

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/258/0023
	Site Name	Old Raadsaal, Church Square, Pretoria
	Date	
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-25.731340, 28.218370

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Site Category: Building

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: The old Government Building faces the south-western corner of Church Square; those who know Pretoria would find it difficult to imagine the square or the city centre without this building. It is the pride of the city and the architectural masterpiece of Sytze Wierda, Government Engineer and Architect of the former Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek. On 1S May, 1860, Pretoria became the seat of government of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek. In the same year a contract for supplying stone for building a government building was concluded with one F. Botes, but it was not until 1864 that a contract with architects was signed. A simple, elongated thatched house with end- gables and a verandah which stood at the corner of Plein and Paul Kruger Streets remained in use until 1889, when it was demolished to make room for the new Government Building or Raadsaal. The discovery of gold in the 1880's resulted in considerable prosperity in the Republic which now found itself financially able to erect government buildings worthy of an independent state. Shortly after his arrival as government architect, Sytze Wierda was instructed to design a new government building. In his own words, "the building was designed in the Italian Renaissance style. The section of the front has an 'Avant-corps' or porch with a balcony on top and a driveway underneath. The corners are built up in the form of pavilions with attached wings and between them, at the sides, there are back wings and also central section . . . " Wierda originally designed the building with only two floors and completed the design in April, 1888. The ground floor had several entrances. To the left of the main entrance were the two offices of the State President. Also on this floor there was a boardroom for the State Secretary, Commandant- General, Registrar of Deeds, Surveyor-General and the Government Attorney as well as archives, waiting rooms and store-rooms. On the first floor provision was made for a Council Chamber, a reading room, tea-room, washrooms and the offices of the Treasurer-General, Auditor-General, the Departments of Education and Public Works and the Inspector of Customs. In February, 1888, tenders were invited for erecting the buildings. On the recommendation of the Tender Committee a tender of J. J. Kirkness for R165 000 was accepted and work on the building started in February, 1839. President Kruger laid the foundation stone on 6th May. The doors and windows were made in Kirkwall in the Orkney Islands by Samuel Baikie and Company. They were brought by ship to Durban and by rail to Charlestown and finally by ox-wagon to Pretoria. In spite of this, the building progressed so fast that the Council Chamber and the adjacent rooms could be made ready in a temporary fashion for the annual session of the Volksraad (Parliament) of 1890. It was during this session that the Vòlksraad decided to establish a so-called Second Volksraad to comply with the demand of the large number of "Uitlanders" or foreigners for a share in the government. Consequently it was decided to add a third floor to the building to provide a chamber for the Second Volksraad. Wierda began to design the third floor immediately after the session and by December, 1891, Kirkness had completed the whole building. Telephone communications inside the building were installed by the contractor, P. C. Paff, and in 1892 the Government Building was taken into use without any formal ceremony. The total cost of the building was R310 000. Several further improvements and additions were made after completion. In 1893 a contract for installing electric lighting was awarded to Delfos Bros. and Company, who completed the work in 1896. In 1893, also, four striking clocks were installed in the tower. The machinery was ordered from the firm of H. Beijes of Hildesheim, Germany, and cost R1 048 including the cost of installation. These clocks were put into operation on 1st January, 1894. The four bells respectively bear the following inscriptions in Dutch: (1) "Staatspresident Paul Kruger". (2) "The right of nations is on our side and however weak we may be, our

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God is a righteous God". (3) "Our motto is the motto of our fathers : Unity. is strength". (4) "We solemnly repeat, our motto is Unity and reconciliation, our Freedom is Law and Order". The Government Building was not only built in times of stress, but it was to witness the highly dramatic events in the history of South Africa. On its balcony, in 1893 and 1898, S. J. P. Kruger was presented to the people as the State President of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek. In the chamber of the First Volksraad Great Britain's reply was awaited on 11th October, 1899, to the ultimatum of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek. On 6th June, 1900, the Union Jack was hoisted on this building when Pretoria was surrendered to the British Forces and in this building, too, the first step towards independence was taken when Lord Selborne opened the Transvaal Parliament under the Premiership of General Louis Botha on 21st March, 1907. On 31st May, 1910, the proclamation by which the South African Colonies became the Union of South Africa was read from the balcony. On 31st May, 1961, the building witnessed the presentation of the first State President of the Republic of South Africa, Mr. C. R. Swart, on the steps of the Palace of Justice on the opposite side of Church Square. Proclaimed 1968" Visual Description: Colours: Site Features: Condition: Construction Date: 1892 Materials: Catalogue: , No: , Significance Category:

Damage Types: