

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/018/0198
	Site Name	Koopmans De Wet House, 35 Strand Street, Cape
	Date	Town
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-33.920937, 18.421303

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Site Category: Building

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: The first street to come into existence in Cape Town was Sea Street, directly opposite Van Riebeeck's Fort of Good Hope, along the beach to the west of the Heerengracht. In this street, which today is situated far from the sea and opposite the railway station, the well-to-do merchants of the seventeenth century had their 'large and tasteful houses. Here lived such well-known people as Henning Husing, Willem ten Damme and Jan Brommert. Here too was situated the land that Willem Adriaan van der Stel granted to a rich merchant, Reynier Smedinga, on which the Koopmans De Wet House stands. Tradition has it that Smedinga was a ship's captain who brought out building materials on his last voyage and built himself a lovely thatched house on this erf in 1701. About the middle of the eighteenth century double-storeyed houses with fiat roofs became fashionable; it was probably then that this house was given a second storey. At the end of the century the Cape experienced a kind spurious prosperity and Louis M. Thibault dominated the architectural scene. It was Thibault who rebuilt the front of the house in the so-called Louis XVI style and gave it its present form. The beauty of the house lies in the strict classical lines of the façade and its harmonious proportions. The fluted columns, the panels between the upper and Ower windows, and the pediment are the most striking features. The rooms are exceptionally large and the walls were finished in tinted plaster and decorated with conventionalized coloured representations of pilasters, mouldings and so on. The house was acquired by the De Wet family at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Hendri1 Justinus de Wet, of the third generation of this old Cape family, died at an early age in 1804. His widow bought this house in 1809 and lived in it for many years with her three sons. Eventually it passed to her eldest son, Johannes (1794-1875). He was an advocate and played an important part in public life. Among the many eminent men who visited 23 Strand Street during this period were Abraham Faure, John Truter, Christoffel Brand, Andries Stockenstrom, John Fairbairn and William Porter. Johannes de Wet was a collector of Cape furniture and of historical information about South Africa. Advocate de Wet had two daughters, one of them, Marie, married Johan Christoffel Koopmans who had come to South Africa after the Crimean War as an officer of the British-German legion ; the other sister, Margaretha, never married. After the death of Mr. Koopmans in 1880 the two sisters occupied the house and it was then that Marie Koopmans de Wet came to the fore as a political figure. She not only added to the already valuable collection of furniture in the house, but worked untiringly for the preservation of South African antiques and historical buildings. Indeed, it can be said that, acting on her own, she saved both the Castle in Cape Town and the Powder Magazine in Stellenbosch from being demolished. In the course of time her home became an influential salon, frequented by consuls, judges, ministers and members of parliament—as well as prominent personalities like Paul Kruger, Cecil John Rhodes, Sir John Truter and Presidents Brand, Reitz and Steyn who came to exchange ideas about matters of public importance with their talented hostess. After the death of Mrs. Koopmans de Wet in 1906 and of her sister in 1911, the house and its valuable collection of antiques were in danger of being lost to the nation. By means of public contributions and government support the house with its most important contents was purchased and, on 29th October, 1913, handed over to the trustees of the South African Museum at Cape Town as an annexe to that museum. The spacious rooms of the flat-roofed, double-storeyed building now accommodate a rich variety of priceless specimens of old Cape furniture and other objects. Today the house stands surrounded by modern business establishments. Of the outbuildings, only the slave quarters survive, and in the yard a 200-year-old grapevine still bears fruit to this day Visual Description: Colours: Site Features: Condition: Construction Date: Materials:

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Catalogue: Rennie, Vol 2, No: 050.06, Significance Category:

Damage Types: