

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/069/0069
	Site Name	Dutch Reformed Church, Main Street, Paarl
	Date	23/07/2014 - 09:22
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-33.745935, 18.962713

Page No: 1 **SiteAutoID:** 28025

Site Category: Building

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: This historic cruciform church with its "strooidak" or thatched roof stands in High Street, Suider Paarl. It is the church of the third oldest Dutch Reformed congregation in South Africa, the congregation of Paarl, formerly known as Drakenstein. This congregation came into being at the insistence of the French Huguenots, led by their Minister, Pierre Simond, on 30th December, 1691. At first the services were held in a "hut or shed" of one of the French Huguenots who had moved to another farm. In December, 1694, the Council of Policy granted 41 hectares in Simondium to the congregation for a church. Here the first little church was built which, according to Valentyn, "looked more like a barn than a church". This church served the congregation for some years until the heavy rains caused it to deteriorate so badly that it had to be demolished. After much trouble and travail a start was made in 1717 with building a proper church on a portion of the site now occupied by the "Strooidak Church". The work was retarded by inadequate funds, heavy rains and trouble with the builder, with the result that the building could only be inaugurated on 2nd June, 1720. It was shaped like an elongated hexagon, 24 metres long and 12 metres wide. This building served the congregation for eighty-five years. A number of well-known ministers preached in it, including the Rev. P. A. van Alien, Salomon van Echten, Petrus van der Spuy and Robert Aling. Amongst the many who were baptized in it were the three Voortrekker leaders Piet Retief, Sarel Cilliers and Louis Tregardt. The congregation continued to increase. During the 1790's the question of enlarging the church was raised repeatedly in the Kerkraad or Church Council. Technical advice was sought from the master mason Phil Diehle of Cape Town who estimated the cost of adding two wings at 60 000 guilders but considered "that the present building is not worthy of the expenditure". In spite of this the Kerkraad resolved to enlarge the building but failed in their efforts to raise the necessary money. Besides the Rev. Aling, the driving forces behind the movement to enlarge the church were the deacons Jacobus Marais and Johannes Minnaar. Consequently, when these efforts failed, they proposed to the Kerkraad that a new church be built because the old one "has a misshapen appearance", was built of poor bricks, and according to expert advice was unsuitable for enlargement. At a meeting in December, 1799, the Kerkraad adopted this proposal and decided that the Congregation would have to finance the project itself. Efforts to raise funds were started immediately with the consent of the government. The deacons Marais and Minnaar began a house-to-house collection. They had two lists: one for contributions of money, the other for support in the form of the loan of slaves, wagons, etc. The Rev. Aling delivered a passionate appeal for support from the pulpit, and the response was so encouraging that the Kerkraad decided to begin building. It was decided in principle that the church would be shaped like a cross, the interior to measure 30 m long and 11 m across, and that the architect L. M. Thibault should be asked to design it. However, it was necessary to exercise the utmost economy from the start, so Thibault was asked merely to draw an "external" drawing of the building. When it was found that beams that were long enough for the roof's trusses could not be obtained locally and that yellow-wood beams were too expensive, Thibault was consulted again. He recommended that the roof be supported on pillars so that shorter beams could be used, but this would result in so many pillars that the congregation would not be able to see the pulpit, and Thibault was asked to reduce the number of pillars. Meanwhile bricks were made and thatching-grass was brought to the site and provision was even made for housing the artisans and workmen. In the midst of all this activity, the Rev. Mr. Aling died on 24th April, 1800. This event and the shortage of suitable timber caused the Kerkraad to stop the work temporarily. In August work was resumed, but Thibault's plan was abandoned and another

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design by Maj. Georg Conrad K  chler, a military engineer and former head of the Cape Artillery, was accepted. K  chler undertook to build the church for SO 000 guilders (R2 500). This decision annoyed Thibault intensely. He wrote "an impertinent and abusive letter" to the Kerkraad and claimed 250 riksdaalders for architect's fees. The Kerkraad considered this charge excessive, but Thibault sued the Kerkraad before the Council of Justice. Through the mediation of the Fiscal Thibault reduced his claim by 50 riksdaalders provided that the Kerkraad paid the legal costs amounting to 14 riksdaalders. In June, 1803, Kuchler handed over the building to the Kerkraad, but much remained to be done before it could be inaugurated. One of the outstanding items was the laying of the floor. At first the Kerkraad were prepared to lay a clay floor, but they eventually decided to use bricks after all. At last the pulpit, which had remained in use in the old church, could be transferred to the new one and the building was opened by the Rev. J. P. Serrurier of Cape Town on 28th April, 1805. In 1808 the iron gates, made by Jan Warnick, were erected and in 1811 the bell-tower was built. The exterior of the building has remained unaltered through the century and a half it has been in use. A few alterations were made inside. In 1828 a ceiling and two galleries were added and in 1838 a new pulpit donated by Miss M. M. Krynauw was inaugurated. In 1852 the church was enlarged by the removal of the wall between it and the vestry and a new vestry was added to the same wing. New benches were provided in 1878 and the gallery in the east wing was added in 1882. Some of the most notable ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church served in this church. Among them were the Rev. T. J. Herold (1823-1831), for many years the chairman of the Cape Dutch Reformed Synod; the Rev. G. W. S. van der Lingen (1831-1869), a champion of the establishment of the Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch and protagonist of the Paarl Gymnasium and of Easter services in South Africa; the Rev. Gilles van de Wall (1870-1895), moderator of the Cape Synod; the Rev. A. A. Moorrees (1895-1907) who later became a professor at the Theological College at Stellenbosch; the Rev. P. G. J. Meiring (1907-1921), the, first editor of De Kerkbode, and the Rev. D. G. Malan (1921-1930) who also was to become a professor at the Theological College, Stellenbosch. Through the work of these men the old church gained a very special tradition. But this church is not only rich in historical associations and traditions; it has a remarkable architectural quality. The interior is utterly simple, with a simplicity that evokes a hallowed mood; the exterior with its lovely white gables creates a true Cape atmosphere of rustic peacefulness which is enhanced by the tall oaks and the old-time vaults in the surrounding churchyard. Proclaimed 1966"

Visual Description: Colours: Site Features: Condition: Good Construction Date: 1805 Materials: Catalogue: Paarl, No: A11.15, Significance Category:

Damage Types: