

The History of Tennis in the Free State

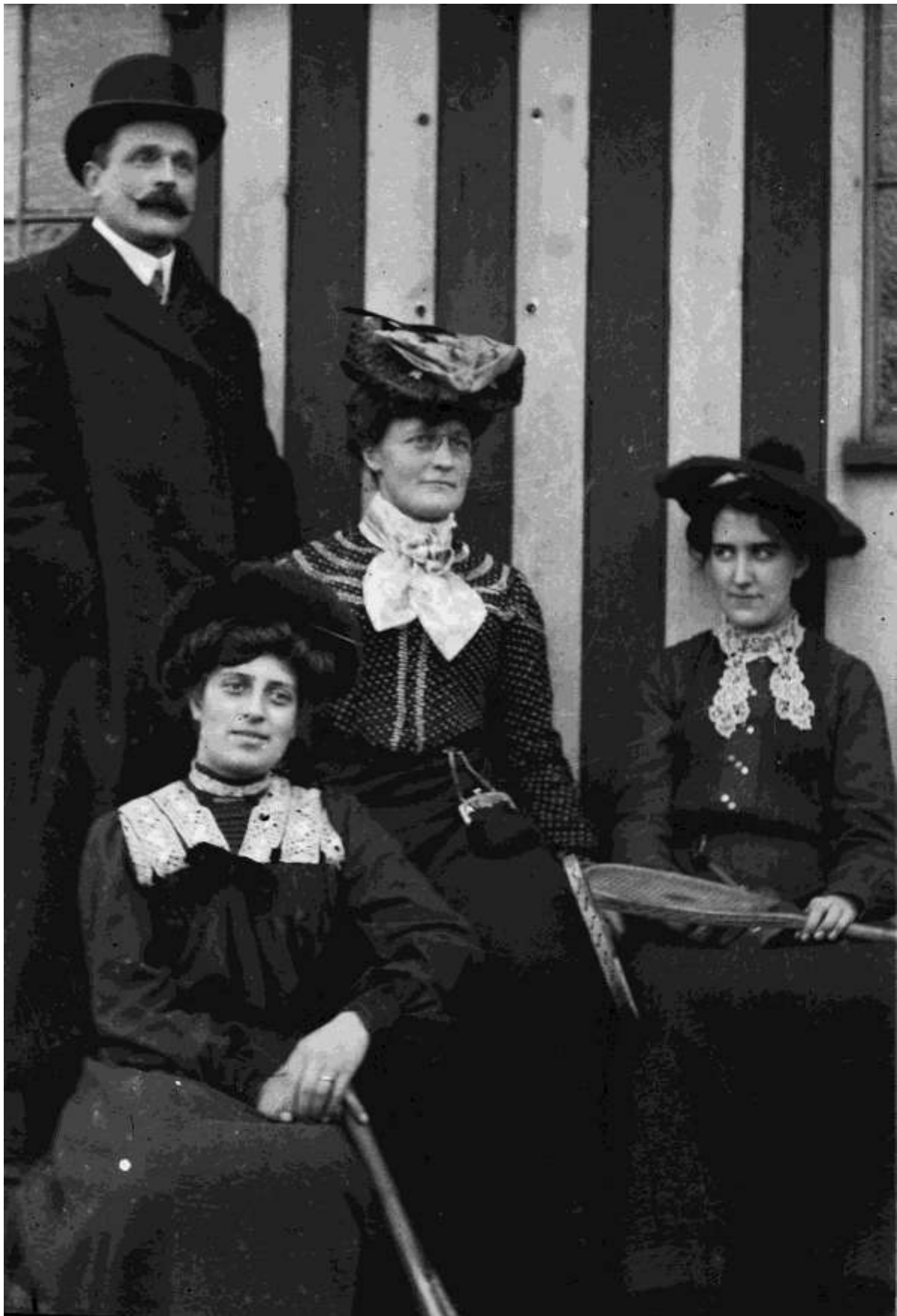
Evidence suggests that tennis was played on farms and in different towns throughout the Free State, before the Anglo Boer War/South African War (see photos).

In Bloemfontein courts were built behind the Government's buildings, known as the Bloemfontein Tennis club, later known as the Orange Free State Lawn Tennis Club. Mr and Mrs Beck played an important role in the building of the tennis courts and the promotion of tennis in the Free State. In 1896 Ramblers Club was established to manage the recreation area in Zastron Street and organise sport on a more formal basis.



→ REPRODUKSIE: FOTOBRON

Só is daar in 1906 tennis gespeel! Die foto is geneem op die h/v. Heil- en Piercestroat (op die tennisbaan van die tans bekende Mev. Cathy Hofmeyer) en daar verskyn v.l.n.r.: Mej. Van der Merwe van Bethlehem (tans Mev. Roos van Reitz) 'n onderwyseres, wat getroud was met Gijsbert Roos, prokureur, van wie die vader Landdros op Heilbron was; Mej. Hudson, ook 'n onderwyseres van Heilbron; Mnr. (onbekend); Mej. Du Toit, onderwyseres.



During the Anglo Boer War

It is known that the British soldiers did play tennis. Tennis courts might have been available at the fort in Bloemfontein.

Bermuda

The Boer Recreation Society was established in July 1901 to ensure that the prisoners of war were kept busy and get enough exercise. The prisoners of war helped to built tennis courts on different islands. Second hand tennis rackets, nets and balls were provided. The recreation society had three sub committees, one for cricket, one for tennis and one for football. The committee, consisting of Gordon Fraser (chairman), Rocco de Villiers (secretary and from the Free State), J Botes, P Kamann, D de Lange, H van Jaarsveld and C Theron, were responsible to draw up a constitution and manage the grounds and equipment. Tennis was played on Darrells, Tuckers, Burts, Hawkins and Morgans. According to Gordon Fraser, in a letter to Maria Outerbridge, Burts had a reasonable good tennis court with 48 members. Rocco de Villiers, Gordon Fraser, S Hepburn and J Curlewis travelled to Darrells to participate in a tennis tournament. The tournament was unfortunately cancelled because of rain.



Trichinopoly

Different committees were responsible for collecting funds to buy equipment for the different sports played. Each club's name started with Takhaar (Hippy) tennis club, takhaar-cricket club and the takhaar rugby club. Tennis was played in the mornings and late afternoons because of the heat. The Boer officers and British officers played a tennis match the day before Christmas in 1901.

Ahmednagar

Ahmednagar had two tennis clubs. In September 1901 a tennis tournament was organised between the Boer officers and the British officers. The Boer officers won the match. With the arrival of new prisoners of war new huts had to be built where one of the club's had their tennis courts. By 1902 new tennis courts were built and tennis could be reassumed.



Amritsar

The camp's tennis courts were officially opened on 30 May 1902.

St Helena

Because of bad weather tennis was not often played.

Ceylon

Diyatalawa

A few tennis courts were built in September 1900 and completed in March 1901. The Diyatalawa Tennis Club was so popular that players had to book a court to play a game of tennis. Prisoners on parole, in Bandarawella, played mixed doubles with some of the local ladies.

Urugas

Tennis courts were available for the prisoners of war.

The 1900s and 1930s

In 1908 a fire destroyed the government buildings and the members of the BTC had to move to the Ramblers tennis Club. Just before World War I, Mr Fraser established Willows Tennis Club, about the same time Railways tennis Club was also founded.

One of the most colourful and interesting characters before World War I was Farther Kelly, who played in a long flowing Cassock. Farther Kelly was the first men's champion in 1910; he faded away after taking the title again in 1915. The first Free State tournament on record was played at Ramblers in 1905 and was called the Orange River Colony Tennis Championships. The first South African tournament was played at Ramblers from 18 April to 25 April 1908.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s Gordon Fraser did a lot to keep tennis alive in the Free State. During World War I little tennis was played, but after the war the Bloemfontein Tennis Club was revived, followed by clubs being established at Marquard, Wepener and Dewetsdorp. The Bloemfontein Tennis Club later had six tennis courts. Their ladies singles champion was Mrs John Reid, who later won the South African singles title. The first president of the Bloemfontein Tennis club was a Mr Remberton with Mr Weal as his secretary.

Over the years Free State Tennis has produced many players who distinguished themselves on and off the courts: Sandra Reynolds, daughter of George Reynolds, was twice runner up in Wimbledon doubles title matches. Jackie du Toit won the Bloemfontein singles title on 20 occasions. Jackie du Toit also managed the South African team who won the Federation Cup in 1972.



SEE FREE STATE TENNIS LEGENDS FOR MORE INFO

Sources: Schoeman, K - on the Anglo Boer War

Tennis – The South African Story

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