

Diamond mining in Namibia at the beginning of the 20th Century

Compiled by WF Kotzé

(<https://www.namibia-accommodation.com/listing/kolmanskop-ghost-town>)

In April of 1908, Zacharias Lewala, a worker on the railway line between Lüderitz and Aus in what is now southern Namibia, picked up a shiny stone and showed it to his supervisor, August Stauch.

Recognizing the find, Stauch got himself a prospecting license and then presented the stone for verification. State geologist Dr. Range confirmed it was a diamond, and within months the diamond rush was on around the site of Kolmanskop, 10 kilometres inland from the coastal town of Lüderitz.

The name Kolmanskuppe, Kolmanskoppe or Kolmanskop is believed to have originated from a transport driver named Johnny Kolman. He transported goods from Keetmanshoop to Lüderitzbucht and it was his custom to out span his oxen and camp in the vicinity of a low-lying Gneiss kopje (Kuppe) or hillock.

In 1905 he was caught in a fierce sandstorm with his ox-wagon span, and his oxen vanished. He was fortunately rescued but the wagon remained abandoned for years. From that time the Kopje was known as Kolmanskuppe. A certain chief veterinarian of the territory was not so lucky. He was trapped in similar circumstances with a companion and they died of thirst. Later when the area was being dug up by diamond seekers, the mummified remains of the veterinarian were found. In September 1908, the Colonial Government declared a Sperrgebiet or 'forbidden zone' extending 360 km northward to latitude 26°S from the Orange River and 100 km inland from the coast, known today as Diamond Area No.1 in order to control the mining of the diamonds and in February 1909 a central diamond market was established. This area was accessible only to the Dernburg Company. The proclamation

forced prospectors to the north of Lüderitz where the discovery of diamonds at Oystercliffs, Saddle Hill and Meob Bay in 1908 led to yet another diamond rush. The Sperrgebiet was designed to give the government control over the region thought to contain diamonds and accounted for 20% of the worldwide diamond take. In 1909 almost 500,000 carats were produced there, and yields almost tripled in 5 years. The diamonds were small but of high quality.

By 1910, more than 500 claims had been registered and the mining towns Charlottenfelde, Conception Bay, Holstia and Fishersbrun mushroomed deep within the oldest desert in the world, the Namib. Miners lived, prospected, thrived and died amidst the most challenging living conditions and difficult circumstances of the hostile desert environment. As the diamond mining progressed to Kolmanskop, a unique little settlement mushroomed in the desert sands. Improvised wooden buildings with corrugated iron cladding, prefabricated in Germany, gave way to solid and astonishingly impressive buildings that contrasted in a bizarre way with their desolate surroundings.

Among them, with an air of importance, were the double-storied homes of manager Hans Hörlein and mining engineer Leonard Kolle.

There was a police station (camels were used frequently for their patrols), a post office (opened in February 1909), a general dealer's store, a bakery, butchery, lemonade and soda-water factory which used the same cooling facilities as the butchery. There was an ice making facility which provided each household daily with a free block of ice which was made in special upright, long and narrow forms. Each morning the ice-vendor came down the streets, which were even then smothered with sand, to deliver the daily ration of ice blocks and cold drinks to each household.

Marianne Coleman (daughter of Ou Kat Coleman foreman at Kolmanskop) recalls, "I was born in Pomona, SWA. My mother was German and my father Danish / German. He was in charge of the engineering section. Everybody worked for "The Company" . One of my early childhood memories is of labourers being sent out with empty jam jars, a small spade and a hand broom, returning later in the day with jars filled with diamonds. The most beautiful gems were found at Pomona. Our house was built high on the hill where the sandstorms swept past it. I am still fascinated by the sound of howling winds.(In her memories Marianne mentions an enclosed porch in which her mother grew plants).

The house was so solid that the elements did very little harm to it, despite the fact that it stood there with no maintenance being done to it for many years. We had a post office there, and that was our link to the outside world. Post was delivered late on Friday afternoons. That meant that everybody went to the post office, waiting for the mail to be sorted. In its heyday Pomona was alive with people, it even had a skittle alley. Remember, the Germans always built a skittle alley before anything else, because it was their favourite sport and it was also a social meeting place".

Marianne recalls:

"Pomona was originally called "Pomonaforte" as it was located at the 'entrance' to many other valleys, e.g. Idastahl named after August Stauch's wife Marianne and Katie Tahl - his two daughters, Stauch Lager, Hexenkessel and Scheibestahl. I think there must have been about 300 Germans working there and about the same number of migrants. Working hours on the mine was nine hours every day for six days a week, with only special days like Easter or Christmas, New Year, etc, being given off.

In the early days church services were held in the school building. We even had a house specially reserved for officials

when they visited. It was called the "Hotel" ! When Pomona was closed, it became a halfway station for transport and passenger buses between Oranjemund and Lüderitz. Everybody had to be 'X' rayed to make sure that they did not smuggle diamonds. That meant that everybody had to strip totally naked, and cover themselves with a sheet. You were then left alone until it was your turn to walk over and lie down on the cold marble slab to be 'X' rayed. Still it was fun to us and when the wind played havoc with the sheets, everybody looked politely the other way, and no one complained. We moved to Kolmanskop during 1923. The whole company was run by Germans with only two English speaking persons working at Kolmans". Pomona's water supply was brought in via a narrow gauge railway - the remains of which can still be seen today. "Kolmanskop" and all the other little mining havens were staffed almost exclusively by Germans and when the World) War I broke out, they were all interned and the mines closed down until such time when replacement staff were recruited or transferred from the mines at Kimberley and Cullinan. I can very well remember the bitter tears when the men left and the women and children were left behind. Suddenly we were all part of a war we had nothing to do with, and that was taking place thousands of miles away from where we were living in peace. I can better remember that my father remarked that at least two Germans were glad to see the South African troops arriving, and they were the owner (Frau Zimmer) of a pleasure house (the Green House) and her accomplice - they were jailed for illicit diamond dealings, and when the SA troops arrived in Lüderitz, they just opened the jail doors and set them free. The owner (Frau Zimmer) got the diamonds for services and drinks when the client's money ran out. She hid her diamonds in the false bottom of the kennel of her fierce dog (Moritz). My parents were disgusted about this place right next to the church Felsenkirche on Diamantberg. The hill was so named because of all the broken bottles that were littering the hill. All of them being thrown out through the windows. In the sunlight

these broken bottles glittered like huge diamonds, hence the name Diamantberg. But what I can remember even better, is the wonderful times we had, the freedom, the joys and the pleasures. The mutual coherent way of living, a special quality in the character of a Sperrgebiet sibling.”

“Of all the hotels in Lüderitz, the Rösemann and the Kapps hotels were the best. Mr. Rümmler, a former employee of the Woermann shipping line, bought the hotel and renamed it to The Rümmler. He married an orphaned girl Elsa. Just like her husband, she was very competent and a very good cook. It was these Woermann ships that brought the potted plants from Europe or from Cape Town, as ordered by the women of Kolmanskoppe. Mr Woerman’s shop acted as a casual agent for these women, just out of goodwill. The plants always arrived in good condition and were watered. Mr. Woermann would let the women know about the arrival of a ship. The next day the women would gather, dressed up in Sunday’s best outfits and make a special day long outing to fetch their ordered goods. August Stauch insisted in separating business from his private time. He and his wife would always stay over in the Rümmler hotel chatting with friends relaxing and playing Knobel. But when he met with businessmen they would meet in the Kapps Hotel. Sadly when the war broke out, August Stauch was trapped in Germany, and as a result separated from his family. While he was in hospital, his house was broken into and everything was stolen. He died of cancer in Eisenach and we were told that despite all his assets in SWA, he had no cash other than a few Marks in his purse. Only his daughter Käthe and a few relatives and friends were at his memorial service. His body was cremated and the ashes sent to Windhoek but the urn got lost. Fortunately rediscovered many months later. His ashes was laid to rest in the Windhoek cemetery”.

“When I last visited our old house in Pomona, it was still good enough to live in, with just a window pane missing here and there, but standing there deserted, sand sifted in over the

years, still solid with nothing more seriously needed than a good clean-up, and one could move in. Because I was much older then, I realized how incredibly much was achieved under the circumstances. In my time the sand was gathered and removed by the cleaning gang, who carried the sand off and just dumped it on the Northern border of the town. I once was a flower girl at a wedding in Pomona. My father added a big red Geranium to my shoulder bouquet. I was totally overdressed in German style despite the desert climate. The reception was held in a corrugated iron shed. All the food was prepared by the women, assisted by the butcher and the baker and the men donated all the Champagne, beer and cool drinks” “I vaguely remember the early years when supplies were brought to Pomona by a camel supply train, bringing mostly dry rations and things like bully beef, tinned fish and dry forage and other feed stuff for the animals and poultry. Fragile items or fresh produce could not be transported over the long distance and it was almost always broken or spoiled. Later on when the railway line was completed - things got better. It was difficult to keep a pet, but we had an ostrich which pulled a little sleigh over the sand. An ostrich is not a docile beast and I remember the terror and loathing looks from housewives as we careered along. The ostrich stopping every now and again to pinch and eat anything that it could find. Nevertheless, the ostrich and sleigh was used at Christmas time to bring father Christmas and some presents. The manager told us that reindeer were unable to cross the desert so he had to resort first to mountain goats as replacements for his reindeer, and when they encountered the sandy stretches, the goats were replaced with our ostrich. When we moved to Kolmanskop we took the ostrich with us.”

Marianne writes about Kolmanskop: “We did not have refrigerators but cooler chests. I remember the ice man doing his rounds delivering ice blocks to the homes from the ice factory. He then put the ice blocks into the cooler chests at every home.

"Sometimes a child's priorities were different from her mother's, and it often happened that a child would take the butter or eggs out of the cooler, to make space for their lemonade. Very nice soda water and lemonade were made at the ice factory as well. It was bottled in the old fashioned bottles with the glass marble on the top to prevent the gas escaping.

The butcher was Mr. Zirkler, and the baker was Mr. Brechlin. Every morning on his way to work, father would drop off his daily order at the store, bakery, or butcher. Fresh bread or rolls, meat and other groceries were delivered before noon.

Mr. Zirkler made the best smoked Vienna sausages you could imagine. In the store one could buy home made fudge and toffees. Behind the store was a playground for the children, with a merry go round and a giant wheel, and other entertainment offered for children from toddlers to teenagers."

There was a large workshop, a huge depot, a carpentry shop, offices and stables.

"I have found memories of taking part, in Christmas and Easter plays as a young girl. The workshop was decorated for these special days. These were the days before we had the corrugated iron "Casino " or the big recreation club which was built in 1927. After the celebrations we all went home with oily feet, despite all the cleaning of the floors. My father's office was in the middle of the workshop with glass all around - so he had a good view of what was going on. There was also a carpenter shop that was not only doing timber things for the mine, but also made all the furniture for the houses. I don't think there are much of those pieces of furniture left, but the dining room suite in the house used by the General Manager when he visited Lüderitz is still there. We had a painter from Germany who painted the insides of the houses with fabulous patterns and designs".

“We had a seawater swimming pool. The water was pumped all the way from Elizabeth Bay. It was just a square dam of even depth of two meters. Across this pool we had ropes strung where people could hold on to. The overflow water was used on the plant and for cleaning purposes. There were bathing huts around the pool, birthday parties were held there, and on Sundays, weather permitting, the band played and we all had a jolly time. Although the swimming pool was soon half filled with sand after closure of the town, you could still see the beautiful Italian Terrazzo tiles”.

"One of the town's people was a real jolly fellow, and on his door he had a little notice that read. "In diesen Pondok wohnen Jacob und Elizabeth mit Kindern und Thomas der Kater. Unser Dach. Mittel Strasse" as there were no street names, he chose his own street name, and decided that they live in Middle Street!"

There was a primary school (up to Standard 3) with a playground complete with swings and merry-go-round.

At the top of a sand-dune hill was a reservoir which served a dual purpose. It provided the mining plant with water for the washing and treatment operations and was also used as a swimming pool by the residents of Kolmanskop. Sea water was pumped through a long pipeline from Elisabethbucht 28 kilometres away. A pipeline also served Charlottental.

Occasionally there was a leak which was greatly enjoyed by the children, an unexpected shower in the desert.

Drinking water remained a problem. It had to be shipped from Cape Town to Lüderitzbucht and then brought by rail to Kolmanskop. It was transported in barrels to the diamond fields. Initially these water barrels were conveyed in wagons, but their wheels got bogged down.

The problem was solved with the barrels being pulled along the desert sands by two mules. Fresh water was also obtained from a spring at Garub, about 100 kilometres distant. It was

transported in barrels in railway trucks, off-loaded at the depot and pumped into tanks. Prior to 1927 there was also a simple corrugated-iron recreation centre with a skittle alley.

Stauch was virtually the king of Kolmanskop where he had established his headquarters. He used it as a base and undertook various prospecting expeditions to the south, where he believed he would find the biggest diamonds. Like his colleagues, he suffered more from the icy winds in the desert than from the heat in the desert of extremes. He later set up camp in a valley called Märchental (Fairy-tale valley) in the richest part of the Pomona field at Idatal (named after his wife Ida) and this came to be known as Stauchslager. In this valley diamonds were literally picked up by the handful.

In 1910 Stauch's Koloniale Bergbau Gesellschaft decided to erect a central power station at Lüderitzbucht to supply electricity to the diamond fields. This ambitious undertaking was initiated by Stauch. A few years later the company floated the Lüderitzbuchter Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft, with a capital of two million marks, to run the power station. Housing, electricity and fuel were provided free by the company, which also maintained a well-built hospital. The hospital had one of the finest X-ray plants in Southern Africa. It also had its own wine cellar. The wine was moreover used medicinally. One of the two resident doctors Dr. Kraenzle, believed that patients recovered more speedily if they received some stimulation in the form of a little wine or Champagne. Another doctor, Dr. von Lossow, an excellent surgeon, had a less exotic conception of health-giving additives. He encouraged his patients to eat a raw onion daily. "It was a common sight to see Dr von Lossow walking along, balancing on a railway line, eating raw onions and whistling madly in between bites. He was a bachelor until late in life and died on his honeymoon", Marianne recalls. "Dr von Lossow was a bone specialist, and it was an assault on the senses to be examined by him unless, in self defense, one ate raw onions or garlic beforehand. The hospital had the finest 'X' ray machine.

When Kolmanskop was closed down the machine was sent as a present to Ovamboland”.

In 1927 a magnificent new recreation centre was built where many functions and forms of entertainment were held. It had perfect acoustics, designed by an expert from Germany.

Provision was made for gymnastics and film shows. There was also a large skittle alley, a casino and a theatre.

Marianne recalls “After the recreation club was built in Kolmans, the mine sponsored and brought out opera, theatre groups and orchestras from Europe for entertainment. Every sophisticated taste was catered for. People came from Lüderitz to attend. These events were always in aid of charity. While the wind whipped sand across the windows, we enjoyed the perfect acoustics of the hall.

The various rooms were painted in different colours with artistic friezes, deriving their names from the colour used. An enormous kitchen with a high ceiling had unique features.

The stoves stood in the middle of the floor, leaving ample working space all around, and the chimneys were placed under the flooring.

“The ladies had a very active social club, funds were collected for various charities. They organized wonderful parties. For one such fund raising party they organised a ship's dance. The stage of the recreation club was converted to a captains cabin. The orchestra sat there playing a variety of lively music. In the middle of the hall was the bridge and the Champagne and wine bar. Along the sides the hall there were cubicles used as cabins and saloons with all the necessary decoration trimmings and food or drinks. On the one side were the delicatessen, sweets, fishcakes, port, etc., and along the opposite wall there was the "sailors" food - pork, Sauerkraut, potatoes, and pea soup. The main floor was for dancing. Every now and again the dance was interrupted for the can-can, or other dancing girls to come out to give a cabaret show. This women’s club made a fortune for

charity, and these events usually lasted two days. There was a bachelor named Arnold. Whatever food was left over were taken to his place. Who ever wanted to join in the dancing was welcome to dance to the music from a wind up grammophone. That particular day, when the men had to report for work on Monday morning, some of them turned up still dressed in their sailor outfits and caps!”

“Kolmanskop had a school with classes up to Std 4. There were about 25 to 30 children attending school. Boys and girls, more or less equal in number - and as it goes the older boys and girls each had a shy but secret admiration for a special friend. Our teacher was a Mrs. Hussmann. There is a picture of me all dressed up for school. We did not have school uniforms as it was not German custom. But there I am dressed in a Dirndl dress and long thick woollen stockings to protect my legs from the stinging sand.

“Kolmanskop also had a very active gymnastic club, a theatre which sponsored visits of shows and operettas from overseas and a 8- piece orchestra that played for all the formal dances as well as tea dances on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. All the ladies turned up in the latest fashions. The club served tea, coffee, beer and spirits while the orchestra played sweet music. Some couples did the tango or one step. The brave ones tried the Charleston”.

At a later stage Marianne played the piano in this orchestra, after she had lessons from a Mr. Felix de Cola the ladies ran a very effective club, funds being collected for various charities.

“Once my father and the owner of the hotel discussed church matters, and they agreed on how kind it was from the Kaiser to donate a very nice stained glass window, and how kind it was that the Kaiser’s wife donated the altar Bible. Most probably not to be outdone, Mr. Stauch imported a large Steinway grand piano, but the church did not have sufficient room to house it, so it ended up in the gymnasium. The owner of the hotel then

said that an upright piano similar to the one in the bar would have been much more appropriate. But unfortunately that one has been shot at so many times that it stopped working, otherwise he would have given it to the church.”

“I think it is because of the hardships of life in the bleak windswept desert, that the little towns were such havens in the early years. People really cared for each other. All sorts of commodities were developed to suit cultural requirements e.g. the recreation hall in Kolmans was the centre of entertainment for the whole area, including Lüderitz. We had houses that were built in the German tradition, with steep roofs to shed snow or sand? There were numerous shops in Lüderitz. Woerman & Brock started off by selling dynamite, and later on prefabricated wooden houses. Hermann Metje the builder of the solid German houses, and the architect Mr. Ziegler opened a hardware shop. Later on they imported and stocked just about everything one could think of. My mother bought a very nice Dresden dinner set from them.”

Some 700 families lived in the town, including about 300 German adults, 40 children and 800 Ovambo contract workers. Wages were good and virtually everything was free, including company houses, milk deliveries and other fringe benefits. Large metal screens around the gardens and corners of the houses helped to keep the sand at bay and a sand-clearing squad cleared the streets every day. Many of the professionals in Kolmanskop had lavish homes. One of these homes, the home of the mine manager Hans Hörlein has been recently restored by Namdeb for tourists.

One of the earliest power plants in the region was built to provide electricity for the residents and the mining machinery.

Marianne:- "The Power station, as far as I knew, was the biggest in both SWA and South Africa. Apart from feeding Lüderitz, and Kolmanskop the electricity was also supplied to all the other mining plants further away as well as to the electric

railway cars. This power station was also one of only two in the world that distilled water from the sea. The other Power station was in Aden Germany. We also used fresh water which was brought in torpedo tankers from Garub about a 100 kilometres away. This water was stored in tanks beneath the floor of the mine magazine. From there it was pumped into tanks on the hill, from which it flowed downhill to the houses.

The inhabitants of the diamond settlement as well as the Lüderitzbuchters enjoyed going on picnics over weekends. They travelled by horse-cart or in trolleys on the railroad.

Marianne recalls:

“I remember the mules, lovely fat and strong animals that pulled the "violet wagon" and also the smart rail coach to Charlottenthal, Idastahl, Hexenkessel, and Mariannesthal. (named after August's sweetheart and eldest daughter). All the ladies as well as myself were dressed in parasols and tremendous ostrich feather hats every Easter, the manager arranged an Easter egg hunt and the families who lived at Kilometre 20 on the way to Elizabeth bay, hid hundreds of Easter goodies amongst the rocks. Afterwards very nice tea and cookies were served- and lemonade provided as well.”

One of the most popular outings was to the great rock arch of Bogenfels. Nearby were caves which could be explored at low tide. There was also a miniature Bogenfels in the vicinity. Diamond mining took place at Bogenfels between 1910 and 1913, and almost 400 000 carats were recovered. A large condenser supplied the inhabitants with drinking water.

“On the railway line between Kolmanskoppe and Pomona sand was always a problem, causing long delays. The train was always accompanied by cleaners with shovels to clear the tracks”.

Much of the area is similar to the Lüderitzbucht environs with its bleak charcoal-streaked appearance, blackish dolerite boulders and gneiss rock with quartz veins running through the

granite. Mainly metamorphic, it looks as if there had once been violent volcanic activity. Scattered around are incongruous, green blobs of shrubs interspersed with patterned sand dunes. Sometimes the men went on jaunts to catch crayfish, such as in the small bay of Jammerbucht, near Pomona. The crayfish were either grilled on the fire or boiled in sea-water. There was an abundance of black mussels at Grosse Bucht and a colony of seals at Wolfs Bucht with jackals slinking in their midst, sly opportunists. A popular outing was to a hotel at Elisabethbucht with the romantic name Wüsten König, meaning desert king.

Board and lodging there was ten marks, and hot meals were always available. Horses could be hired for five marks a day. At Prinzenbucht where there were landing facilities for boats from steamers, an enterprising Mr. H. Kabilenski sold water from a sea-water condenser, as well as horse fodder. Prinzenbucht was actually the source of supply for Bogenfels via Pomona. There were daily trips from Lüderitzbucht to Griffith Bay where one could obtain meals, liquor and have a game of skittles. Another attraction was Radford Bay and its lagoons with flamingoes strutting on long slender legs and rising in a cloud of pink indignation when disturbed. One had to be lucky with the weather. It was almost always windy, blowing either hot or cold, and sand storms caused mishaps. The storms were at their worst at Pomona where the wind was particularly strong, sometimes lasting several weeks.

The extreme wealth of Kolmanskop during the 1920s made it one of the richest communities in Africa. Despite the wealth of the 300 Germans, 800 Oshiwambo labourers did not share in the riches.

Stauch showed inspiration and tremendous energy in procuring mining claims. But he wisely obtained the services of qualified experts for the actual management and supervision of the mining developments. In charge was an engineer, Baumeister Hans Hörlein, an honourable man of exceptional ability. Later, Hörlein with the takeover by the Consolidated Diamond Mines,

he continued in his capacity as manager for many years. He used to travel on horseback once a month to Oranjemund. He was responsible for the planning and buildings at Elisabethbucht which developed into a mining town. Finally he retired to his farm Eirup, some 80 kilometres from Mariental, bordering the Kalahari. Stauch contracted from Germany another very efficient engineer, Leonhard Kollé, who became "second in command". His two sons were brought up at Kolmanskop where the family stayed until 1935, when he was transferred by the CDM to Oranjemund. The first technical director was the Bergassessor (mining engineer), Kurt Pasel, a most conscientious worker. Others who became well-known on the diamond fields were the mining engineer Max Schiechel, who devised the so-called Schiechel jig for diamond mining and Georg Glockemeier who later improved this invention. Then there were the geologists, Dr. Lotz, Dr. Erich Kaiser and Dr. Werner Beetz. The two latter established boreholes in the desert which resulted in a great saving of costs with regard to drinkable water, since water from the condensers was very expensive.

In the early days, in the nearby Itadel Valley, stones were so accessible that prospectors with no mining equipment would crawl on their hands and knees in full moonlight collecting the glittering stone.

South Africa gained control of Namibia after World War I (1918) and sold the diamond deposits to Consolidated Diamond Mines (CDM), which was transferred to De Beers (predecessor to Namdeb) in 1929.

In 1928, the discovery of Namibia's vast marine-terrace diamond reserves, just north of the mouth to the Orange River, slowed production in the north.

The general exodus to Oranjemund began and many of the original prefabricated wooden houses were dismantled and reassembled again in Oranjemund.

Kolmanskop remained the headquarters of the CDM (Consolidated Diamond Mines) until 1943 when it moved to Oranjemund. Mining operations ceased there in 1950.

The two deteriorating buildings the large workshop and the depot were demolished by the CDM in the 1950's and the iron sold to a scrap dealer, while the 'zentrale Wäsche' (washeries) were also demolished.

“Looking at Kolmans and the other towns, after the desert had taken over, it is difficult to believe that these places were once alive with people, and that some of them had beautiful indoor gardens. As in Pomona, we had an indoor garden and a small lawn big enough for a small table and two chairs. Father said living in a desert did not mean your place must look like a desert - therefore just as in Pomona, where we had four trees, and red geraniums. In Kolmans my father planted four eucalyptus trees, a small lawn, a rosebush and geraniums. Every morning and evening father measured one cup of water for each geranium and the rose bush, a little for the lawn and about two litres for each tree. Of all those, only the stumps of the trees remains. Mother's potted plants were her pride and joy. Her hand painted designs on the pot plant holders were very elegant Bauernmalerei (Duitse boere verf kuns) an art that she learned from the painter who came from Germany to paint the houses and later on also the club. Her favourite potted plant that she kept in their bedroom was a "lily of the valley" with its racemes of white bell shaped fragrant flowers”.

By 1956 the town of Kolmanskop was deserted and replaced by Oranjemund as Namibia's diamond headquarters the beginning of the end started.

Soon the metal screens collapsed and the pretty gardens and tidy streets were buried under the sand. Doors and windows creaked on their hinges, cracked window panes stared sightlessly across the desert. A new ghost town had been born.

So within 40 years the town was born, flourished and then died. One day Kolmanskop's sand-clearing squad failed to turn up, the ice-man stayed away, the school bell rang no more.

The man who started it all, August Stauch ironically lost his entire fortune during the depression and died of cancer on May 6 1947 in a hospital at Eisenach not far from his birthplace Ettenhausen. He was 69 years old at the time.

Compiled by WF Kotzé.

Acknowledgements:

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Various Websites on Kolmanskop (Kolmannskuppe)

Marianne Coleman (daughter of Ou Kat Coleman foreman at Kolmanskop). Courtesy late Franz Schneider and Hennie Kruger