

JAN FLEMMER  
RAGEL ESSEX

Just before we held the Flemmer 150 Year Reunion in Cradock in 2003 I was contacted by a descendant of this couple. He was McDonald 'McGyvir' Flemmer, part of a big Flemmer family that had lived in the Cradock and Middelburg area for generations.

We were happy to welcome McGyvir and some of his family to the Reunion and subsequently he spent some considerable time trying to establish whether in fact the 'Danish' Flemmers were related to the Jan Flemmers. Despite many attempts to track down birth or baptismal records, no early trace of the family could be found. I quote here something McGyvir sent me:

*The Legend of the Coloured Clan of the Family Flemmer*

*As the story goes the family had almost no memoirs of our direct ancestors. The belief in the LEGEND purely is in the line of hearsay partly because there is no written evidence for this clan to present their line of ancestry.*

*This Clan were not educated people up until the 4<sup>th</sup> generation. The children of JAN FLEMMER – a white man with a rare English accent as his grand children who knew him can fatedly remember, were bound to half education because of their father's marriage to a coloured lady by the name of RAGEL ESSEX.*

*This whole episode begins at the beginning of the 1900's. What I write here is information I have gathered from the earliest memories possible. Unfortunately there is no written evidence to verify this. At that stage JAN and his children were still classified as white people before the coming of the Union of South Africa in 1910.*

*A sudden twist will follow when JAN'S only son CHRISJAN FLEMMER married another coloured lady by name of LIZA HOLSTER from Cradock. The children of CHRISJAN would become (be classified as) coloureds. CHRISJAN became a bricklayer and builder by trade and this skill would be passed on to his children and some of his grand children.*

*Although not educated the children of CHRISJAN would be workers and labourers by art and musicians by heart. No evidence of the abovementioned people has been recorded i.e.: birth, baptism, marriage or death and hence the family legend.*

This family legend lies at the heart of historical South Africa with its racial divisions and all of the misfortune and heartache it has brought. The only comments I make are:

1. I have traced no one with the name Jan Flemmer in the Danish family – which doesn't mean he wasn't one of them, but it seems unlikely.

2. As Jan Flemmer's grandson, also Jan Flemmer was born in 1911, I would estimate that Jan Flemmer snr. could have been born in the 1870's.
3. Although it is possible that the name Flemmer was assumed by Jan when he was working on a Flemmer farm, it doesn't explain the legend set out above. His grandchildren were adamant that he was white. He spoke with a 'rare English accent' or do they mean strange? As in a Danish/English accent? We don't know and never will I suppose.
4. Barring finding documents I have suggested the only way to establish a connection is by DNA testing.

I had the pleasure of going to McGyvir's wedding in Cradock in 2005. He is a Manager with the Lottery Company. I also met Jacob a police officer in 2003 and have been in correspondence with Jerome Flemmer, a cousin who is Marketing Manager with SAA.