

## **Introduction: Professor Rodger Frederic Morton**

*Jeff Ramsay\* and Christian John Makgala\**

Over the last four and a half decades, Professor Fred Morton has made an immeasurable contribution in promoting public understanding of Botswana's past in the context of the wider Southern African region. His impact is manifest in his mentorship and community activism, as well as academic research and publications. In terms of publications, he has authored, co-authored, and edited ten books and nearly fifty peer-reviewed articles and book chapters while producing numerous conference and seminar papers.

Morton's continuing contribution towards a greater public understanding of Botswana's heritage has notably included his leading role in sustaining the Botswana Society and its publications. It is, therefore, even more appropriate that he is being honoured in this volume of the Society's Notes and Records.

Like a hardy Motlopi tree (*Boscia albitrunca*) in the Kgalagadi sands, Morton's many contributions are deeply rooted in his embrace of Botswana society. Born in the plains of western Ohio in the United States, he first came to the country he would make his home in 1976 after being recruited to become a history lecturer at the Botswana campus of what was then still the University of Botswana and Swaziland. In the same year, he had been awarded Doctorate at Syracuse University for his nuanced study of slaves, fugitives, and freedmen on the Kenya coast, which became the basis for his 1990 book *Children of Ham: Freed Slaves and Fugitive Slaves on the Kenya Coast, 1873–1907*. In 1976, alongside the historian Professor Thomas Tlou, they introduced the long-running history student research essays which became the pride of the Department of History at the University in Gaborone.

While his early exploration of East African social evolution yielded additional articles, his broader legacy rests with his studies of Batswana in Botswana and South Africa. As Ackson Kanduza's piece in this volume shows, Morton's scholarly work is notable for examining the transborder dynamics of Setswana societies from pre-colonial through to contemporary times. This quality is an outgrowth of his focus on the evolution of the cross-border Bakgatla-ba-Kgafela polity. His detailed investigation of the Bakgatla past generated a wealth of publications, culminating in his 2009 book *When Rustling became an Art: Pilane's Kgatla and the Transvaal Frontier, 1840-1902* (2009).

Morton's collaborative publications provide further evidence of his broader regional focus, including *The Collapse of Apartheid and the Dawn of Democracy in South Africa: The Multi-Party Negotiating Process, April 1993* with John Eby (2017), "To Make Them Serve"—*The 1871 Transvaal Commission on African Labour* with Johan Bergh (2003) and as co-editor with Elizabeth Eldredge of *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labour on the Dutch Frontier* (1994).

Morton has contributed to a broader understanding of Botswana's past as the co-author of three editions of the *Historical Dictionary of Botswana*. He is also the co-editor, with Jeff Ramsay, of the popular text *The Birth of Botswana: The History of the Bechuanaland Protectorate from 1910 to 1966* (1987).

In more recent years, Morton's academic work has focused on the evolution of settlement patterns, which has led to his multi-disciplinary collaboration with archaeologists Stefania Merlo and Lokwalo Thabeng in interpreting local archaeological sites. This area of investigation has notably included Morton's role as principal investigator for the Moshana/Mokolontwane Archaeological and Heritage Management research project in Botswana's Southern District.

For national service, Fred Morton was the coach of the men's Botswana National Softball team

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which got acclaimed as a ‘people’s winner’ by the press in the United States during a tournament held in Michigan which the team participated in. This was reported in the *Botswana Daily*s in July 1984 as shown in Figure 1:

**Figure 1: Report of the men’s Botswana National Softball team as ‘a peoples winner’**

**Softball team described as “a peoples winner”**

International games against Southern African teams in the past two years. Their official record now stands at 22 wins and 11 losses. Botswana's victory over Bermuda in the Midland tournament makes it the first African team to win a game in the championships. South Africa failed to win a game in the past when it took part in the same championships.

The Botswana team returned from Michigan on July 25 after ranking number seven out of the eight teams it competed against in the tournament which was held from July 6-14.

Most of the team's losses, said the team coach, were suffered because the players had trouble getting settled in the early innings of each ballgame.

He said the runs that were allowed in the first innings or two, were the runs that beat them.

“Our team played excellent defence in each game after the second inning, except against Taiwan in which everything seemed to go wrong,” he said.

“Batting was another problem,” he said. “None of our players did well in this category and in each game it was a struggle to score runs.”

“We faced some amazingly fast pitchers to the extent that the team made only 20 hits in seven games played and posted a low 0.123 team average,” he added.

According to Dr Morton, in the next championships, he expects the team will want to arrive very early in the softball town so that they can have plenty of time to rest, exercise and to get a lot of batting and fielding practise.

According to him, the problems should also be tackled by involving the team in more

unusual international scene which contributes to fight.

He said that they were already trying to organise such games in a move to get set for the next tournament which will be in 1988.

“We have talked to the Canadians for a possible exchange and we think it may be possible to attract other teams from countries such as China, Japan and the US into it,” he put in.

He felt however, that his team put an impressive show considering that they were playing in the championships for the first time in their career. He said the losses were very close, ranging from 3-2, 2-1 and 2-0.

One of the bright spots on the team, according to him, was the pitcher Labbeaus Peloeuwese who proved to be one of the best pitchers at the tournament.

According to the *Midland Daily News*, “in a 35 inning pitched, Peloeuwese has allowed 21 hits

and just 10 earned runs and has a 1-4 record.”

A run-down of the games played by our softballers looks like this.

The Botswana team lost to Bahamas 2-0. Asked to comment on the game, Dr Morton said that two errors in the first innings allowed Bahamas the only win in the game. This was very good play for our team bearing on the fact that Bahamas came 3rd in the 1980 Championships.

In another game, Botswana was beaten 10-0 by Canada. According to the coach, Canada's Jim Cowdrey pitched a perfect game, giving Botswana no hits. On our side, he said, Bakwena pitched fairly well but got little defensive or offensive support.

Botswana then went down against Guam 2-1. Dr Morton says Mo kg wathi scored Chalebwa from 2nd base with a powerful double to open the game and end Botswana's batting drought, but then the bats stopped working. Guam's experienced team pushed across the winning run on an error in the bottom of the 7th inning, he said.

“This was a tough loss for Botswana and Labbeaus, who gave up only one earned run,” he said.

Our team was then beaten 3-0 by Netherland Antilles before a record crowd of about 9 500 spectators.

To the eyes of the coach, this was a well-played game for Botswana and by Labbeaus who threw excellent pitches. “Again the bats were silent and errors let in two of the three Antilles' runs,” he said.

In another meeting, Botswana was walloped 11-1 by Dominican Republic who took advantage of the fact that the team's spirits were down after having lost a good number of games.

Dr Morton said the defenders gave up many runs and failed to support Pitcher Bakwena who stopped working. Guam's experience to hit playable balls.

After losing another disastrous games against Chinese Taipei, which was 19-0, the Botswana team defeated Bermuda 3-2 in their last game.

According to the coach, Botswana pushed across the winning run in the last inning.

Labbeaus, he said, pitched the team to victory when he hit two singles and drove in one of the runs himself.

Before the team left for home, it was awarded a ‘Golden Bat’ which is made of extruded aluminium and anodized bronze and inscribed, “Golden Bat Award USA, 1984”. The award was presented to the team by USIA Director Mr Charles Z. Wick and Ashe Hayes, acting Executive Director of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, in recognition of the efforts the team has made in the games.

**By Ray Mangope**  
GABORONE, July 27: The Botswana National Softball team from the men's softball championships held in the USA, was described as ‘a people's winner’ in the American press.

The Botswana National Softball Squad would go home a winner because ‘this team are winners no matter if they had a ballgame or not,’ said a report in the *Midland Daily News*, a paper serving Midland, Michigan, where the championships were held.

According to the team coach Dr Fred Morton, his team attracted many fans during the tournaments despite the fact that they won only one out of the eight championship games.

“They were on our side most of the time no matter what the results of the games were,” he pointed out.

The Botswana National team in the Southern African Championships, having defeated the Zimbabwe National Softball team earlier this year. Before the World

The team coach Dr Fred Morton




Some members of the Botswana national softball team at a reception at President Hotel in Gaborone given in their honour by BSA after their arrival last week.

Source: *Botswana Daily News*, July 1984

After just over a decade at the University of Botswana, Morton returned to the USA. From 1988 until 2006, he was resident at Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa, following brief postings at the University of Wisconsin, Platteville, and State University of New York, Plattsburg. During this period, he continued his academic and personal engagement with Botswana. After leaving Loras, he resettled in Botswana, having built a family home in Ruretse near Gaborone. In 2009 Morton's talent was once more sought by the University of Botswana, where he served for another dozen years before retiring in June of 2020. He has since remained affiliated with the University as a senior research associate. For instance, by mid-2021 he was part of the process that enabled the Botswana Society to be relocated to the University of Botswana campus in Gaborone through a memorandum of understanding between the two entities.

As a member of the executive board of the Botswana Society since 2007, Morton took the lead in designing a Certificate Course on Cultural Heritage Tour Guide Basics, in collaboration with Botho University and Botswana Tourism. His community service further includes his chairmanship of the Botswana National Archives and Record Management Advisory Council (2006-2014) and serving as the ‘mayor’ of Ruretse Neighbourhood Watch.

In his eighth decade, Professor Morton shows no sign of reducing his prolific and increasingly diverse output in terms of research, publications, and the mentorship of others in promoting local heritage. We can thus look forward to more fruits of knowledge from the Motlopi tree.

The articles and notes in this commemorative volume do not follow any specific theme but focus on different subjects on Botswana from various disciplines.