

Archaeological Site Report	SiteNo	9/2/018/0127/002
	Site Name	Leeuwenhof, Hof Street, Cape Town
	Date	
	Project	
	CaseNID	
	Coords	-33.938184, 18.405758

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Site Category: Building

SiteComments:

Archive Import History: This important old Cape house, at present the official residence of the Administrator of the Cape Province, was built circa 1782 by J. C. Bräsler. 1693 Simon van der Stel granted land to Guillaum Heems, a Burgher Councillor at the Cape. House probably built by Fiscal, Johan Blesius who became owner in 1697. Blesius was a friend of WA van der Stel. Owned by Johan Christiaan Brasler (1764 -1788) who converted it to its current form. 1841-1848 owned by Christoffel Brand, Speaker and father to President of the OFS Republic, Johannes Hendrikus Brand. Owned 1848-1881 by Johannes Kotze MP and Mayor of CT and father of Sir John Gilbert Kotze, Judge of Appeal. Provincial Administration bought it in 1936'. Leeuwenhof, the official residence of the Administrator of the Cape Province, stands on the slope of Table Moun tam above Welgemeend. It is reached by an avenue of oaks that leads off Hof Street where the latter makes a bend. Partly hidden by high pine and wild-fig trees, against a background of Table Mountain and commanding an incomparable view over Table Bay and the distant hills beyond, it is one of the finest old flat-roofed, double-storeyed houses in Cape Town. It is not known precisely when and by whom this old building with its perfect proportions and excellent lines was built, but the romantic story of the estate goes back to the days when Simon van der Stel was Governor and is closely connected with the history of Cape Town and South Africa itself. On 22nd October, 1693, Simon van der Stel granted 12 hectares of this mountain land on loan to Guillaum Heems "to clear, plant, plough, develop and work" it. Heems was an enterprising and industrious fellow. On his arrival at the Cape he served as foreman to the well-known farmer Wouter Mostert but soon became a free burgher. He was granted the right to trade in wine and brandy. In this he was so successful that he not only became a man of standing in the small community but was able in 1691 to buy Bosheuvcl which had formerly been Van Riebeeck's farm and later became Bishops court. Heems called his newly acquired land on the outskirts of Cape Town "Leeuwenhof". He built one or two small buildings on it, but he was a business man and sold it after barely two years to Heinrich Bernhard Oldenland. Oldenland was an outstanding botanist and a competent and versatile official—he was the Master Gardener of the Company's garden, a surveyor and "superintendent of all roads, streets, bridges and buildings". For all these services kie was paid the meagre salary of 100 guilders a year and it was probably only with the help of his wife, the widow Blum, that he was able to scrape together 5 000 guilders to buy Leeuwenhof. Leeuwenhof, with its variety of indigenous trees— spekboom, wild-olive, wild-fig and yellow-wood—and numerous shrubs and plants, must have seemed like a paradise to Oldenland, but he enjoyed it for only eight months. He died suddenly in 1697 and his wife sold it to the Fiscal Joan Blesius for the same price as Oldenland had paid for it. Oldenland's short period of possession and his modest means probably precluded him from building a house. The Independent Fiscal Blesius was a very important official. Indeed, he ranked second to the governor but was independent of him. Furthermore, he was one of Willem Adriaan van der Stel's favourites who shared in the grants of land that this governor distributed so lavishly to officials Although Blesius obtained Leeuwenhof in 1697 he probably only went to live there in 1701. It must be assumed that he built the first proper house on the property. There is no proof of this but it may fairly be deduced from several pieces of indirect evidence. In the first place, the original deed by which the land was granted to Blesius, which is preserved in the Deeds Office, only indicates a few simple little buildings. Secondly, it can be taken for granted that an official of his standing would build a house for himself that accorded with his status. Thirdly, there is a drawing of a house in the upper right-hand corner of the owner's copy of the title deed of the land, probably drawn by Blesius himself, to

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show the siting and the style of the house he intended to build. This drawing shows “a single-storeyed house with a pitched thatched roof with hipped ends and three dormer windows in front”.’ After Blesius’s death, and that of his widow in 1714, the estate changed hands repeatedly until Johan Christiaan Brasler (Bresler) who had come from Copenhagen bought it for 14 000 guilders. Dr. Mary Cook, an authority on old Cape houses, considers that Brasler built the present main house, but again there is only circumstantial evidence of this. Brasler owned the place for 23 years; he was a market gardener and fruit farmer, and during the last years of his ownership of Leeuwenhof the Cape experienced a period of great prosperity. In 1781 a French garrison was stationed there to forestall a possible attempt at occupation by England, calls by visiting ships increased, fortifications were built, paper money was issued to meet expenses and the prices of all kinds of local products rocketed. Leeuwenhof was right on the spot of all this activity and Brasler undoubtedly shared in the boom. One of the results of the general prosperity was the building of large government buildings and pretentious residences. The contemporary traveller De Jong speaks of “a passion, a craziness, a contagious madness that has infected nearly everyone”. As far as domestic architecture is concerned, this “madness” gave rise to a particular expression, typical of the fourth quarter of the eighteenth century : double-storeyed houses with flat roofs, their aesthetic quality depending on almost severe lines, good proportions and delicately adjusted relationships between the constituent elements. In many cases, as in Koopmans de Wet House, the pitched roof of a single-storeyed building was replaced by a second storey and a flat roof. Leeuwenhof conforms so faithfully to the architecture of this period that one must conclude that Brasler was a party to this “madness” and that he converted the old house into the fine mansion it is today. Finally, the tremendous increase in the value of the property while Brasler was the owner can be adduced as proof that he built the house. He bought the property for 14 000 guilders and in 1788 his wife sold it for 51 000 guilders. This increase is greater than can be explained by the rise in the price of land, the doubling of the size of the property by the grant of an additional 12,8 hectares of adjoining mountain land, and the inflation of the paper money of the Cape. Several owners succeeded Brasler in quick succession until Johannes Zorn bought it in 1799 for 90 000 guilders. He came to the Cape as a soldier in 1782 and prospered rapidly both in the army and socially. In 1801 he was a major; he served on several Boards and Commissions, and in 1809 the Earl of Caledon appointed him as land- drost of the Cape district. Zorn was deeply interested in agriculture and cattle- farming. He turned Leeuwenhof into a pleasure garden, but also made it into a paying proposition. There were 35 000 vines and a great variety of fruit trees. To work the estate and market its produce he kept 33 male and six female slaves. Contemporary writers greatly admired Zorn’s hospitality and the beauty of his estate. Latrobe speaks of the house as “a good Dutch building delight- fully situated. The portico or gallery, running along the whole front of the building, has an espalier roof entirely covered with vines . . .”. Burchell refers to the house as “the very pleasant villa of Leeuwenhof”, while W. W. Bird speaks of “the house on celebrated gardens of Mr. Zorn”. In 1814 Zorn retired from the position of Landdrost to give all his time to Leeuwenhof, and he died in 1825. It must have been in this period that he built two out- buildings and the slave quarters behind the main house. One of the houses is now occupied by a member of the Administrator’s staff, while the other was privately owned for a time but has recently been restored to Leeuwenhof. After Zorn’s death his widow obtained an additional 41,1 hectares up against the mountain for a nominal sum of R20 to protect the water supplies, so Leeuwenhof became a farm of more than 77 hectares. During the nineteenth century Leeuwenhof passed through the hands of six owners. Two owners of special interest were Christoffel Joseph Brand (1841-1848) and Petrus Johannes Kotzé (1848-1881). Christoffel Brand, father of Jan Brand, the President of the Orange Free State, led the busy life of an advocate and politician. The restfulness of Leeuwenhof offered a welcome escape from the city, but he could devote little attention to the extensive gardens and financial setbacks also prevented him from doing so. Petrus Kotzé bought a small portion of Leeuwenhof facing Hof Street in 1839 and built a house on it which he called La Belle Alliance. Nine years later he acquired the whole farm, but he did not occupy the main house until 1854. He played an important part in public life. He twice served as Mayor of Cape Town and in 1859 he became a member of the Cape Parliament. His son, John Gilbert Kotzé, who

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later became a well-known judge in the South African Republic, spent his youth at Leeuwenhof and his memoirs give us a clear picture of the old estate. Petrus Kotzé restored Leeuwenhof to its former glory. The vineyards and orchards were resuscitated. Ornamental trees and flowering shrubs including some from the East were planted—such as hibiscus of several colours, oleanders, honeysuckle, myrtle, plumbago, hydrangeas and snow-wreaths. At the end of the nineteenth century the expansion of Cape Town began to make irresistible demands on the old estate. Large portions were sold off, so that of the original 80 hectares of ‘the garden Leeuwenhof’, barely two hectares remain. Fortunately the main house has survived virtually unaltered in spite of the constant changes in ownership. In 1936 it was acquired by the Cape Provincial Administration for the official residence of the Administrator and so the preservation of this fine historic old house was ensured. Proclaimed 1966 Visual Description: Colours: Site Features: Condition: Construction Date: 1782c Materials: Catalogue: , No: , Significance Category:

AdminComments:

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Damage Types: