

They're Afrikaners, they have Afrikaans surnames like Retief and Myburgh but they speak Spanish. Most of them are still Calvinist, they are regular church-goers; but their two reformed churches are known as Iglesia Reformado.

These are the 600 descendants of the Afrikaners who emigrated from South Africa more than 70 years ago and settled in the Patagonian province of Chubut, about 1400 km south of Buenos Aires.

But they have not completely forgotten their blood ties with South Africa and the traditional South American carnivals are sometimes laced with Boeresport if not a sporadic shout of "Vrystaat!"

The older members of the community still try to keep Afrikaans going, but it is a losing battle against Spanish. The younger ones carry names like Juan Venter and Ricardo Greyling.

One might even find a typical South American gaucho introducing himself as: "El nombre es van der Merwe!" (My name is van der Merwe).

There were three main treks of these Bittereinders immediately after the Anglo-Boer War. Lawrence Green writes that the first trekker was Louis Bouman of Ladybrand.

Bouman was followed in 1902, says Green, by an Englishman named Watson (who fought with the Boers) and Pieter Visser.

September 1903 saw a pioneer body of about 100 leave from Barkly East led by C J N Visser. This trek included the names of Calvert, Grimbeek, Verwey, Myburgh, le Grange and de Beer.

The largest contingent came from the Philipstown and Burghersdorp districts in the north-eastern Cape. Well-known families bearing the names of Grobler, Coetzer, Olivier, De Klerk, Henning, Van der Walt, Van Rensburg, Schlebusch, Venter and Smit were among the 300-odd burghers who collected at Bur-

Rhodesians, according to reports, are being offered sanctuary in the Argentine. History may be repeating itself says NEVILLE ADLAM.

El nombre es van der Merwe

gersdorp on October 12 1905.

P H Henning, in his book, "n Boer in Argentinie, says on that day the shops were closed and a huge crowd of people, both white and brown gathered at the station.

"I thought I was a grown man, but when I saw adults crying, I could not hold my tears back," he wrote. The train pulled out and one of the trekkers began playing "Home, Sweet Home" on a cornet.

The land the Argentine government chose for the new settlers was bleak and inhospitable, almost Karoo-like — but with fierce winters and blizzards.

Many of the Boers had little capital to branch out and they discovered when they arrived in the Argentine that it lacked a commodity they had in abundance in South Africa — labour.

But there was that cold. In the winter of 1925 a great snowstorm killed 80 000 sheep. The Boers brought 12 blacks with them . . . but by the third winter only three remained alive.

The trekkers were virtually cut off from the outside world and in the beginning they had to do without schools and there was no church.

They slowly tamed this wild land but the collection of low over-due rents and a drop in the wool prices in 1926 and 1927 brought many to the verge of ruin.

Then there was the fact that many were unable to buy their land. In 1934 there were at least 900 Afrikaners in the Argentine, nearly 700 in the Chubut region — but only 28 Boers had obtained title deeds.

There was also the strong resistance to the Roman Catholic influence. But even this was not enough. Some of the children were being lost to the Kerk.

In the early 1930s the idea of going back to South Africa slowly began to take root. A petition was drawn up and support sought among the Boers. They had heard of the successful repatriation of the Angola Boers in 1929 — and they made representations to the Union Government. In 1938 citizenship was granted to the expatriates and the SA Government and the NG Kerk jointly bore the expense of the trek home.

By 1940, 449 Afrikaners had returned to the fold. A total of 200 — mainly youngsters who had adapted themselves to the new country — remained.

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When the main contingent of Trekkers had gathered in Cape Town before embarking for South America in 1905, a prominent lawyer, advocate Henry Burton, appealed to the Boers to stay in Southern Africa.

"Don't go to that strange land," he told the assembled burghers. "There is land aplenty — and cheap too — in the north—in Rhodesia."