

John Dunn

by
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John Dunn

Where do I start? The John Dunn journey started many years ago for me. Growing up we always had heard of the name and the fact that we were related to him was shared, but we were never told very much more than that.

My first contact was way back in 1980 when I was home on military leave one weekend. My mom approached me and asked me to drive her to a funeral up in Zululand. I cannot even remember who had passed on, but I agreed to do the taxi bit and drive her.

On arrival, there were loads of people of all races. Very much outnumbered by Africans, everyone addressing each other as “aunty” this or “uncle” that. This, I took as a sign of respect, as all children in South Africa were taught to call anyone your elder by the formality of either uncle or aunty. (Well white kids are taught that, even more so if you were brought up in an Afrikaans family, but then it is “oom” and “tant”). I don’t remember much about the visit, a little about the drive from the N2 to the house and all the people at the tea gathering after the funeral. I remember the right turn up a sandy road up a steep hill past a radio antenna mast, then a very windy sand road up to a farm house amongst the sugar cane fields. I knew a little about the area as I had in the previous years boxed in Mandini and Empangeni.

So as far as the Dunn family goes, I had my first encounter without much event. At that stage I still did not put two and two together. Well I must say my math was not much to be desired, so not much was thought about. All we knew was the tit bits of information we had been given over time.

Through the years as I said earlier we were never told the truth, but neither were we told any lies. No questions were asked so no lies were told. The stories told, not that there were many, we were told that John Dunn had had 49 wives and around 117 children. We were, as kids, led to believe that one of his wives was white and the rest were African. I cannot remember if we were actually told that John Dunn had a white wife or if it was something that we assumed. Anything was possible when it came to kids imaginations. I also think that we might have sensationalized the hearsay to create legends.

Well however the stories evolved, the end result was what we as children wanted to hear. Especially as white South Africans, the thought of him not having a white wife did not even enter the picture. I do not think that it had anything to do with being racists; it was just the way it was. An African mother was not feasible so it was never thought about.

As I said earlier, no one really sat down and discussed anything about the family. All the stories were just in a passing kind of way, there were loads of secrets and rumors that followed the legend of John Dunn around.

In the later years, when we were more grown up, there was an issue with one of the cousin's wives being afraid of having children, with a fear of an African throw back. Again nothing was ever discussed, just the wafts or chat in the wind. There was the occasional story about life on the farm in Zululand. The stories involved incidents involving snakes and the like.

While we were growing up there was always a slight interest about all the rumors and stories. No-one ever took the time to do any follow up, research or even purchase any book about the subject. Given there was not that much material available, but I am sure that if anyone in the family wanted to know the truth, then it was there to be found. Subconsciously, maybe no-one wanted to find out the truth. The adults more than likely knew the some of the truth but I am sure that not everyone knew the whole story.

The stories and the history were forgotten to us for many years. It was always in the back of my mind though. Through all the years the whole family suffered very many bouts of psychological torment, not that anyone in the family would ever admit to this though. So when I eventually moved out of South Africa to Sweden, and with the evolution of technology. I started doing some research on good old John Dunn. The more I looked the more I found.

With the internet, things were made simpler. Getting my hands on information was even easier than before. The more I got the more I wanted. I started creating my family tree. There was also the oddity of finding the not wanted information, well, I researched the possibility of registering the URL johndunn.com, but turned out to be owned by someone in the US and was using the name as a sex site. I was a

little annoyed but there was nothing that I could do about it. So that is what led me to www.dunnsland.com . Dunnsland, from what I have now learned, was the name given to the land by the Zulus where the Dunns and his family live. This land was given to him by the Zulu King Cetshwayo.

Starting with my son Joshua, building up from there. Once I had begun, things just started to fall into place. I was learning as if from the beginning, all about John Dunn. I was learning all the truths that had been hidden and suppressed for all those years. The internet is very good but also limited with data. The data is only available if someone has taken the time to present it to the public. Very much of the history behind what John Dunn was all about was not available on the internet. So I delved into the world of books, purchasing almost every book that I could get my hands on that had any reference to John Dunn.

With all the content available, the only book that had very much information about what John Dunn was really like was a book called "John Dunn - The White Chief of Zululand " by Charles Ballard. Unfortunately, when I started, this book was out of print and was not available. Through the internet I made many new acquaintances in association with research on John Dunn.

One person in particular that helped me a lot was Rosemary Dixon-Smith, a researcher from Durban. She has a great interest in South African history and had had a fair amount of encounters with information concerning Dunns. When I first met her she was very helpful, informative and forthcoming with information concerning John Dunn and the surrounding history of Durban. When I decided to start to collect books, the Ballard book was one of the first that I sort. I very soon came to realize that the copy was in very short supply. It was Rosemary that came up trumps after nearly 5 years of searching. The purchase price was fairly high but worth every cent. So now I have added that to my collection.

It seems to be a very interesting source of information. It is a biography of John Dunn.

Through the early years of research I wanted to try to make contact with the Dunn family in Mangete but for some reason never did. Then in April 2004 I planned a trip back home to Durban. While I

was there I then decided to make the effort and drive up to Zululand to meet the Dunns.

I invited my mom and my direct family, loaded the car and took the plunge. It felt very strange because I had had a fair amount of negative reaction from various members of the family when they all knew that I was doing research and exposing a few hidden secrets. I was told that I was opening a can of worms. I ignored there comments and went ahead and opened the can in anyhow. Worms were most definitely not what I found.

When I started with this, I was clear with all the family members about what I was doing. My reasons are completely personal and for my family. I did not want my son Joshua growing up with not knowing where he comes from. I am actually a little annoyed that there are so few people out there that are interested in keeping any records of where and what they came from. Some of the family was actually happy that I had opened a door of secrets that they have had to hide for so many years. It was a weight that had been lifted off of their shoulders. I am just sorry that some of the family did not live to see the making of history.

I believe that any family that goes back more than 4 generations in South Africa has got some sort of non-european connection. After all the documents that I have read, very many show what the old South Africa called Immorality, was very much alive and active. I find it very ironic that a system that is so racist can hide such dark secrets. What a place South African would have been if people had been more open and accepting of each other. Unfortunately people are afraid of differences.



Lawrence and Joshua, Nicole Mckeon, Pat Dunn, Belinda, Branda Lamprecht, Lawrence Dunn.

A story that I have only just remembered, as I look back, this was very often the start of the Dunn family conversation. We were told that between the five Perce sisters, they could inherit 10 hectares of land north of the Tugela River. Nothing was known about the property, except it existed. We were told that the land could not be divided. The land could only be inherited together. There was an occasion that one of the sisters tried or did sell her part of the land against the inheritance information. My brother also did some research into the inheritance so that he could start a chicken farm. What he came to understand was that all the sisters had to sign a decree that allowed my brother to inherit the land on their behalf and take ownership himself. At that stage, two of the sisters had passed on; my brother approached the other two to ask for their signatures for the handover of the inheritance. None agreed to just sign away the land saying that it was worth something and that they wanted to have it available for their own offspring. This was not true as we all know that the inheritance land was more than likely not very arable land. All the best land had already been taken by the local family that were living and farming the land.

As I was saying earlier, we made the trip up to Mangete. This was a very good decision, as the people that we met were incredible. On arrival we were welcomed by Pat and John Dunn. Pat is the current head of the John Dunn Association. She had arranged that we stayed over in her and John's chalets on the banks of the Tugela River. The view from the balcony was of the Tugela River Mouth and

the sugar cane fields that border the beaches. It was a really lovely place to spend some time.



View from Chalets on Pat Dunns Property

We spent the first day sitting on the porch at Pats house and chatted about the past and the future. The first evening at the chalet, we were visited by about 8 members of the Dunn family. It was incredible to watch my mom talk about the farm and the people that she remembered from her days there. I do not really remember exactly who made the effort to pop in for a cup of tea and a walk down memory lane. It was also time to be introduced to each other as we had never met before. What a great evening was had by all. We most definitely plan to do this again the next time we visit South Africa.



Chalets on Pat Dunns Property

On the morning of the second day, Pat met us at the chalet and gave us a guided tour to John Dunn's grave stone. We had rented a small Nissan Almera and Pat took us through all the sugar cane fields to get to the grave site. I am really surprised that we did not get stuck while on our travels as the sugar cane roads have much to be

desired. Also it did not help that we were 4 adults and a kid in the car. The location of the tombstone is fairly remote from the main road. It is close to where John had his original farm house.



John Dunn Tombstone



Ned Dunn, John's eldest son and his wife's gravestone.

Driving down the bumpy track leading down to the graveyard was quiet an experience. It was a really hot sunny day with a very slight breeze. The grave is located in an area called "windy fields", this was due to the wind always blowing in the area almost all the time. The reason he was buried there was because this was John favorite place to be. As I understand it he used to spend a lot of his time here sitting under a tree passing the time away.

While driving to the site, I noticed that there were no sign posts giving direction to the location. I also realized that the road condition to the site is in a very bad state, there is no real road to speak of, it is just a sand track leading there. I asked Pat Dunn about this and she commented that the history of John Dunn was related to the Zulu culture and that was not of major interest or priority to the current government. It seemed that all through Natal, there was very little information regarding the history of John Dunn. I thought that was not really very good, seeing as he had such a large roll to play in the history of the whole of Natal. Especially concerning the liaison between the English and the Zulus.

Pat and I spoke briefly about the possibility of what the John Dunn Foundation was looking to do for the local people. One of the early ideas was to try to look for funds for the maintenance of the graveyard, for the possibility to build a proper road to the site and provide sign and information posts about the area. In essence try to create a historical site for people, family and friends to visit and share stories. Also to spread what John started with so many years ago. We feel that he had a very big impact to the local area and people, so the least we could try to do was create an accessible memorial in his memory.



Since I have started gathering data about the Dunn Family, I have had contact with very many people, so many that I am sure that I have lost some of the contact details. I hope that as I progress and get my site fully functional that I will rebuild a more reliable database of Dunn people.

This site that I have sponsored is basically provided as a place to share and have contact with other Dunn family members and non family members. A place to keep in touch, share and spread the genealogy bug.

So Enjoy.