

157. Announcement Some of Montagu's Women over the Ages

"She who seeks to kindle a fire must have a spark within herself."

A favourite saying from Esther Hofmeyr

How this article came about

The day 22nd June 2026. The place Montagu Museum archive. The aforementioned information is important as it signaled something special was starting at the museum and two women were directly involved. Lithalethu Mshoti Montagu Museum Manager and Irma Jordaan Montagu Museum volunteer archivist. Let us start with Irma and her dream. From her retirement Irma has steadfastly been upgrading the archives in different ways with an ultimate goal of digitization of the archival collection. Lithalethu (Litha) on the other hand was a new museum appointment in her second year at the museum with her own goals for the museum. Fortunately both ladies had something in common and Litha was able to build a bridge between the Stanford University and Montagu Museum which culminated in the Montagu Museum being selected as a target for digitization with the help of the Stanford University. The date the implementation team arrived at the museum was the 22nd June 2026.

Accolades to Irma and Litha

During the excitement of the digitization project launch Irma sprung a surprise: **"Let's do an article celebrating the women of Montagu which can be posted to celebrate Womens Day on the 9th August 2026.** In planning this story I was very mindful of

one of Irma's favourite principles **"Do not reinvent the wheel"** as we had already written a number of articles about some of the women of Montagu in Montagu Stories and Yvonne Bussell had also written a book **"Die Vroue van Montagu 1900 – 2000"**.

A two fold approach was decided upon. An effort would be made to collect funds to have the book **"Die Vroue van Montagu 1900-2000"** reprinted and made available for sale at the Montagu Museum shop and the following short article would be posted on Montagu Stories to make people aware of what was in the pipeline.

I am happy to announce that Irma has indeed found sponsorship for the book to be reprinted and watch out for an announcement of its availability to purchase.



Front cover of the book

The article that follows is a short preview of what you can expect in the book, **"Die Vroue van Montagu 1900 – 2000"**. We have identified some of the women not covered in the book for the example that follows. All material that follows is sourced from the **Montagu Archive collection**.

VROU VAN MONTAGU

Dr. Isabel Nivison Muller (née McKeand)

Born in Scotland in 1879 and died in Montagu on 16 June 1934.



Dr. Muller was the first female medical doctor in Montagu, Western Cape, where she operated a highly respected joint practice alongside her husband.

Born on the Isle of Mull in Scotland, she studied medicine at Edinburgh University. She completed her medical qualification in 1902, a year before her future husband, Charles Herold Muller.

The “Airlies” Practice: The couple married and moved to Montagu, establishing their home and medical practice at a property named “Airlies” in Bath Street. As a duo, they became

legendary in the region for their precise diagnoses and dedication to the local community.

Dr. Isabel was instrumental in managing early rural healthcare challenges in the area. She famously helped transition local leprosy treatments into a dedicated circular hospital structure in Montagu, allowing patients to be treated and return home.

She was famous for her resilience. One local folklore account describes her setting off by horse-drawn buggy to treat a patient in the remote Koo region. After realizing she had accidentally left her newborn daughter behind at home, she turned around, retrieved the sleeping baby, and completed the treacherous trek through Burgers Pass to treat the patient with her infant in tow.

Dr. Isabel fell seriously ill and passed away in 1934. Her death deeply impacted the Montagu community and her husband, who continued practicing as a broken-hearted widower.

To read more about the doctors Muller visit the Montagu Stories link below

<https://montagumuseum.co.za/montagu-stories/the-husband-and-wife-doctor-team/>

Mavis Alexander

Miss South Africa



Mavis Alexander made history in November 1925 as the first-ever woman crowned Miss South Africa while working as a local school teacher from the Koo just outside Montagu.

The Unofficial Miss South Africa Title

While the official, annual Miss South Africa pageant only officially began in 1956, three early, unofficial national pageants took place before that. The very first was a nationwide search for the country's most beautiful woman, sponsored by Cape Town's newspaper, *The Argus*, in October 1925.

Out of nearly 800 contestants who submitted photos for public display, Mavis was selected as the winner. She was officially crowned on 14 November 1925 at the Tivoli Theatre in Cape Town.

Her Time in Montagu and Career

At the time of her entry and subsequent victory, Mavis lived

in the Western Cape farming area of the Koo outside Montagu, where she was employed as a schoolmistress.

To read more about Mavis visit the Montagu Stories link below

<https://montagumuseum.co.za/montagu-stories/112-mavis-alexander/>

Dulcie Winegaard



Dulcie was the 2nd of five David's children born in 1946, in Crawford (Cape Town). She qualified as a nurse. With union assistance she trained to develop community care givers to children and the elderly, her passion.

Her first husband abandoned her and their three children. At the age of 28 a neighbour raped her, resulting in pregnancy. She moved to Montagu in 1979 and became a spokesperson and councillor for the people.

Assisted by Cape Winelands District Municipality she started household vegetable gardens. More than a hundred of these now provide income to the unemployed. She founded the Rural Women's Association, providing legal representation to the

poor. Dulce ran Ashbury Soup Kitchen and a community crèche (Sakhikamva Crèche). She recruited children living on rubbish dumps, enrolled them in school and founded an organisation teaching them life skills.

According to Sister Dulce her success is due to healthy living and the loving support of her family and others that believed in her. She remarried, has five children and was recently ordained as a pastor. Her community cares deeply for this selfless woman that “always puts others first”.

La Guerenne “Rennie” Rose-Innes (née Basson)

She is the daughter of Ewie Basson, a former town clerk and long-serving Mayor of Montagu (1954–1971), and Justine Basson (née Joubert).

Her mother, Justine, was a revered local figure who co-founded the Montagu Nature Garden in 1954. Rennie and her sister Wilna grew up playing in the garden and returned to Montagu for the unveiling of the garden’s renovated “JustBabs” main building, named in honour of their mother.

Her early athletic excellence left a legacy in the Western Cape region; her school alma mater still awards the *La Guerenne Basson Cup for the Best All-Round Sportswoman*.



Springbok hockey captain

Rennie Rose-Innes had a highly distinguished elite sports career, most notably as an international hockey player and captain for South Africa, alongside playing high-level competitive tennis. She has a rare reputation for leadership, having captained every single hockey team she ever played in, beginning in her high school days.

She earned her national caps playing for South Africa in 1978, and later returned to the national squad from 1984 to 1986, serving as the South African team captain.

She represented Stellenbosch University ([Maties Hockey](#)) on the field for nearly two decades, spanning from 1970 to 1987.

She played provincially for Western Province (WP). In 1976, she and her husband, Cari, achieved a unique milestone when they were named captains of their respective Western Province men's and women's teams at the same time.

While she participated in netball, swimming, tennis, and hockey in school, she chose to narrow her competitive focus strictly to hockey and tennis when she reached university.

Alongside her elite hockey career, she was a highly competitive tennis player. Even after her international retirement and undergoing a knee replacement, she continued to actively play league tennis in the Western Cape.

To read more about Rennie and her family visit the Montagu Stories link below

<https://montagumuseum.co.za/montagu-stories/139-something-about-the-basson-family-of-montagu/>

Sandra Reichert

Waagmoed en deursettingsvermoë haar Wenresep

deur Deonette de Kock

11 Julie 2008 Landbouweekblad

Met baie waagmoed – en sonder enige kennis van of ervaring in die konfytbedryf – het 'n vrou van die distrik- Montagu 'n onderneming begin en 'n reuse sukses daarvan gemaak. Sy wou vir haar dowe seun 'n toekoms bied nadat haar huwelik skipbreuk gely het, vertel Sandra Reichert van die plaas Klipkuil by Montagu in die Wes-Kaap.

Daarom moes sy eenvoudig sêlf die mas opkom. Sy koop toe 'n konfyt-onderneming, wetende dat sy geen ander keuse gehad het as om 'n sukses daarvan te maak nie.

Toe ek dié merkwaardige vrou op 'n fris wintersoggend besoek, is die wêreld plek- plek nat na onlangse reën. Bv 'n vaatjie met 'n aalwyn daarin geplant, moet ek afdraai en lei die pad my tot voor die kookhuis, reg agter die woonhuis.

'n Miemes van bedrywigheid begroet my. Werkers in blou oorjasse is ywerig voor stomende potte doenig. Die wasem bo die potte verdryf die ergste koue en vrolike radiomusiek skep

‘n gesellige atmosfeer.

‘n Donkerkopvrou stap my haastig tegemoet. Sandra Reichert huur Klipkuil se huis en geboue die afgelope vyf en ‘n half jaar by Kosie Fouché, eienaar van die plaas

Baie benoud oor so ‘n groot stap, het ek die fabriek by ‘n vriend, Gerrit Swanepoel, gekoop. Destyds was dit ‘n kleiner besigheid as nou en is dit ook heeltemal anders bedryf. Maar ek was in geldelike nood en Gerrit het die plek rentevry aangebied. Hy het ook voorgestel dat ek dit terugbetaal soos dit vir my moontlik was.

“Ek het niks gehad ná my egskeiding nie. Net my twee kinders, Ciska (33) en Anthonie (30). My seun is doof en ek onderhou hom. Ek het aanvanklik baie swaar gekry. Dis ‘n angswekkende gevoel as jy besef dat jy niks het nie.

“Die eerste jaar het ek gehuil. Die tweede jaar was ek hartseer en kwaad, maar het besef dat ek myself moes regruk en aangaan,” vertel Sandra openlik.

Aanvanklik was die verkope maar traag, en kontantvloei ‘n groot probleem. Sandra het egter verseg om lenings aan te gaan en het vir Gerrit stuksgewys terugbetaal soos die besigheid uitgebrei het. Vandag spog sy met 75 produkte, soos konfyt, pickets, blatjang, mosterd en ook Kaapse spesialiteite, soos produkte wat witblits, brandewyn en rooiwijn bevat.



Sandra(links) met vriendin Blackie Badenhorst

Sandra het in Vaalharts in die Noord- Kaap grootgeword en was altyd lief vir kosmaak, maar het nie huishoudkunde as vak op skool geneem nie. Sy het ook geen opleiding in dié rigting ontvang nie. Skielik moes sy dié leiding kry en boonop sorg dat alles seepglad verloop.

Aanvanklik het sy al die kook- en skepwerk self gedoen met die hulp van vyf plaaswerkers. Sy het hulle self opgelei om met die voorbereidingswerk – skil -, pak – en kookwerk – asook die skep van produkte in die bottels, te help. Die enigste manlike werker, James Pieterse, kon aanvanklik skaars skryf, maar doen vandag al die bestellings, asook al die swaar pakwerk.

Die ander werkers is ook opgelei sodat hulle mekaar kan aflos as een van hulle die dag nie kan werk nie. Sandra moedig ook haar werkers aan om allerlei vaardighede aan te leer en hulleself beter te bekwaam.

Op die oomblik het Sandra sewe permanente werkers – met Sylvie Windvogel as voorvrou. Daar is ook een tydelike werker wat kom uithelp. Al die mense was voorheen seisoenwerkers vir wie Sandra 'n vaste werk en inkomste geskep het.

Ook haar seun, Anthonie, help met die aflewering en om goed

te gaan haal. Daarom kan Sandra met 'n geruste hart vir 'n rukkie weggaan en die onderneming aan haar knap span oorlaat. Sandra koop aan die begin van elke jaar vir haar werkers se kinders skoolklere en betaal ook skoolfondse vir een werker se kind.

Sandra vertel laggend hoe haar eerste poging tot aarbeikonfyt 'n absolute fiasko was. Dit was donker gekook en taai. Maar dit het haar aangemoedig om agter die kap van die byl te kom en deur oplees en herhaalde pogings het sy wel die kuns bemeester en later vervolmaak deur ou resepte aan te pas en te verander. Sy is dwarsdeur die jaar besig, vertel Sandra, hoewel Desember tot Maart seisoentyd en dus die besigste is. Dan is daar 'n verskeidenheid vrugte en piekels wat bewerk moet word. In die druktyd begin haar dag reeds om vyfuur en werk sy tot donker.



1. Sandra se voor- vrou, Sylvie Windvogel, besig om groenvye in 'n pot te roer.

2. Haar bekwame span is, van links, Kitty Almon, James

Pieterse, Liesel Willemse, Ragel Willemse, Elna Conradie, Maré Windvogel, Li-Anne Windvogel en Sylvie Windvogel.

3. Elna Conradie (links) en Li-Anne Windvogel besig om kweperstukke te bottel.

4. 'n Aalwyn in 'n deurgesaagde vaatjie dui die ingang na Sandra se woon en werkplek op Klipkuil aan.

Sandra koop die meeste van haar vrugte regstreeks van Klipkuil aan. Vrugte word ook vanaf Stellenbosch, Swellendam en Ceres aangekoop. Sy verkoop die meeste van haar produkte in die Oos en Wes-Kaap en KwaZulu-Natal, vertel Sandra.



Sandra's brand Farm Fresh

“Ek kan nie voorbly met verkope nie. Om uit te brei, het ek 'n groter gebou en meer werkers nodig en sal ek my ook op 'n kleiner reeks produkte moet toespits.”

Volgens Sandra is daar altyd 'n behoefte aan haar produkte en het sy nog nooit een dag geadverteer of bemark nie.

“Ek verkoop die meeste van my produkte by padstalle en kan nooit genoeg voorraad hê nie. Ek glo dit is omdat die produkte tuisgemaak en in Consol glasbottels verkoop word. Hoewel ek my eie etidert die beginjare.”

Haar gewildste produkte is groenvye, appelliefies, slaphaakskene, kerrieboontjies en “boeremeisies” (appelkosies met ‘n wit- blitssous).

Om die bye weg te hou, het Sandra hul werkplek met gaas toegespan. Sy probeer ook die bye weglok met die pitte van die hanepoot.

Sandra glo haar ondememing lewer beslis ‘n bydrae tot die gemeenskap se ekonomiese vooruitgang. Nie alleen skeep sy werk vir die plaasmense nie, maar sy lewer ook haar produkte aan padstalle, slaghuise, groente en vrugtemarkte en aan ‘n kettingwinkel op die dorp. Die gemeenskap vind ook baat daarby, aangesien van die boere hul produkte vir haar kom aanbied sodat sy dit kan verwerk.

Sandra glo haar produkte sal nog vir baie jare gewild wees.

“Ek glo my produkte is uitsonderlik en min mense doen wat ek doen verál die piekels wat ek maak, is skaars. Mense koop met hul oë en my produkte lyk mooi in die glasbottels. Boonop verkies mense tuisgemaakte produkte bó fabrieksware. Ek gooi glad nie pektien in my produkte nie en probeer dit so natuurlik moontlik hou. Gehalte is vir my belangrik en my pryse billik.”

Haar raad aan ander vroue wat so ‘n ondememing wil begin, is om werklik belang te stel in wat jy doen. En om ‘n redelike reeks produkte te hê om te verkoop, anders gaan hulle sukkel om ‘n mark te kry. Ondersteuning van familie en vriende is belangrik, baie harde werk is nodig en deursettingsvermoë en insig ‘n moet.

Toekomsdrome?

“Ek wil poog om my reeks produkte af te skaal sodat ek my mark kan vergroot en meer van die gewilde produkte kan maak. Wanneer ek dit reggekry het, wil ek graag landwyd uitbrei en so sterk word dat ek ‘n stewige toekoms skeep vir my seun

waarop hy eendag kan voortwoeker.”

Want waar 'n wil is, is 'n weg glo Sandra.

Use the link below to see an article which appeared in Country Life during 2017

<https://followmyfootsteps.co.za/post-21>

Jeanne Biesenbach





Jeanne Biesenbach was a deeply respected, long-time community figure in Montagu, known for her contributions to local heritage, heritage conservation, and Khoisan medicinal herb lore. Her major impacts on the town include.

She served on the Museum Board of Trustees and played a key role in the museum's development and preservation.

She collaborated with locals (such as Blackie Badenhorst) to research and document traditional Khoisan medicinal recipes and plants. These remedies are still sold at the Montagu Museum Shop.

In the early 1980s, she co-founded the original 22 Church Street restaurant (later known as Ye Olde Tavern).

In 1997, she was named "Montaguer of the Year" in recognition of her exceptional contributions to the town.

She is probably best known for her passion in driving the restoration of historic KVV building complex (Montagu Quarter). In November 2019 the Montagu Cultural and Educational Trust (MCET), owner of the iconic KVV building on the corner of Kohler and Long Streets, successfully applied for a R98,000 grant from the Rowland and Leta Hill trust which was a major kick start in renovating the building. A passionate gardener with a rich understanding of herb lore, Jeanne contributed significantly to the Museum's Heritage Herb

Project. Through her generous sharing of knowledge and enthusiasm for indigenous plants, she helped energise and shape the Museum's herb garden—one that continues to thrive today as a living reflection of her care and vision.

Visit the link below to read about the Montaguer of the Year competition

<https://montagumuseum.co.za/montagu-stories/die-montaguer-van-die-jaar/>

Jacomī Van Rooyen

Induction guide to Montagu newcomers





Jacomi van Rooyen is 'n bekende en geliefde inwoner van Montagu in die Klein-Karoo. Sy is 'n voormalige skoolkoshuis-matrone.

Flip haar oorlede man en Jacomi het hulle veral daarop toegelê om nuwe intrekkers in Montagu welkom te laat voel en gewoonlik een keer per jaar uit- stappies vir hulle gereël waar almal saam gesellig verkeer het en die interessante omgewing van Montagu leer ken het.

Dit was 'n onselfsugtige diens wat hulle uit eie inisiatief tot voordeel van die gemeenskap gelewer het. Ook in kerkverband het hulle die NG gemeente op hierdie manier gedien deur nuwe gemeentelêde in die dorp en sy kultuur in te lei.

Ná die skielike afsterwe van haar man Flip in 2006, het Jacomi voortgegaan met dit waarmee sy en haar man begin het; sy het eers in 2025, weens swak gesondheid, uiteindelik haar ambassadeurstake in Montagu neergelê.

Sy ken almal en spreek gereeld besoekers en nuwe intrekkers op die dorp aan soos (in die slaghuis) om seker te maak hulle aard en kry die regte ondersteuning.

Sy het spesiale uitstappies vir nuwe inwoners organiseer. In die winter neem sy bv groepe na Piet Nel se aalwynplaas, en in die lente gaan wys sy hulle die plaaslike pelargoniums (malvas).

Haar werk het gefokus daarop om die gemeenskap saam te snoer en te verseker dat nuwelinge vinnig deel van die dorp se lewe word.

The women and organisations covered in this article are in no way complete and Montagu is indeed fortunate to have women and organizations that continue to contribute to the greater good of Montagu in various ways.

You all contribute to the **Quality Of Life** of Montagu residents and we thank you for your individual and group contributions

Die lys van vroue en organisasies wat in hierdie artikel genoem word, is geensins volledig nie; Montagu is werklik bevoorreg om oor vroue en organisasies te beskik wat op verskeie maniere tot die groter belang van die dorp bydra.

Julle dra almal by tot die **Lewensgehalte** van Montagu se inwoners, en ons bedank julle vir julle individuele en gesamentlike bydraes.
