

Mr Ontong, could I use some of this in our letter accompanying our application to SAHRA?

Motivation for declaration of Martin Melck warehouse on Bree Street

1. Introduction

We are sincerely appreciative of the fact that the National Heritage Resources Agency is in the process of re-assessing the grading of the three Lutheran Church complex buildings: the church and the two 18th century townhouses flanking it. However, the warehouse on Bree Street, extending from Strand Street to Waterkant Street, has not been included in the proposal for grading. We respectfully but urgently request that the warehouse be similarly declared.

Using the work of J. Hoge, who meticulously researched the early history of the German community in Cape Town, the construction of the VOC-era warehouse can be dated to between 1764 and at the latest 1770. It is one of only four surviving 18th century utilitarian buildings in Cape Town.

The warehouse unquestionably meets the criteria required for Grade 1 grading, which is that it should have qualities so exceptional that they are of special national significance.² We believe this to be the case.

2. Characteristics of the warehouse.

Measured against the criteria to be taken into consideration for grading, the following applies:

- 2.1 The complex of buildings on Block 8 (the Warehouse, the Martin Melck House (now Gold exchange), the Lutheran Church and the sexton's house (now Netherlands Embassy) occupy a VOC space that contributes to the sense of **cultural landscape in the historical core of the central city**, the only intact street block representing 18th century architecture in South Africa.
- 2.2 The Warehouse can claim **rarity** from the fact that it is the only remaining example in Cape Town of the type of warehouse built in the 18th century. (It should be noted that only 3% of the buildings in the core historical city were adjudged to fall into this category).
- 2.3 Together with the Martin Melck House, the Lutheran Church and the Netherlands Embassy it forms a fine **grouping of architectural merit linked by period and history**.
- 2.4 The four buildings together form a fine **urban setting** (as depicted in various early paintings and photographs).
- 2.5 [We do not claim that this category, involving a contribution to the quality of a square or other space of significance, applies in this case]

- 2.6 With respect to the **architectural criterion**, the warehouse, along with the Lutheran Church, represents the quality of construction of the buildings built by this prominent member of 18th century society at the Cape and outstanding benefactor to the Lutheran community,
- 2.7 The Warehouse is **more than 240 years old**, and substantially unaltered.
- 2.8 The Warehouse qualifies for study as archaeological and architectural site.
- 2.9 With the direct link between the building of the warehouse and the early history of the Lutheran congregation at the Cape, and their role in the freeing of slaves by baptising them, the Warehouse has **associational significance relating to the history of slavery** in South Africa.
- 2.10 The warehouse has its place in South African military history of the 18th century, since it housed first the Luxumburg regiment and thereafter the Meuron regiment in the first quarter of the 19th century, and was also briefly used as hospital for seamen.

3. Previous recognition of importance

The heritage importance of the Lutheran block including the warehouse has been previously recognised and underlines its significance

3.1 Accorded Category 1 status by Rennie et al, 1978.

These four buildings are accorded “Category 1” status in *The Buildings of Central Cape Town Vol. 1* (Rennie 1978:47). In a grading system less nuanced than the one currently used, this category indicated buildings of “national or local importance”. What is important to note is that this category was based on what is now termed intrinsic significance, coupled with associational, historical significance. This category was generally accorded to buildings worthy of National Monument status.

3.2 Declared as Urban Conservation Area

The declaration of the complete street block bounded by Buitengracht, Strand, Bree and Waterkant Streets as Urban Conservation Area by the City of Cape Town under section 108 of the Zoning Scheme [*Province of Cape of Good Hope Official Gazette* of 24 June 1990 (plan reference no. TPZ8246)] testifies to the City’s seeing the need to conserve it as a cohesive area (urban cultural landscapes) of heritage significance.

All four historic buildings on the Lutheran Church street block, one of which is the warehouse, display features (as defined in s 3) of cultural significance, either intrinsic or associational.

3.3 Assessment by Fransen

As recently as 2004, while revising his *Old Buildings of the Cape*, Dr Hans Fransen wrote “[The Martin Melck House] is one of a group of three (if no. 94 - the warehouse - is included, four)

18th-century buildings on Strand Street that is **of unique value to Cape Town.**” (Our emphasis)

And: “Even today the Lutheran group manages to dominate the upper half of Strand Street, in the face of modern buildings many times its size.”

We believe the warehouse to be of intrinsic significance which qualifies it for declaration as a Grade 1 site of national significance. We respectfully but urgently request that the warehouse be provisionally declared as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely

Marie-Lou Roux / Ian Pretorius / Hans Fransen