

144.Montagu Under Martial Law During The Anglo Boer War

Updated: 02/06/2026

**Speech given by Irma Jordaan at “Little Sanctuary” on Thursday
23 October 2025**



THE MONTAGU HERITAGE ASSOCIATION PRESENTS

An Enchanting Open Garden at The Little Sanctuary



 Badshoogte,
Montagu

 Thursday, 23 October

 09h30

 R50 (includes tea,
coffee & freshly
baked scones)

 Talk by Irma Jordaan
— “Montagu Under
Martial Law”

Lift Club available
NG Church 09h00 | Depart 09h15

E. R. MARTIAL LAW.

Revised Rules for Permits. Village and District of Montagu.

All previous orders under Martial Law relating to permits and movements of persons are hereby cancelled.

I. MOVEMENTS OF PERSONS.

All farmers and others residing in this District beyond the Municipal limits of the village of Montagu are required to remain at their places of abode unless they have valid reasons for leaving them, viz. : Business with Civil or Military Authorities, purchasing supplies, bringing in produce, church going, or other legitimate business.

II. REPORTING ARRIVAL.

All persons coming into the village must report themselves on arrival to the Chief Constable and at the Commandant's Office promptly, *during office hours*. Should they be in charge of loads of produce, wood, etc., they must state the nature and quantity at the time of reporting.

III. PERMITS FOR TRAFFIC IN PRODUCE.

Permits to bring in loads of produce, etc., to the village from outlying farms will *not* henceforth be required, but for traffic in produce, etc., between farms a permit must be obtained.

IV. HOURS FOR TRAFFIC AND TRAVELLING.

No traffic whatever, unless authorized by a special permit, is allowed between the hours of 7.30 p.m. and 4.30 a.m. Persons may however move about in the village of Montagu and on their farms from 4.30 a.m. to 10 p.m. In the event of sickness it is permissible to travel by night to obtain medical aid from the village but the person so travelling must report himself to the Chief Constable immediately on arrival there.

V. PERMANENT PASSES.

Permanent passes for various purposes will be issued at the discretion of the Commandant.

VI. PASSES FROM MONTAGU VILLAGE.

Persons in Montagu Village must procure permits should they wish to proceed beyond the Municipal limits. As a rule the same restrictions will be placed on their movements as contained in Order I relating to farmers.

VII. TRADING PASSES, HAWKERS LICENCES, COMMERCIAL TRAVELLERS.

Trading passes and Hawkers licences in this District are cancelled. Commercial Travellers are not allowed to move about the district without permits.

VIII. HOUSEHOLDERS TO REPORT ARRIVAL: STRANGERS.

Householders are held responsible that the arrival of any strangers without permits, in their houses is reported immediately to the Commandant.

IX. PERMITS OUT OF DISTRICT.

(a) No person whatsoever is to leave the Montagu District unless authorised to do so under a permit.

(b) No loads of Produce or other commodity are to leave Montagu Districts except under the authority of a permit.

(c) Persons may not travel by rail unless provided with a Railway Permit. The issue of these is restricted.

N.B. All permits must be signed
by the Commandant.

Any contravention of the above
regulations will be dealt with
under Martial Law.

S. W. ROBINSON, CAPTAIN,
COMMANDANT.

Commandant's Office,
Montagu, 16 March, 1901.

It is a true pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of the MONTAGU HERITAGE ASSOCIATION, to Little Sanctuary, – a place rich in history, charm, and quiet enchantment. For many of you, this

may be your first visit to this iconic property which has stood here as a silent witness to generations past. Today, it opens its arms to you—not merely as visitors, but as participants in its living legacy. The garden surrounding you has been lovingly nurtured, and the pathways hold whispers of time long gone by.

After my talk, we'll be serving coffee, tea, and freshly baked scones. Please help yourselves and enjoy the refreshments. Then, feel free to explore the garden, wander the paths, and soak in the serenity that makes Little Sanctuary so special. I invite you to walk slowly, observe closely, and allow the spirit of this place to speak to you.

Thank you for being here. May today offer a gentle pause in your week and leave a lasting impression on your heart.

Let us now journey back to a pivotal moment in South African history—a moment that reshaped the region and reverberated across the British Empire. On 11 October 1899, the Second Anglo-Boer War erupted, fuelled by tensions between British imperial ambitions and the determined independence of the Boer republics: the South African Republic and the Orange Free State.

At the time, the Cape Colony had a significant Afrikaner population—then known as “Cape Dutch” – many of whom sympathised with the Boer cause. Fearing rebellion and support for Boer commandos, the British declared Martial Law just six days after hostilities began.

Despite these precautions, Boer commandos, aided by Cape rebels, launched daring raids into the region. Their incursions disrupted colonial stability and exposed deep divisions within the Cape community.

As Boer forces moved into the Montagu district, stricter Martial Law regulations were issued by the Commandant, Captain S.W. Robinson on 16 March 1901. These rules severely

restricted local movement. A curfew was imposed: people were confined in their houses between 10:00 PM and 4:30 AM, while traffic was restricted from 7:30 PM to 4:30 AM. Permits were required to transport goods beyond Montagu's limits, and all newcomers had to report to the Commandant's office. Residents were even encouraged to report sight or knowledge of strangers – an act that sowed mistrust among neighbours.

To make sure these new measures were enforced, Town Guards were appointed from the local community itself. Some served right here in town, while others patrolled the outlying farms on horseback, keeping an eye on movement in the area. But their presence also caused tension – you see, some people saw joining the Town Guard as an act of loyalty to the Crown, while others viewed it as a betrayal. Records from a medal ceremony held in 1905 show that twenty members of the Montagu District Mounted Troops and sixteen Town Guards were honoured for their service.

The Commandant's office operated from the little building which is now the Route 62 Brewery Company opposite Mimosa Lodge in Church Street. Officers lodged at Mrs. van Tonder's boarding house on Bath Street, while most of the soldiers were billeted in what is now the industrial area.

The British troops took particular interest in the Dutch Reformed Church tower, using its height to monitor the town. Church council minutes from 26 October 1901 reveal that Commandant D. Huntley requisitioned both the church and Church Hall for military use, suspending all public religious gatherings. Limited Sunday services resumed on 15 September, but for over two weeks, no services were held.

Stories from the time recount how soldiers removed the clock face on the Bath Street side of the tower for observation—possibly even for firing. The clock was reportedly thrown into the garden and damaged. To this day, the Bath Street opening remains arched, unlike the other three round

ones.

The church suffered further damage. Church Minutes from 1902 note broken windows, which had to be replaced after the War by a Cape Town firm. A photograph from Kanonkop in 1901 even shows a Union Jack flying from the tower.

In the aftermath of the damage to the church, a dedicated commission from the local church council stepped forward to seek justice. This group, made up of the Dominee, the schoolmaster Mr. J.G. Euvrard, and elder Mr. P.W. Cloete, was tasked with negotiating compensation from the British authorities. They submitted a formal claim of £215—an amount reflecting the true cost of the destruction. Despite their efforts, and although the Church's building commission was granted permission in 1903 to begin restoration, the compensation remained unresolved. In the end, only £50 was received—a fraction of what was rightfully claimed.

For the local Afrikaner community, the occupation of their sacred space by foreign troops was deeply painful. The damage went beyond bricks and mortar—it wounded their spirit and pride.

To further secure Montagu, forts were erected around the town's perimeter. So far, seven have been identified: Fort Sidney atop the tunnel, one on Bessiekop behind the Nature Garden, another near the TV masts, one above Knipe's Hope, one behind Bergsig (now reduced to rubble), one on Ouberg Pass, and one on the Montagu side of the Poortjieskloof dam wall. According to the late Mrs. Esther Hofmeyr, two more existed, though their locations remain unknown.

A key lookout point during the war years was **Fort Sidney in Cogmanskloof**. It was guarded by what remained of the **Gordon Highlanders**, those battle-hardened soldiers who had survived the fierce fighting at Magersfontein where their commanding officer was killed.

The other forts scattered around Montagu were manned by the **local Town Guards**.

Just below Fort Sidney, where we now find the **parking area**, was once the soldiers' camp – a busy, dusty hub of tents, horses, and watchful eyes. And here's something I only recently discovered: soldiers were also stationed out at **Pietersfontein**, keeping a sharp lookout for any Boer movements in the surrounding hills.

Despite the declaration of Martial Law, and the erection of blockhouses and forts all across the Colony, the Boer leaders still managed to outwit the British at every turn. General Jan Smuts, Manie Maritz, Captain Danie Theron, and Commandants Gideon Scheepers, Schalk Pyper, Piet van der Merwe, and Hans Theron all led the British forces a merry dance through this region.

It is a well-known fact that some of these Boer commandos passed through the outskirts of Montagu.

Towards the end of 1900, eight farmers from the Montagu district were arrested and sentenced to hard labour. Their crime? They had failed to report that they had seen, assisted, or were aware of Boer commandos in the district.

Let me share their story.

In September 1900, a few Boer soldiers arrived at Mr Joubert's farm, *Allermorgensfontein*, about 72 kilometres outside Montagu on the road to Ladismith. Soon after, a full column of around 400 men under Commandant Piet van der Merwe joined them.

The men demanded food, and Mrs Joubert did what many farmers' wives did at the time – she handed over what she had. In this case, that meant the 40 to 50 dozen eggs she had just packed to sell in town. The Boers spent the night on the farm and left at sunrise the next morning.

But a week later, Commandant Danie Theron arrived – also with

about 400 men – and once again they were given food and shelter for the night. Unfortunately, word of these visits spread. The following week, Mr Joubert and his son Giepie, together with six neighbouring farmers, were taken into custody by British soldiers. They were brought before a Military Tribunal in Montagu and were accused of failing to report the presence of Boer soldiers to the British authorities.

Their case was referred all the way to Lord Kitchener in Pretoria, who decided they should each be sentenced to three months of hard labour and fined £50. If they could not pay the fine, they would serve an extra month in prison.

On the weekend of Nagmaal – when farmers from all the outlying districts gathered in Montagu for the traditional Communion – the townspeople were called together by the sound of a trumpet echoing across Church Square. There, before the assembled crowd, the British commanding officer read out the sentences of the eight farmers – who were present. Their punishment – three months of hard labour – was to be spent building what we now know as Lover's Walk.

I must also mention that *Allermorgensfontein* suffered terrible losses when the British troops passed through the farm at one stage. They cut down every fence, and as a result, the farm's 300 ostriches scattered into the hills, never to be seen again. Worse still, about 400 of Mr Joubert's sheep were bayoneted to death – only the hindquarters were taken for food, the rest left to rot where they fell.

The financial loss to the Joubert family was immense... but even that pales in comparison to the suffering endured by so many ordinary people during those dark and difficult years.

Another prominent Boer Commandant closely linked to Montagu was **Gideon Scheepers**.

His legacy still lives on in folklore today and in the names

of two farms along the R62 – **Scheepersrust** and **Scheepersdraai**.

Around September 1900, Commandant Gideon Scheepers and his force of about two hundred and fifty men arrived at Jan Swart's farm near Kruispad. Their mission was to rally support among the local people who sympathised with the Boer cause. But by then, Scheepers was gravely ill – it was believed he was suffering from typhoid fever. His condition grew worse each day, until eventually, he became too weak to ride. From that point on, he had to be transported in a captured Cape cart.

According to the daughter of the late **Dr Wessels**, who was the local doctor in Montagu at the time, her father was **summoned in secret** to attend to Scheepers. He would travel **under cover of night** to visit the sick Commandant – without the knowledge of the British authorities. Sadly, we don't know how often he went, or how long Scheepers remained there to recover.

When Scheepers finally regained some of his strength, he and his men set off once again – making their way to the farm of Mr. Alewyn Burger at Talana, where they spent the night. But early the next morning, word reached them – the English were on their spoor, and more were waiting for them in Montagu. So, before they left, the Boers decided to lock Mr. Burger in one of his own outbuildings – just to give him a solid alibi in case the British came knocking with questions!

Realising the danger that lay ahead, Scheepers and his men turned around on the farm *Boererus*, owned by Frans du Toit, and made their way toward Langkloof – in the direction of Ladismith. A handful of men were left behind to distract the pursuing English troops, buying precious time for the main group to escape. From that day on, Mr du Toit renamed his farm *Scheepersdraai*. A brief skirmish broke out between the Boers and the British troops – leaving a couple of British soldiers wounded and who had to be brought back to town by horse and cart.

And so, from Ladismith, Scheepers' column made its way toward the Calvinia district. On the 10th of October, about twenty-one kilometres north of Gamka's Kloof near Prince Albert, a fateful decision was taken. It was unanimously agreed by the entire commando that they would move on – and that Commandant Gideon Scheepers should surrender, rather than await certain death from ill health.

Upon his capture, Scheepers was taken immediately to hospital, where he spent about a month recovering. Thereafter, he was transferred to Graaff-Reinet, where he was tried under martial law. The court sentenced him to death – by firing squad.

In his final request, he asked to be executed as a soldier, standing upright. But that wish was denied. He was tied to a chair – and shot sitting down.

He was only twenty-four years old.

And then there's one final story I'd like to share – the story of *Mr. Pieter Conradie*, who lived on the farm Lettaskraal in the Montagu Karoo.

On their way out of Montagu, the Scheepers commando passed through the farm of Pieter Conradie where they came across a coloured man – someone well-known in the area as a spy for the British. Without hesitation, he was shot on the spot and buried right there by some of Scheepers' men.

As fate would have it, the spade the Boers used to dig that shallow grave bore the name **P. Conradie**, neatly etched into the handle. When the men had finished their grim task, they thrust the spade into the ground beside the mound – a simple gesture, never imagining the trouble it would cause.

Not long after, the British troops arrived on the scene. They spotted the disturbed earth and exhumed the body – and there, gleaming in the sunlight, was the spade that told them all they needed to know. Or so they thought.

Poor Mr. Conradie, who hadn't even been home at the time, was accused of killing the man. He was arrested and sent off to the concentration camp in Grahamstown. His wife, too, was taken – locked up right here in Montagu – while his elderly parents were forced to march on foot, ahead of the mounted soldiers, all the way into town. There, they joined their son's wife behind bars. In time, the women were released, but the old father languished in jail for weeks. All because of one spade.

Meanwhile, far away in Grahamstown, Pieter Conradie's fate seemed sealed – he was sentenced to death. But fate, it seems, had other plans.

Around that same time, one of Scheepers' men – the very man who had been there at Lettaskraal when the spy was shot – was captured. During questioning, he told the true story. Thanks to his testimony, Mr. Conradie's death sentence was overturned, and instead he spent the rest of the war behind bars.

Back home, though, his family never received the news. They believed Pieter had been executed. Imagine their shock when, one day after the war had ended, Pieter Conradie suddenly appeared at the farm – on foot! The British had released him as far as Montagu, but from there he had to walk the rest of the long road home.

When he arrived, he discovered that every letter he'd written from prison had been destroyed, never sent by his jailers. And worse still – his homecoming was to ruins. The soldiers had smashed his furniture to splinters... and burnt his house to the ground.

The only thing left – the only thing still usable – was one leg from the dining room table. And his mother, ever practical, had taken that table leg... and turned it into a rolling pin.

Thank you for allowing me to share this chapter of our history. May it deepen your appreciation for the resilience of this community and the enduring spirit of the people of Montagu.

Please use the link below if you would like to know a little more about The Little Sanctuary

[70.The Little Sanctuary](#)
