest, as one of the oldest missionary stations for the education and civilization of Natives established in this part of Africa more than seventy years ago by the Moravian Brethren, and ... it has steadily flourished and advanced in prosperity up to the present time. It has always been more or less a labour supply for the whole of the neighbouring country. As far as I am aware the Moravian Brethren are among the first to recognize the duty of teaching all converts to work for their living, and this principle appears to have been steadily kept in view throughout their subsequent proceedings.
Bartle Frere, Governor of the Cape Colony, letter dated 22.11.1879 written after a visit to Mamre

There was not enough land for all the people who came to settle at Groenekloof, or the other missions like Genadendal, to become independent farmers in their own right. Consequently, the mission inhabitants sought their livelihood labouring for European farmers and many increasingly began to journey to Cape Town in search of work. And so, the mission communities, including Groenekloof which became known as Mamre in 1854 and its people Mamriers, spread their families from the countryside into the town. And the ride to Cape Town became a familiar journey in the lives of the Moravians.

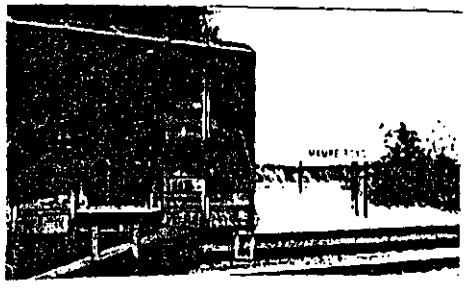


At Easter time, the Mamriers who were working in Cape Town would journey home to Mamre to celebrate their Christian festival and to see their family and friends. In the early twentieth century, the journey became a train-ride to Mamreweg Station, and then from Mamreweg station a wagon ride along one of the roads to Mamre.





By 1886 there were so many Moravians from the rural mission stations, especially Mamriers, living and working in Cape Town, that the missionaries established a Church in District Six to gather together their scattered flock.



This journey has become part of the popular memory of Mamriers. The tradition of the Easter journey from Cape Town to Mamre is a symbol of unity and renewal for the Mamre community. It is one of the images from the lived experience of Mamriers. And is part of the new history of Mamre being created in the present.

It is from the well-spring of memory that a people's history of Mamre will grow. For this journey to Mamre spans generations from the beginning of the twentieth century, and belongs to all Mamriers today.

Making History in Mamre: Community Participation and Response in the Mamre History Society Project.

Kerry Ward
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The road to Mamre is not simply the fifty kilometres of bitumen along the west cost shoreline which separates the village from Cape Town. It is also the temporal path by which Mamriers explore and construct their own individual and collective histories. This paper follows one of the different routes by which Mamre's history is brought to life by Mamriers. It also shows how Mamre's history has been enlivened through the process of dialogue between myself as an "outside" researcher and both individual interviewees and community groups. In essence, this is the study of a journey through the newly charted territory of historical research mapped by oral history methodology and practice. It analyses the creation of, and interaction between, academic and community-based history, and argues that it is the very process of dialogue between them which deepens our understanding of the social purpose of making history.

This paper is a chapter from a thesis which explores these issues.* It traces the development of a community history project in Mamre and the decisions made by people involved about how they wanted to research and present their community's history. While the project was considered valuable and exciting by the people involved, there was a tendency for the enthusiasm of creating a "people's history of Mamre" to become nostalgic in its presentation. This paper examines process of creating a community history, and what the project represented in the reinterpretation of Mamre's history by Mamriers.

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* This paper is based on chapter five of my thesis 'The Road to Mamre: Migration, Memory, and the meaning of Community c1900-1992', unpub. M A thesis, University of Cape Town, 1992.

Analysing nostalgia ought to be a crucial issue for historians and for the making of history, but many reject its validity as an interpretation of the past. Most historians perceive nostalgia as a conservative image of the past that needs to be combatted. Debates amongst historians about nostalgia revolve around the social purpose of history and its public presentation; and centre on the role of historians in the production of a usable past. At its core, this is a political issue about the role of history in the present. These are current debates within the methodology of people's history, oral history and popularisation. Often the process is seen in terms of opposites. On the one hand, history can be a powerful tool to justify the status quo, on the other, it can mobilise people to see their history as an alternative to the dominant view, and empower them to struggle for change in the present. At present in South African society, the struggle over how history is created and presented is of enormous importance in the formation of a new social order. It is within this context that my involvement in Mamre developed and these are the issues that will be addressed in this chapter through an evaluation of the history project.

In Cape Town historiography, the creation of a popular history of District Six based on popular memory has also tended towards nostalgia. It is the abominable destruction of District Six and its role as the symbolic scar of forced removals in Cape Town which has heightened the tinge of nostalgia in the presentation of its history. The uprooting of communities also happened in other parts of Cape Town, like Mowbray or Claremont for example, but the history of these areas is not presented with the powerful nostalgic images invoked by District Six.[6]

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[6] Christopher Saunders, '*The Struggle for District Six* in the Context of Urban History in South Africa', unpublished paper, Cape Town History Project Workshop, 11-12 November 1991, p10. In fact, there has been comparatively little historical focus on these communities. For one of few examples, John Western, *Outcast Cape Town*, (Human and Rousseau, Cape Town, 1981). A booklet produced by the United Women's Organisation in the early-1980s *Claremont: A People's History* (UWO, Athlone, 1982) to mobilise around forced removals from "Harfield Village" shows how nostalgic memories about Claremont from ex-residents can motivate people politically.

This is partly explained by the way that historians have tapped the 'residues of popular memory'; as Bill Nasson says, 'the history of District Six has become a history of the mind'.[7] 'We have', Nasson continues, 'if not a duty, then a need, deeply engraved within a democratic human culture, to help preserve that history and to burn it for many years to come.'[8] As historians, we also have a duty to explain why people's memory is conceptualised nostalgically. By doing so, we demystify the romanticised images and reveal how they can be a critique of the present. Analysing nostalgia as an expression of identity, instead of rejecting it as "false consciousness" enables a closer and more critical engagement with popular memory.[9]

The public presentation of history through the media and by both academic and amateur historians often embraces nostalgia uncritically.[10] The media presentation of Mamre is on the surface resplendently nostalgic. Newspaper articles carry titles like 'Mamre - A Haven of Peace and Old World Charm'[11] and 'The Old Ways Persist'[12]. A recent House of Representatives publication which includes a section on Mamre reiterates the timelessness of nostalgic myths:

> 'Many places in the Republic can be called an artist's paradise and Mamre, the quaint mission station in the Swartland near Malmesbury, is one of them. In Mamre, one finds beauty in the design of the mission buildings, beauty in the old cottages and their unusual layout, beauty in the abundance of wild flowers in spring and beauty also in the trust the early missionaries had when they started to build a world in which people could practise their chosen religion, away from the fear of evil spirits and bad omens.'[13]

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[7] Bill Nasson, 'Reconstruction', p46.

[8] Ibid, p47.

[9] Philip Bonner and Tom Lodge, 'Community, Space and Class' in P. Bonner et al eds., *Holding their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa* (Wits University Press/Ravan, Johannesburg, 1989) pp2-9, state that testimonies which romanticised the past repressed conflict, but they do not offer an explanation of why popular memory is expressed through nostalgia.

Within Mamre, there is a split between the oral and written history of the community. Mamre's history as told through popular memory of lived experience is often expressed through nostalgia. On the other hand, its written history is neither nostalgic nor centred on the lives of Mamriers. The public presentation of Mamre's history in booklets which have circulated within the community have tended towards a history which underlines the chronology of Dutch settlement through to the establishment of the mission at Groenekloof. The history of the community is dominated by the missionaries, the church and other community institutions, and by a survey of the historical buildings. Sketches of prominent personalities including Benigna, and a list of the first "inwoners" or inhabitants, are sometimes mingled in these booklets.[14] This is the history that people tend to recite when asked about Mamre's past. The written history of Mamre presented in these accounts bears the hallmark of much local history elsewhere. In assessing local history in Britain, Raphael Samuel asks: 'Why then is so much local history, though undertaken as a labour of love, repetitive and inert?'[15]

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[10] Listen, for example, to the way one oral historian describes interviewing elderly women. 'As they unearthed the time capsules of their minds, all looked back with pleasure on those early days, many professing that there was little in life they would like to change...' Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, 'Views From Forescore and More: Youth and Maturation in the Oral Hisotry of Elderly Women' *International Journal of Oral History*, vol.10, no.3, November 1989, p207.

[11] *Cape Times* 'Weekend Magazine' 17/6/67,in 'Mamre' *Macmillan Local History Collection*, African Studies Department, UCT.

[12] *Weekend Argus* 6/12/80, ibid.

[13] Marlene van Eaden, 'Mamre' in *Prisma* vol.6, no.6. August 1991. p4.

[14] Austin Joemat, *De Groenecloof - Mamre; Van Toeka tot Vandag* (Cape Town, November 1980), Basil Kivedo and Donald Adonis, *Mamre: Die Honderd en Tagtigste Feesjaar van die Moraviese Gemeente en Honderd en Sewentigste Herdenking van die Kerk Inwyding* (Mamre, November 1988), anon. *Mamre* (publicity pamphlet for the Mamre Mill) See also, J de Boer and E M Temmers *The Unitas Fratrum*, and B Kruger, *The Pear Tree Blossoms*, B Kruger and P Schaberg *The Pear Tree Bears Fruit*. Other Moravian communities have similar history booklets eg K T August *Moravian Hill: Ons Katedraal in die Moderstad 1886-1980* (Kaapstad, 1980), The Printing Press published history booklets from the late nineteenth century (including *Benigna* in 1873) for example, *De Geshiedenis van den 17 Augustus 1727* (Genadendal, 1890), *Geshied-Verhaal van Genadendal, de eerste Zendings-Statie in Zuid-Afrika van 1737-1806*. (Genadendal, 1893). For further information about the history of the Genadendal Printing Press see Isaac Balie, *Die Geskiedenis van Genadendal, 1738-1988* (Perskor, Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1988).

Samuel makes a plea for the inclusion of oral evidence to make a more democratic and humane local history.[16] But Linda Shopes argues that this does not take community history beyond trivia and nostalgia, and I would agree. Where I would disagree with Shopes however, is that she ignores the significance that these nostalgic popular memories have for community identity. To dismiss the nostalgic images of popular memory is to ignore part of the way in which people view their community and its past. The problem Shopes identifies is the way that historians interact with people within a community when they collaborate on a local history project. Her experience in the Baltimore Neighbourhood Heritage Project led her to the conclusion that unless such projects are firmly rooted in the community and its organisations they will have little meaning to the people who are the intended audience. This was part of the research methodology I wanted to develop in my study of Mamre.[17]

I consulted with CER about whether I should reconsider my approach to working in Mamre after my unsuccessful attempts to create a user group, which had highlighted for me the fact that "history" in Mamre generates more of a passive interest than an active participation. Some people expected me to give a talk on Mamre's history rather than suggest that they should be the ones doing the research. I thought I should perhaps opt for a different interaction with the community, possibly popularising my work and writing a booklet on the life history interviews. I decided to try one more time to generate interest in a History Society and sent out a letter to every household in Mamre inviting people to a meeting. I also worked on a slide presentation which dealt with the issues of oral history, people's history and popularisation. It was an alternative way to introduce myself and my approach to historical research and to people in the community which I thought, optimistically, would be suitable for presenting to a large group. I basically translated the workshop I had initially constructed into a visual presentation.

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[15] Raphael Samuel, 'Local History and Oral History' *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 1, Spring 1976, p193.

[16] Ibid, pp200-201.

[17] Linda Shopes, 'Baltimore', p27.

One of the interesting things about people's response to my slide presentation was the excitement and discussion generated by the slides themselves. I had used photographs taken of the people I had interviewed and combined them with slides of old photographs that belonged to the interviewees. Before the "official" discussion began, people asked if I would show the slides again. There followed an animated discussion about the old photographs and who was in them, and people were keen to explain to me exactly what was happening in the photos and who the people were.

This was a crucial moment in the reinterpretation of Mamre's history by the people present. Their enthusiasm was aroused by the slide presentation because they saw themselves as ordinary Mamriers within the context of the community's history. The discussion which followed the reshowing of the slides involved the audience taking possession of the construction of their history I had created, and elaborating on each picture within its contemporary historical context. It was also the sense of collective remembering which enlivened people's interest. My intention was to introduce the concepts of people's history and oral history. The outcome was a heightened awareness that the history of Mamre was not just a history of the mission and missionaries.[19]

The discussion after the slide show centred at first around how to preserve Mamre's heritage for future generations. There was considerable debate about the idea of a museum/tea-room as a community resource. Some people felt that it was inappropriate to begin working on such an ambitious project while there was a lack of awareness of Mamre's history in the village. They were defining historical consciousness in terms of heritage issues

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[19] See also Belinda Bozzoli, 'Intellectuals, Audiences and Histories: South African Experiences, 1970-1988' *Radical History Review*, vol.46-47, 1990, pp237-263, for a discussion on the evolution of popular history and audiences in the Wits History Workshop movement.

rather than community history. In general it was agreed that incorporating people's history into a process of generating historical consciousness would make heritage issues more real to Mamriers. Vandalism by the youth of the historical buildings, especially the mill, was cited as evidence that the younger generation did not know or care about Mamre's history.

Someone suggested that the best way to generate interest would be to work through existing organisations to see if they would be interested in researching their own history. There were several people who said they would raise the issue within their organisations, including the brass band, Sunday School, and the Moravian Youth Group. Other people said they would be interested in joining a history group as unaffiliated individuals. I said that I saw my contribution to be a facilitator of such a group, and that I could assist with ideas on how to go about research and resource production.

This meeting was followed up by a workshop with the Moravian Youth Group. Their representatives at the initial meeting wanted me to discuss the idea of a history project with the Youth Group members. At the Youth Group meeting, we talked about the aims and activities of their organisation within the Moravian Church and in the community. They wanted to generate interest in the Youth Group by pursuing an interesting project which was relevant to the community, and one which would help them raise funds. The Youth Group wanted to discuss amongst themselves whether they were willing to be committed to a history project and agreed to send representatives to the next meeting of the History Society.

A week later we had the next meeting of people interested in forming a History Society, to establish the aims and form which the group would take. Ten people attended this meeting, and decided to form a History Society that would explore the history of the community and not of the Moravian Church. There

was some concern about Mamre's history being presented as the history of the Moravian Church because that would not reflect the lives of all the people in Mamre. We discussed the issue of presenting a history of Mamre to the community that was separate to church history. One of the people said emphatically, '*this is about volk history, not church history*'. Another replied that he is part of '*volk history*' and proceeded to tell his life story to the group. This was the beginning of the process of asserting popular memory as the voice of Mamre's history instead of the official memory of the missionaries. Older people felt that to develop pride in Mamre for the youth, a history of the community was needed, not another version of official history. It was decided that everyone should think about what aspects of the community's history they would like to research and that we could bring this research together to present to the community.

I then showed them a range of popular history booklets produced by communities and university-based groups who had links with the labour movement and education organisations. These generated considerable interest and we spent some time discussing how and why these booklets were written and produced. Some people wanted to take one or two home to read and think about whether they wanted to work on a booklet. There was some debate about whether a booklet would be an appropriate project because those Mamriers present thought it would not "sell". The alternative suggestion was to produce a tape-slide show or an exhibition. The impact of the visual material and the way in which it generated enthusiasm and discussion was influential in the decision of the History Society members to put together an exhibition instead of a booklet. The Youth Group representatives were keen on the idea of a video, a calendar or a year-planner, which they had raised in discussions after I had left the last meeting. We agreed to meet again to choose which resource to develop and to and finalise what themes in Mamre's history they wanted to work on. The main aim was to produce a resource which would be possible to reproduce once my involvement was over, and one that would reach the widest possible audience in Mamre itself.

By the end of June, the Moravian Youth Group had committed themselves to working on a calendar, and the Mamre History Society had decided on an exhibition. I constructed a workshop "Researching the History of Mamre's Community" which explored what kinds of evidence could be used for historical research and what these forms of evidence could reveal about Mamre's history. This workshop explored how historical evidence can be rooted in the home and the community. We examined how oral evidence like people's memories and songs; possessions like photos, letters, family bibles, and old implements; and the local environment, housing and land use, can be interpreted and used to make history. We also discussed the way that I had made the initial slide show and explored how pictures could represent themes in Mamre's history.

I started working separately with the History Society and the Youth Group. I would often present the same workshop twice, once with each group, and then ask each group to follow up on different issues in preparation for the next meeting. The people who belonged to the History Society were motivated as individuals on a particular aspect of Mamre's history. The Youth Group were more keenly interested in the production of the resource than intrinsically interested in Mamre's history. They needed to decide on themes in Mamre's history that they wanted to explore, and I would draw up worksheets with tasks for them to follow up during the interval between meetings.

The History Society members decided on an exhibition because it was more flexible than producing a booklet and they felt it would reach a wider audience. I motivated fairly strongly for this option because I felt that an exhibition would be easier to produce given the small number of people involved. It also seemed a more appropriate way to reach the maximum amount of people, which then could generate further expansion of the History Society. I also thought that an exhibition could be produced with maximum participation of the members of the History Society without my dominating the process. People also had very distinct interests in areas of Mamre's history they wanted to research. An exhibition could accommodate a range of topics more coherently than a booklet.

They suggested that we present the exhibition at the Church Bazaar in the first week of October 1991 because that was the festival that attracted the most people in the village. Even those people who were not active in the Moravian Church attended the bazaar, it was the most "community" orientated festival in Mamre. The members of the History Society could also be available to talk to people about what we were doing to generate further interest in Mamre's History. The five themes that were decided on for the exhibition were: 1) The lives of women in Mamre, 2) Music, 3) Sport, 4) Work, 5) School. There were one or two people who were interested in working on each theme, and I took the theme "work" in which to participate as part of sharing skills of resource production. We also felt that an exhibition would be flexible in the event of others wishing to join the History Society to follow their own interests. Also if someone dropped out (as eventually happened when one member became ill for a few months) the whole project would not collapse.

The Youth Group workshopped the themes they wanted to research for the calendar. They decided on six themes: 1) Childhood, 2) Farming, 3) Employment/Unemployment, 4) The Development of Mamre, 5) Origins of the Youth Group, 6) Sport. Each theme was allocated to three or four Youth Group members. The themes they chose were almost the same as those chosen by the History Society because they reflect the main life experiences and leisure activities in the community.

I had made a subjective decision, which was debated by people in CER, that I wanted to act as a facilitator of Mamrier's interests in their own history, rather than adopting a role of an activist mobilizing people around a interpretation of their past which would lead them into direct political action. Staff at CER questioned me about the purpose of my involvement in Mamre, and whether I should be more self-consciously political, given the context of people's history as a catalyst for political consciousness. I felt that an activist approach in Mamre had the potential to alienate the people I wanted to reach, and that imposing a 'problem centred' historical analysis was arrogant. I felt it was important to respect people's own subjective interests in Mamre's history.

The next meetings with the Youth Group and with the History Society were both an "Oral History Workshop on Interviewing" which I had designed and discussed with CER. This was the most successful workshop of the series, partly because my own skills at workshop design were improving and it drew on a subject on which I had experience in Mamre. I had read a number of popularised and community-orientated books on "how to do oral history" which helped in designing the workshop.[21] The projects had by this time taken on a sense of direction and we were working towards tangible goals which added to the commitment people were making. It was vitally important to the process of researching Mamre's history that we were working on a resource to present to the community. This was the sense of purpose which generated enthusiasm. The interviewing workshop aimed at assisting people to plan and conduct interviews to enable them to research their themes. The Youth Group in particular showed a considerable amount of initiative and insight in the types of questions they suggested for a life history interview outline. I then encouraged them to follow up the workshop by interviewing people about their themes in preparation for the next meeting.

The Youth Group workshopped how their themes should fit in within the calendar seasons, and reported back on their work in progress. Some had already started writing reports and finding photographs, others had done nothing. There seemed to be a few highly motivated people in the Youth Group, and some who were not so interested in working on the calendar. We arranged an all-day workshop to design and layout the calendar, attended by the enthusiasts, and it was this rough draft that I took to Nick Curwell, who assisted in producing the calendar.

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[21] See Leslie Witz, *Write Your Own History*, Ken Howarth, *Remember, Remember: Tape Recording Oral History* (Pennine Heritage Network, Hebden Bridge UK, 1984), Stuart Archer and Neigel Shepley, *Witnessing History: Looking at Oral Evidence* (Stanley Thorne, Cheltenham UK, 1988), Jeremy Brecher, *History From Below: How to Uncover and Tell the Story of Your Community, Association, or Union* (Commonwork Pamphlets, New Haven USA, 1987)

Part of the CER methodology of skilling was to demystify resource production, including how to apply for financial assistance from potential donors. The History Society members and representatives from the Youth Group workshopped a funding proposal for the History Project. We were ultimately unsuccessful, but people were enthusiastic about having gone through the process.

> The whole point of the Mamre History Project has been for me to assist in setting up structures and sharing skills that will enable the groups to carry on independently once my involvement is over.[22]

By early September 1991, the number of members of the History Society who wanted to work on the exhibition had settled at five. These people were conducting interviews and looking for visual material to create the exhibition. There was a mixed response from the people approached for interviews and artefacts. Some were interested in being interviewed, and others did not want to lend out their photographs and possessions for the exhibition. Apparently, people were sceptical about whether they would be returned. Mercia and I spent one afternoon in Mamre driving around from house to house gathering old implements and articles like blikkie-mugs and butter churns. We even spent a few hours in Miss Maggie Johannes's loft going through dusty old boxes and dark cobwebbed corners to see what was there. To our dismay, many people told us that they had thrown away all their old photographs and the things belonging to their grandparents because they thought it was "old junk".

The final workshop for the History Society was on design and layout for the exhibition. I provided the materials for the exhibition panels which were distributed to each person to take home and work on their exhibit. Everyone had two 800mm x 1010mm cardboard panels for their theme, and they designed the layout independently of the group. This contrasted with the

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[22] The Baltimore Neighbourhood Heritage Project seems to have operated with an enormous amount of funding, more than any project in South Africa could realistically generate. Although Shopes is silent on money matters, finances provide fundamental constraints on what can be produced by a local history project. Linda Shopes 'Baltimore Project'. Leslie Witz extended the section on financing and producing resources in local history projects, as well as mentioning the possibility that such projects might not be completed, in Write Your Own History after it was suggested by groups from the community and schools. 'History Project' p384.

Youth Group who designed the calendar as a group with a more uniform layout, comparing ideas as they worked on their themes. The final result of the exhibition was quite remarkable, as each person brought to their theme their own historical interpretation and sense of aesthetics which added to the impact of the exhibition when the panels were displayed together.

One member of the History Society, to my surprise, decided not to create exhibition panels on women's lives in Mamre that she had planned, but instead made a display asking the audience to consider the ambiguities of "progress" in Mamre. On one of her panels she asked Mamriers "Did you survive the disease called Progress?". As the picture shows, the question posed reflects the newspaper article, but in retrospect. The question is posed in direct relationship to the development of Atlantis, the other newspaper article is entitled 'Atlantis - 'n Droom'. Mercia Bruce was posing the question of whether Mamre had survived the encroachment of the city. In a sense, this is the essence of the value of the Mamre History Project for Mamriers, because it is part of ensuring that the community's identity is not crushed under-foot by the relentless march of "progress".

While it was fascinating for me to have this aspect of Mamre's popular memory unexpectedly become part of the exhibition, I realised that perhaps this was an issue that could have been a main focus to generate debate in the whole group. I had instead wished to respect individual interests in, for example, the history of sport and the brass band, at the expense of more general insights and historical synthesis.[23] As facilitator, to have imposed a political agenda would have been manipulative if it wasn't stated overtly, and the people involved wanted the History Society to be a catalyst for a range of interests in Mamre's history, not a political forum. A focus on nostalgia and popular memory and perceptions of Mamre's history could provide a critique to carry into more individual interests if it were linked to present-day issues of progress in the

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[23] There were precedents to exploring the history of brass bands. See, Julie O'Neill, 'Village Band', *Oral History Journal* vol.15, no.1, Spring 1987, pp50-55.

The exhibition was displayed on the stage of the Lobensaal, where many of the stalls selling food and handcrafts were set up on the main floor space. This ensured that there would be a constant crowd of people in the hall, and that the exhibition had the most visual impact, being raised about 1.5 metres above the main floor space. It also meant we could keep an eye on what was happening with the exhibition because most of the display was borrowed and had to be returned afterwards.

The exhibition was introduced in the opening speech and prayer of the bazaar, and instantly there was a stream of people keen to inspect it up close. We did not count exactly how many people responded, but we estimate that over seven hundred people came up on to the stage to look at the exhibition in four hours.

We also had newsprint available for people to make comments on; we asked: "Wat dink u van ons uitstalling?". Here are some of the responses.

A. Botha: Ek dink dit het harde werk gekos, om al hierdie oudhede uit te krap. Waar ons as jonk mense kan sien wat was vir destyds ou mense. Handig vir werk. Maar bowenal dit beat ons meul, wat gedurig gesluit is, vir sienswaardighede.

Fazlin Davids: Dis die eerste keer wat ek die uitstalling bywoon, maar ek is net spyt my vriende is nie hier van die Kaap nie.

Basil Kivedo: ... Hierdie is 'n bewys dat Mamre 'n ryke kultuurskat het wat bewaar moet word. ... My bede is dat al hierdie skatte binnekort onder een dak in 'n museum (die ou meul miskien) bewaar sal word.

Quentin Newman: Ek dink dat die uitstalling werklik 'n goeie begin is om vir die inwoners van Mamre te motiveer om 'n bydrae te maak om hul ryke kultuurskat te bewaar, en om fisies 'n bydrae tot hierdie doel te lewer. 'n Ander belangrike aspek wat duidelik na vore kom is die feit of eerder beklemtoning van die feit dat dit die inwoners van die dorp is wat self geskiedenis is en geskiedenis maak. Die belangrikheid van ons eie geskiedenis kom ook sterk deur. Baie goeie poging. Sterkte vorentoe.

D. Loock: Dis pragtig. Behou en bewaar alles wat geskiedkundig is vir die nageslag. Wees trots op jul kultuur en geskiedenis , Mamre.

These are a selection from over 120 signatures and comments on the newsprint. There was not one person who commented negatively or felt that the exhibition was not worthwhile, although of course perhaps they might not have bothered coming to see it let alone write a protest.

After the exhibition in October, work began in earnest on the calendar. This is where I believe there was some breakdown in the process I was trying to initiate. There was tension between producing a "professional" calendar which could be sold in large numbers, and having the Youth Group produce the calendar in Mamre. I had encouraged the Youth Group to get quotes for printing a calendar while I was also doing work on costing. The whole emphasis in the overall History Project had been towards skilling Mamriers in research and resource production. However, the level of technology necessary to produce the calendar, my dependence on Nick Curwell, a graphic designer from Teaching Methods Unit at UCT, for technical assistance, and the fact that most of the production processes had to be done in Cape Town, meant that I "took over" the calendar project. There were financial constraints because our fund-raising had been unsuccessful and we had to rely on university funding. This resulted in the calendar being cut from seven to four pages, and from colour to monotone, which meant that some redesigning had to be done. Time and technical constraints meant that this was done by Nick and myself, although I spoke to the Youth Group about the changes that had to be made in order to get their approval.

To compensate for having taken the calendar production out of the control of the Youth Group, I continued attending their meetings on occasion and reporting back on the stages of production. I also told the Youth Group that sales, marketing and distribution would entirely be their responsibility. They would ultimately determine how much money the Youth Group would gain from the calendar. I also requested that I be kept informed about their sales strategy.

We targeted the Village Management Board 80th Anniversary Festival in mid-December as the launch of the calendar. I was working almost full-time on the calendar from October onwards. I eventually took delivery of the 1000 calendars from the UCT Printing Department, where workers stayed late on a Friday afternoon to finish them, the day before the Festival started.

Rose Arendse, Secretary of the Moravian Youth Group, wrote the following report on how they sold the calendar.

> 'The first were sold at the Local Management's festival on the 16th December 1991. Only a small amount were sold due to the non-support to the festival of the community. Quite a lot of calendars were sold - Rose also took some with her to the M.J.U.S.A. [national Moravian Youth] camp in the Transkei (Bazia). Quite a number of people were interested in our project - they were very much impressed but unfortunately there was no time available to sell it. Early in the new year, the whole youth group had decided to walk with the rest of the calendars through the whole community [in Mamre] from door to door - we sold quite a lot with this effort.
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> ....With the calendars still over [about 100], the Youth has decided to contribute this to the [Moravian] Church to sell to tourists visiting Mamre. The whole ideas is that the church has decided to get involved in a project called the MAMRE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT in cooperation with the Mazzakhe project of the church. The idea of having a tea-room available, we thought that the ideas would be fantastic by giving the calendars to the church - in this way, we are now reaching out the fellow brothers and sisters.
>
> Once again, Kary (sic), thank you very much for assistance and cooperation with the group - sometimes we thought that you were wasting your time by coming out to Mamre all the way from Cape Town, but nevertheless, this project is something the Youth will never forget.'[24]

It is interesting that the Youth thought I was wasting my time driving out to Mamre on Monday evenings to attend their meetings. My intention was to ensure that the calendar production remained as accountable to the Youth as possible, so we would discuss work-in-progress during my visits. Yet they obviously did not share that expectation of being involved in every step of decision-making. They were enthusiastic about having the calendar produced, but were content to leave it in my hands during this stage, particularly after we had to change their original design. I think there was some tension between the Group's evangelical role and the time demands of the calendar project; they were concerned about falling behind in their christian education programme.

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[24] Extracts from report written by Rose Arendse, Secretary Mamre Moravian Youth Group to Kerry Ward, CER, UCT. Dated 12 May 1992.

Was there a danger of Shopes' admonishment?

> 'And well intentioned but naive historians, rightfully critical of their professional truthseeker role but unsure of how they are to act as historians, adopt a weak intellectual posture in community oral history projects and let this ramble occur in the name of "letting the people speak".'[25]

I think it would be useful to answer these charge as a way of evaluating the Mamre History Project. While I agree that the critical engagement with Mamre's history was not as focused as it could have been if we had worked on a "problem orientated" history, there are some substantial benefits from having worked in the way we did.

The strength of the History Society exhibition is that it remained a democratic process, the people involved were active in each stage. People involved were also extremely motivated to follow up their research precisely because the project was validating their interests in a particular aspect of lived experience in Mamre. It highlighted people's history and popular memory over the history of the missionaries. The way in which the learning process took place also skilled Mamriers in oral history methodology. In evaluating the project I asked whether they felt they would be able to assist another organisation or individual in researching an aspect of Mamre's history, and they felt confident about sharing their oral history interviewing skills, and some were keen to take forward their interest in the History Project into the Mamre Development Project.

> 'By focusing on a precise and relevant issue, community oral history projects can begin to work in a way that doesn't "capture and share" an essentially static history, but actively constructs, through the collaboration of interviewer and interviewee, historian and citizen, an understanding of the past in a manner that respects the particular qualities of oral history.'[26]

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[25] Linda Shopes, 'Beyond Trivia', p154.

Shopes wrote the above statement as part of the article 'Beyond Trivia and Nostalgia' a few years after her own experience in the Baltimore Project. In her earlier assessment of that project, Shopes's experience is much closer to mine in Mamre. She asked 'What do we mean when we say we want people to do their own history? By the insider's view do we mean people's views of what historians think is important or their definition of what is important in the first place?'[27] I had asked myself that question on embarking on a people's history project in Mamre and had decided to allow participants to define their own interests. As a result, I found, like Shopes, that 'there seems to be a reluctance or an inability to be critical of the collective neighbourhood experience.'[28]

The resource produced by the Shopes project was a theatre production, "Baltimore Voices". The play was based on extracts from life history oral interviews and was conceptualised as a tool for political consciousness-raising. However, the audience responded to it as a celebration of nostalgia, it touched people emotionally but did not promote a critical engagement with the city's history.[29] But Shopes did not acknowledge the power of these nostalgic images for people's identity; this may have provided the critical engagement she sought.

CER's perspective on popular education is based on creating dialogue within the research process. There also needs to be a tension between observation, synthesis and analysis which brings people to a deeper understanding of their lives. I think that the subjective choice I made to allow Mamriers to decide their own agenda in exploring their community's history

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[26] Linda Shopes, 'Beyond Trivia', p156.

[27] Linda Shopes, 'Baltimore Project', pp32-33.

[28] Ibid, p33.

[29] Ibid, pp38-41 "Baltimore Voices" was also partly a victim of its own lavish funding because the production of the play was professionalised to the extent where locally-based participation was minimal. The people who were supposed to be involved in the project became the audience rather than the owners of the project. Shopes identifies this problem also more broadly within her project as being a result of weak links with local neighbourhood organisations and structures. See pp40-42. I think this is one problem which I did manage to overcome in Mamre.

eventually provided that critical issue. What was lacking, and what perhaps may emerge from the planned Mamre Development Project, was a synthesis of the issue of progress and its implication for community identity and heritage in Mamre.

The images presented in the exhibition and the calendar also touched Mamriers who weren't actively involved in the History Project, but in another way. These resources challenged the community's notion of Mamre's history as presented in its written accounts. Focusing on "people's history" was itself an innovation in the way Mamre's history is presented.[30] This has been the primary aim of many community history projects, including the Transvaal Chinese Association Project[31] and the early exhibitions of American Social History Project.[32]

However, the exhibition and calendar as resources did not by themselves generate the critical or problem-centred engagement with the past that would generate an understanding of the present.[33] What they did achieve was a dialogue across generations as part of a new interpretation of the community's history. Not only was there an enthusiastic response by young Mamriers to the exhibition, but the Moravian Youth Group went through their own process of reinterpreting their perception of Mamre's history. The Youth Group's original calendar design had included a considerable amount of text which had to be edited out in the final version. The text was based on interviews by the Youth Group members with older Mamriers, and on their own knowledge of popular memory of Mamre's history. In some cases they reproduced the nostalgic memories of their grandparents, with an added perspective of "progress". For

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[30] E Stokes 'United We Stand: A Synthesis of Oral and Pictorial History' *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, No.5, 1982-83 pp51-57 discusses the process of constructing an exhibition on Broken Hill, New South Wales, using the same techniques of combining oral history interviews with old photographs that we used in Mamre.

[31] Leslie Witz, 'The Write Your Own History Project', p382.

[32] Luli Callinicos, 'The "People's Past": Towards Transforming the Present' in Belinda Bozzoli ed., *Class, Community and Conflict*, p52.

[33] See for example, Sven Linquist 'Dig Where You Stand' in Paul Thompson ed., *Our Common History*, for a description of a history project where people critically engage with their places of work.

example, on the theme "Employment-Unemployment" the Youth Group wrote: *'In earlier times people worked on their land. There was no-one without work. There was no transport for the people to the lands, and they had to walk. They sent their children to the city to work there. Those who worked in town only came home for Easter. There was one bus service, and people used cars to get home more quickly, because the train was too slow.'* Gone is the joyful ride to Mamre Road Station, but in its place is a consciousness that things are better because cars are available now to get to town in an hour.

An important part of evaluating this project is to assess what has been happening since my involvement in Mamre has slowed down. Rose Arendse mentioned in her report the "Mamre Development Project" which is an innovation in the community. The Moravian Church is trying to bring people together to plan a community-orientated approach to heritage issues in Mamre. Part of this project is to re-open the mill as a museum/tea-room, and Church officials have called on people from the Mamre History Society to become involved in the project. It is still in the very early stages of planning, but it appears that they have in mind the incorporation of the exhibition into the new museum. The history of Mamre that would be presented in the museum will place people's history and popular memory at the centre rather than the periphery of the display.

From discussions I have had with various people in the community, it appears that the exhibition and calendar did have the planned impact of getting people talking about Mamre's history and heritage as a community resource rather than holding a passive view of maintaining the old buildings. In doing so, they will be following a trend that has developed in the new generation of museums which are integrating oral history and social history as an alternative to static display cabinets of memorabilia.[34] It is too early to speculate whether the History Society will continue as a distinct group or whether people will join the development project as

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[34] See for example: Gareth Griffiths, 'Museums and the Practice of Oral History' *Oral History Journal*, vol.17, no.2, Autumn 1989, pp49-52, Sian Jones and Carl Major, 'Reaching the Public: Oral History as a Survival Strategy for Museums', *Oral History Journal*, vol.14, no.2, Autumn 1986 pp31-38, and April Whincop 'Using Oral History in Museum Displays' *Oral History Journal*, vol.14, no.2, Autumn 1986 pp46-50.

individuals. There are questions to be answered in Mamre about the ownership and control of a heritage development project.[34] As one member of the History Society said to me *'At the moment Mamre is in a potjiekos. All of a sudden everybody wants to do everything. Everybody is speaking history now and everybody has their own ideas.'*

One of the ideas that seems to be popular is following up on family history using oral history and constructing family trees from the genealogical records that have been compiled by Judy Katzenellenbogen, an epidemiologist at the Medical Research Council.[35] This could also provide the link between *Benigna* as a symbol of Mamre's history, and the community's collective memory. The way that oral history has been linked to people's history in Mamre could generate a reinterpretation of nostalgia and change in the community.

One intervention that has taken place as a result of generating a people's history project in Mamre which is based on oral history is the reinterpretation of Mamre's history as being a history of popular memory. Most of the people I interviewed knew nothing about their parents and grandparents' lives because they said that one didn't ask one's elders questions.

As Amalia Collins told me in response to my question about what her parents told her about themselves and about Mamre's history:

> *'Mmm-mm, hulle't nie vir ons vertel nie. You know, (laughs), the parents of the olden times, they didn't tell us nothing.... Het nie met ons gepraat nie. Ons ouers het nie met ons...dinge gepraat nie.'*[36]

This is something that will never happen again; the popular memory of Mamre in the early twentieth century is one that will survive into the twenty-first and will continue to form part of both individual and communal identity in Mamre.

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[34] These are extremely sensitive issues in the community at the moment which have been discussed with me in confidence.

[35] Judy Katzenellenbogen, 'Mamre Church Record Project: Working Paper' unpub. paper, *Africa Seminar*, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, May 1987, and 'An Historical Demographic Investigation into Mortality in Three Historical Birth Cohorts Born between 1837 and 1900 in Mamre, with Special Reference to Life Expectancy', unpub. M.Sc.(Med) thesis, University of Cape Town, 1990.

[36] Amalia Collins, pp13-14. Also, Martha Pick, p3, Ernestina Joshua, p22, Alexander September, p10.