

<b>Archaeological Site Report</b>	<b>SiteNo</b>	9/2/302/0027
	<b>Site Name</b>	Vierde Raadsaal, President Brand Street,
	<b>Date</b>	Bloemfontein
	<b>Project</b>	
	<b>CaseNID</b>	
	<b>Coords</b>	-29.115772, 26.217724

Page No: 1      **SiteAutoID:** 26543

Site Category: Building

#### **SiteComments:**

Archive Import History: The last of the four Raadsaals of the Orange Free State Republic stands in President Brand Street. It is, indeed, one of the buildings that lends particular distinction to that street. The history of the raadsaals of the Legislative Assembly or Volksraad of the former Republic of the Orange Free State is the story of the development of a nomadic farming community into a settled, mature and thriving people. The first little thatched Raadsaal was built in 1849. In 1856 the Volksraad moved to the second Raadsaal, Jordaan's shop facing the market square, on the site of the present Post Office. Twenty years later the Government built its own buildings at the top of Maitland Street which included the third Raadsaal. The young state prospered and the Administration expanded so rapidly that, in the early eighties there was once again a shortage of office accommodation. Consequently it was decided to build a new Presidency and a new Council Chamber. The Executive Council, instructed by the Volksraad, organized a competition and offered a prize for the best plans submitted for each of the buildings. Lennox Canning, a Johannesburg architect, won both awards. The Presidency was completed in accordance with Canning's plans in 1886. As a result of prolonged droughts and the consequent shortage of funds, it was only in 1889, when the present site was purchased from the Municipal Council for R700 and a tender of R54 367 from T. R. Robertson of Johannesburg was accepted, that the erection of the Raadsaal could be started. On the 27th June, 1890, the foundation stone was laid by President F. W. Reitz. A full three years, however, elapsed before the building was completed. The contractor experienced unexpected shortages of labour and suitable stone. The latter difficulty compelled him to open new quarries and to transport stone over long distances. This resulted in such heavy and unforeseen losses that Robertson was unable to fulfil his contract. When his sureties, Heimann and Co., also failed, the Executive Council had to invite new tenders for the completion of the remainder of the building, and a tender of J. J. Kirkness for R25 000 was accepted. The inauguration of the building finally took place on 5th June, 1893. At 10 a.m. the members of the Volksraad assembled for the last time in the third Raadsaal in the Government Buildings. After formally leaving this hall they adjourned to the new Raadsaal in a procession headed by the Sheriff of Bloemfontein on horseback, carrying the Free State flag, escorted by mounted artillerymen and followed by the artillery band, the master of ceremonies and the architect with the key to the building. Next in the procession came various dignitaries : President Reitz, J. G. Fraser, Chairman of the Volksraad, the Rev. C. S. Morgan, Members of the Volksraad, the chief justice and judges, members of the Executive Council, consuls and consular agents, ministers of various denominations, senior officials and the rector of Grey College, the mayor and members of the municipal council, the general manager of the National Bank, the chairman and members of the Chamber of Commerce, and finally the citizens, in all 600 to 700 persons. On the arrival of the procession at the new building the President unlocked the door with the silver key and the procession entered. After the proceedings had been opened with a reading from the Scriptures and a prayer, short addresses were delivered by President Reitz, John G. Fraser and others. Then, with great fervour, the audience sang the Free State National Anthem. Shortly before the inauguration a Special Commission of Supervision for the Raadsaal consisting of John G. Fraser, Cornelius Wessels and J. A. Venter was set up. During the next few years this Commission purchased beautiful curtains and carpets from D. Isaacs & Co of Cape Town; ordered the artistic railings around the building, erected at a total cost of R8 000, from Koch Brothers of Paris; was responsible for considerable improvements to the acoustics of the hall and in 1896 had a large concrete coat of arms of the Republic affixed to the front gable. Nevertheless, the Government was not

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destined to enjoy the comfort and luxury of the Raadsaal for long. In March, 1900, Bloemfontein was occupied by the British forces, and the Republican Government withdrew to the north. The magnificent hall was converted into a military hospital. The furniture was removed, much of it finding its way into private homes. The beautiful carving in wood of the coat of arms was taken to England as a trophy. After the war, the British coat of arms, carved in stone, was placed above the heavy teak front door. By resolution of the Provincial Council, this was removed only recently. In 1907, after being ruled as a Crown Colony for seven years, the Orange River Colony was granted responsible government. The government now consisted of two chambers or houses, namely a Legislative Council and a Legislative Assembly. Obviously, the Legislative Assembly would meet in the Raadsaal, but provision had to be made for the Upper House. After careful investigation a special committee, consisting of Abraham Fischer, J. B. M. Hertzog and John Fraser, recommended that the existing building be retained intact and a separate building be erected facing Aliwal Street. Architecturally this building was to harmonize fully with the old building and be connected with it by an open colonnade. These recommendations were accepted, plans were drawn up, and the well-known eastern block was erected. With the advent of Union the Raadsaal became the headquarters of the Provincial Council, while the chamber of the Legislative Council and its suite of rooms were occupied by the Appeal Court which met there until the handsome building facing the Raadsaal was completed in 1929. The Raadsaal was proclaimed a historical monument in 1951. In 1954 a fine statue of Gen. C. R. de Wet, the work of the South African sculptor, Coert Steynberg, was erected in the north-western corner of the Raadsaal grounds.

**B. Architectural Visual Description:** The Fourth Raadsaal is the architectural jewel of the Free State. Built in the Renaissance style in which the most important features of the Greek and Roman styles are blended, it stands as a true monument. This is particularly true of the handsome and dominating front view. The steps, the portico, the broad colonnade in front of and flanking the hall, the fluted columns with their Ionic capitals, the frieze, the pediment and cornice are Greek. The Roman cupola, with its arched openings, the lantern motif and flagstaff, surmount the Greek substructure. Inside, the chamber has that dignity, calm and distinction which lent lustre and status to the highest assembly of the old Republic and still graces the meetings of the Provincial Council today. This is the result of careful and sensitive planning. The circular entrance hall and adjoining lobbies provided access to the chamber. The moulded dome of the ceiling with its decorated cornice and skylight of coloured glass gives an impression of space and stateliness. This was also the case regarding the two side lobbies with their decorated cornices and groined vaults, but unfortunately they have lost much of their character since both were partitioned off and converted into offices. The floors of the entrance halls are of Devonshire marble, and in the centre of the floor of the main entrance, the coat of arms of the Orange Free State is worked in mosaic in different colours of this marble. The interior of the chamber itself is artistic and interesting. The large surfaces of the long, high walls are broken by fluted pilasters with decorated Corinthian capitals. Around the hall, above these capitals, there is a beautiful dentil-band with floral paterae as well as a cornice and frieze. The floor is of light Stettin oak and the inner doors, frames and gallery front are of deal, painted brown and grained to blend with the brown walnut furniture. The windows are of coloured glass with the coat of arms of the Orange Free State, a rosette and a lyre alternately. Lennox Canning, the architect, designed the furniture and woodwork for the hall so that it might accord exactly with the architecture of the building. The furniture of the Raadsaal is most striking. The canopy is particularly fine, being an inherent part of the interior architecture of the hall. It comprises the wainscot or panelling, a low platform, three desks (designed as a single unit) and three chairs. At the same time the richly adorned panelling forms a background for the Free State coat of arms. The carved wooden coat of arms, resplendent in colour, was made in 1856 by the Government Secretary, J. W. Spruijt, and it graced the various Volksraad chambers throughout the time of the Republic. It was taken to London in 1900 as a trophy of the war, but was returned in 1938. In front of the panelling is a desk ; it has three sections with a chair behind it. The large chair in the middle was intended for the President, and those on either side were for the Chairman of the Volksraad and the Government Secretary. A handsome round table, two metres in diameter, stood in front of the dais, and on either side of the hall were the chairs

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Page No: 3      **SiteAutoID:** 26543

and desks of the members. This portion of the chamber is separated from the rest of the hall by a hand some barrier. On the other side of the barrier was room for 282 seats for the public. In addition there were two portable folding screens, and in the gallery were chairs with tip-up seats. The furnishing of the offices of the President, Chairman and Secretary as well as that of the committee and members' rooms was strictly functional. As we have seen, the furniture was designed to harmonize completely with the architecture of the Raadsaal. The architectural features of the building are, therefore, repeated in the furniture down to the smallest detail. Thus the fluted columns with Ionic capitals are repeated in the panelling, the table legs, chairs, the jambs on either side of the fireplaces, and even in the bronze lamp-stands on the barrier. The pediment and cornice at the front of the building are repeated in the back of the president's chair and in some of the bookcases, side tables and fireplaces. The fluting of the pilasters inside the hail is extensively used in almost every piece of furniture. Likewise, there is free use of the lyre and rosette in the window panes ; the lyre as well as other motifs appear in the backs of chairs for the public, while the heads of the ornamental studs for the upholstery are rosettes. In addition to these decorations the following mouldings have also been used : the astragal beading ; the crenellated moulding ; the key-patterned band ; and the egg-and-dart moulding, symbolic of the cycle of life and death. It is a single storey sandstone building with a corrugated iron roof. Colours: Site Features: Condition: Good Construction Date: 1893 Materials: Sandstone : corrugated iron Catalogue: , No: No, Significance Category:

Damage Types: