
GOVERNMENT NOTICES

DEPARTMENT OF ARTS AND CULTURE

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SOUTH AFRICAN HERITAGE RESOURCES AGENCY

DECLARATION OF “the graves of Charlotte Maxeke in Nancefield Cemetery”, Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph in Avalon Cemetery, Johannesburg AS NATIONAL HERITAGE SITES

By virtue of the powers vested in the South African Heritage Resources Agency in terms of section 27(5) of the National Heritage Resources Act, 25 of 1999, SAHRA hereby declares “the graves of Charlotte Maxeke in Nancefield”, Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph in Avalon, Johannesburg as National Heritage Sites.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The graves of Charlotte Makhomo Maxeke, Helen Joseph and Lilian Ngoyi is a tangible representation of their significant contribution to cultural development, education, cross-cultural exchange, African independent churches, advocacy of non-racialism, trade unionism, women’s rights and participation in resistance politics. The location within the historic cemetery of Nancefield and Avalon is on its own a significant tangible heritage representation that portray a sad chapter in South African history of forced removals, oppression of human rights, and destruction of historical urban settlement.

Charlotte Maxeke was born on 7 April 1874 at Fort Beaufort in the Eastern Cape. She comes from an area where a political elite of mission-educated Africans was beginning to emerge. After completing her missionary education she qualified as a teacher and taught in Kimberley.

Charlotte Maxeke was one of the first black South Africans to fight for the freedom of African women from oppression and exploitative conditions. She was South Africa’s first black woman graduate obtaining a B.Sc degree from the institute of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC) from the Wilberforce University in Ohio. Maxeke was influenced by AMEC and through her connections with the Ethiopian Church in South Africa became the organizer of the Women’s Mite Missionary Society in Johannesburg, and then moved to the Pietersburg district as a teacher and evangelist.

Charlotte mostly wrote in Xhosa regarding social and political circumstances of women and in a publication titled, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, she addressed the ‘woman question’. Maxeke was an early opponent of passes for black women; she organized the anti-pass movement in Bloemfontein in 1913 and in 1918 and founded the Bantu Women’s League of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC). She led a delegation that met Prime Minister Louis Botha to discuss the issue of passes for women. Maxeke participated in the formation of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) in 1920. Charlotte was involved in the organization of voting rights for women and was elected as president

of the Women's Missionary Society. Maxeke set up an employment agency for Africans in Johannesburg and was the first black South African woman to become a parole officer for juvenile delinquents. Maxeke was politically active throughout her adult life. She was known and honoured as, '*Mother of Black Freedom in South Africa May*' and with her husband used the famous expression, "*Mayibuye i Africa-Africa must come to her own*"; while an ANC nursery school was named after her in Tanzania. Charlotte Mmakgomo Maxeke died on 16th October 1939 in Johannesburg.

Like Lilian Masediba Ngoyi and Helen Joseph, Charlotte Mmakgomo Maxeke were also involved in the protests on the Witwatersrand about equality and better working conditions for women. The introduction of Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph into politics was co-incidentally through a General Secretary of the Garment Workers Union, Lillian as an ordinary factory worker and Helen as a Union official and a close friend. This was in 1952 during the National Defiance Campaign called by the Congress Alliance in terms of the African National Congress's 1949 Programme of Action.

During the following decades women organised and formed formidable opposition through the African National Congress Woman's League and the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW or FSAW), which were launched on 17th April 1954 in Johannesburg. Lilian Ngoyi was the first women who served on the executive of the African National Congress in the than Transvaal (Gauteng). Both Lilian Masediba Ngoyi and Helen Joseph were members of FEDSAW. Lilian Ngoyi was the president of the Federation of South African Women and together with Helen was pivotal in the formation of the Federation whose membership consisted of women from all race groups, trade unions and progressive political organisations. FEDSAW strove for non-racialism and equality for all South African women, while eradicating economic and social barriers impeding their empowerment. The major task of FEDSAW members was to ensure that pass laws were not extended to women by organising and taking part in protest marches. According to its constitution, the objectives of the Federation were to bring South African women together to secure full equality for all women, regardless of race, colour or creed; to remove social and legal and economic barriers; to work for the protection of women and children. Although the Federation acknowledged that the primary task at hand was the struggle for national liberation, it warned that the struggle would not be won without the full participation of women.

At the first conference a call was made for the enfranchisement of men and women of all races; equality of opportunity in employment; equal pay for equal work; equal rights in relation to property, marriage and children; and the removal of all laws and customs that denied women such equality. This led to the formulation of *The Charter*, which demanded paid maternity leave, childcare for working mothers, and free as well as compulsory education for all South African children. A major task of the Federation in succeeding years was the organisation of massive protests against the extension of pass laws to women. Together with the ANC Women's League, the Federation organised scores of demonstrations outside government offices in South African towns. The first national protest took place on October 27, 1955 when 2,000 women of all races marched on the Union Buildings in Pretoria, planning to meet with the Cabinet

ministers responsible for the administration of apartheid laws. The Minister of Native Affairs, Dr. Verwoerd under whose jurisdiction the pass laws fell, refused to receive a multiracial delegation. The biggest protest of women took place on 9th August 1956 when 20 000 South African women marched to the Union Buildings in Tshwane (Pretoria). This march was led by Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa and Sophie Williams –De Bruyn and culminated in the women's defiance campaign in 1956. The success of the demonstration challenged the stereotypes about women and their lack of political drive.

This gathering of women was unprecedented in attracting one of the largest crowds ever to gather at the Union Buildings. Helen Joseph established the Congress of Democrats, an organisation which organised and ignite militant White resistance to apartheid. In 1957, Helen Joseph and others were banned and their movement restricted to certain municipalities. She also became the first person in October 1962 to be placed under house arrest according to the Sabotage Act. Like Helen, Lilian Ngoyi's movements were also restricted.

The 9th of August was declared Women's Day to commemorate and celebrate the achievements of South African women as represented by Charlotte Maxeke, Helen Joseph and Lilian Ngoyi.

DESCRIPTION

The following property falls within the protected area:



Figure 1: Locality plan for Avalon Cemetery where Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph are buried (Courtesy of Alan Buff, Johannesburg City Parks)



Figure 2: Locality plan for Nancefield (Klipspruit) Cemetery where Charlotte Maxeke is buried (Courtesy of Alan Buff, Johannesburg City Parks)