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FIRST PHASE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSED BUSINESS DEVELOPMENTS ON ERF 24722, OLD PRESIDENCY, BLOEMFONTEIN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The South African Reserve Bank is planning new business developments on Erf 24722, Old Presidency, Bloemfontein, Free State. This property is a declared National Monument and is part of an important historical area of Bloemfontein.

Remains of previous activities occur in the form of corrugated iron buildings, concrete foundations, cement irrigation furrows, stone terrace walls and steps and several indications of rubbish dumps.

It appears that the majority of the features on the site originate from a nursery, which had been in operation from the 1930's or earlier. In some cases, it is not clear which of these structures are authentic or had been added later by the Free State Provincial Museum Service.

Large trees, which are clearly very old, form part of the layout behind the Presidency and the old stables and should be considered for preservation.

The whole area in general and the old stables in particular are in an advanced stage of neglect and should receive urgent attention.

The Old Presidency and environs represent the earliest European occupied area in Bloemfontein. It is therefore important to do a proper site investigation and to make provisions for regular site monitoring during the excavation and construction phase.

I likewise recommend that the archaeologist should be allowed to instruct officials who will be in charge of the work on the site, about the possible discovery of ash heaps and other cultural remains of former human occupation.

The area might include cultural and historical material dating from the early days of Bloemfontein. It would be essential, therefore, to clear the matter with the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) and relevant experts on the history of the Bloemfontein and the Presidency.

I also recommend that the planning of the proposed developments may proceed, providing that the necessary precautionary measures should be taken to prevent damage to any cultural remains.

No developments should be placed near the source of the spring. Care should further be taken to avoid damage or the destruction of the remains of ash heaps during the excavation and building phases at the site.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE PRESIDENCY

The history of the Presidency had been researched and described in detail (Roodt 1990, Botes 1993) and will therefore only be summarised here.

The piece of land near the natural spring where Johan Nicolaas Brits settled as a pioneer became the property and living place of Major Henry Douglas Warden, the first British Resident in the Free State in 1844. For successive periods ranging from 1854 until 1900, it became the Presidency during the reign of consecutive Presidents of the Orange Free State Republic.

Since 13 March 1900, Lord Roberts occupied the Presidency for some time during the British siege of Bloemfontein.

After his occupation of the property, Major Henry Douglas Warden erected his house there in 1846. According to historians, several outbuildings including a stable and wagon house were added with time. After Warden's dismissal, the house was also occupied by his successor Henry Green, the second British Resident (1852-1854).

With the institution of the Orange Free State Republic in 1854, the building became the First Presidency and official residence of the first two State Presidents of the Orange Free State. In 1861, during the time of M.W. Pretorius, the third President of the Free State, a new residence, known as the Second Presidency, was erected. Initially the house consisted of 11 rooms with later extensions being added. President Brand occupied the house from 1864 until 1886 when the Third Presidency was completed. Brand and his family occupied the premises until his sudden death in July 1888.

During the ensuing period, the Presidency was alternatively occupied by Presidents F.W. Reitz until he resigned in 1895, followed by M.T. Steyn in 1896, until the British occupation in 1900. After the War, the buildings were used for

various purposes, ranging from a hostel for scholars of the Eunice School for Girls, the Bloemfontein Teachers Training College and as offices for Provincial Government Departments. The building was restored to its former glory and in 1985, it became the Old Presidency Museum.

The premises at the back were alternatively used as a kraal for horses, vegetable gardens, and sports facilities, a nursery of the Public Works Department and more recently, a storage place for antique agricultural equipment.

A site map, dating from 1912 when the Old Presidency had been in use as a hostel by the Eunice School for girls (Map 3), provides an indication of the buildings and structures at that specific time.

An aerial photograph taken in 1968 (Fig.1) and a map of the town dating from 1971 (Fig.2), clearly indicate the features and structures used by the PWD nursery. These activities were discontinued in 1982 to make way for the Museum.

INVESTIGATION

Erf 24722 Bloemfontein, identified for business developments by the South African Reserve Bank, was visited on 27 March 2007. The Roodt Partnership (Architects), Bloemfontein, gave information on the locality of the proposed developments of the site. Vincent Khetha and Gabriel Tlhapi, local representatives of the Free State Branch of the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) accompanied me on 2 April 2007, during a second visit to the site.

The area was examined for possible archaeological and historical material and to establish the potential impact on any cultural material that might be found. The Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) is done in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA), (25 of 1999) and under the Environmental Conservation Act, (73 of 1989).

LOCALITY

A portion of Erf 24722 selected for development by the South African Reserve Bank (Map 2) is located behind the Old Presidency (Fig.3) and Stables (Fig.4). The land lies between President Brand Street in the east, St Georges Street in the south, Markgraaf Street in the west and Bloemspruit on the northern side (Map 1).

The following GPS coordinates (Cape scale) were taken on the outskirts of the proposed site (2926AA). Different points are indicated on Map 2.

A	29°07'08"S 026°12'54"E	Altitude 1392m (Fig.16).
B	29°07'10"S 026°12'54"E	Altitude 1400m (Fig.17).
C	29°07'07"S 026°12'53"E	Altitude 1401m (Fig.18).
D	29°07'06"S 026°12'53"E	Altitude 1397m (Fig.19).
E	29°07'08"S 026°12'49"E	Altitude 1398m (Fig.20).
F	29°07'05"S 026°12'51"E	Altitude 1387m (Fig.21-3).
IRRIGATION DAM	29°07'07"S 026°12'57"E	Altitude 1389m (Fig.36).
SWAMP CYPRESS	29°07'06"S 026°12'49"E	Altitude 1384m (Fig.62-3).

RESULTS

TREES AND SHRUBS

The whole area in general (Fig.31) and the vegetation (Fig.32) of the property in particular, is seriously neglected. Towards the southwestern corner, it has developed into an almost impenetrable thicket with a dense stand of undergrowth (Fig.20).

At two different places taps or stop cocks had been removed, resulting in the serious spill of water and the creation of a marshy swamp.

Various big trees, which include the following species, occur on the site. Although some of these trees appear to be very old, it is not clear if they would date as far back to the time of the Presidents.

The list given below contains only my own recording as assisted by Me Denise Krige (horticulturist) and should be investigated by an expert botanist.

Olive (*Olea africana*), (Fig.24),
 Karee (*Rhus lancea*), (Fig.27),
 Wit Karee (*Rhus viminalis*) (Fig.30),
 Witstinkhout (*Celtis africana*) (Fig.29),
 Soetdoring (*Acacia karroo*),
 Pepper Tree (*Shinus molle*) (Fig.25),
 Pine (*Pines harlepenis*) (Fig.26).

Honeysuckle (*Lonicera sp.*) (Fig.28),
 Oak Tree (*Quercus robor*) (Fig.31),
 Poplar trees (*Populus sp.*) (Fig.32),
 Privet hedge (*Ligustrum lucidum*) (Fig.33).

Several Lemon trees were planted in the courtyard at the stables (Fig.32), but must be of a later date after 1982 when the nursery had been transferred to new premises.

The horticulturist pointed out that the solitary Swamp Cypress tree (*Taxodium distichium*) across Markgraaf Street (Figs.62&63) had been part of the Presidency gardens in the past. This specific tree is a unique occurrence of its kind in Bloemfontein and is protected by a City Council resolution. During the building of roads in this vicinity the direction of Markgraaf Street was deviated to bypass the tree.

FINDS

Historical and cultural remains occur in the form of old corrugated iron buildings, concrete foundations, cement irrigation furrows, stone terrace walls, steps and pathways and the indications of several possible ash heaps.

From the investigation, it appears that the majority of the features on the site originate from a nursery that was in operation from as far back as 1939 or earlier. In some cases, it is not clear which of these structures are authentic or had been erected by the Free State Provincial Museum Service under Prof. P.J. Nienaber, the former Director.

Historical and cultural remains occur in the form of several structures and features.

1. The old stables with the grape vine (Fig.4).
2. Wagon house (Fig.5).
3. Locks are broken (Fig.6).
4. Toilets and kitchen ruined.
5. Floorboards are taken out (Fig.8).
6. All the electric wiring is removed.
7. Plaque of the National Monuments Council removed (Fig.12).
8. The bust of J.N. Brits (Fig.13).
9. Reservoir dam (1) erected in the time of Pres. Reitz, 1889-1895 (Fig.14).
10. Pear trees (Fig.15).
11. Caretaker's house (Fig.35).
12. Trees (Figs.24-33).
13. Lemon trees (Fig.34).
14. Water reservoir (2), tank and bore hole (Fig.36).

15. Building with concrete roof (Fig.37).
16. Prefabricated ablution (Fig.38).
17. Corrugated iron structures (Figs.39-44,64).
18. Stone terrace walls and steps (Figs.45-46).
19. Terracing (Figs.48-50) and concrete pathways (Fig.47).
20. Floodwater ditch (Fig.51).
21. Remaining portion of old dam wall (Fig.52).
22. Concrete features and irrigation furrows (Figs.53-54).
23. Concrete foundations and floors (Fig.56-7).
24. Discarded sandstone sculptures and waste material (Figs.58-60).
25. Ash heap (Fig.61).
26. Ceramic kerbstones rescued from the old rose garden (Fig.65).

DISCUSSION

The area is of special historical significance and is a declared National Monument (Government Gazette of the Union of South Africa no 2502, 4 February 1938, Notice no 199 of 27 January 1938 p.331).

The site is part of a very important historical setting and could be considered as “the birth place of the Free State” Province. People become suspicious and emotional about the implications of developments at the site. Residents are likewise shocked about the neglect of the site and buildings. It is expected by the interested groups that the preservation of the Presidency and stables will be the responsibility of “the government” or “the monuments people”. People also anticipate that the development of the site will ensure the restoration and maintenance of the Presidency and the stables (Gericke 2007a, 2007b, 2007c).

The area behind the Presidency and the stables had been used by the Public Works Department (PWD) as a nursery for a relatively long time. According to several respondents, the nursery could have been in operation for more than forty years, from 1939, or even earlier, until its demolition in 1982. The names of successive horticulturists who had been in charge of the nursery are mentioned by informants. Several of these people were contacted and interviewed personally or by telephone during the investigation, (See List of people interviewed).

People recall that the nursery was well equipped with steam heated hot houses and a number of other greenhouses of corrugated iron or wooden frameworks with Gundle plastic covers. During its peak, the venture had been very active in the production of plants and seedlings until the nursery was closed down and was transferred to its present locality in Krause Street.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The South African Reserve Bank is planning new business developments on Erf 24722, Old Presidency, Bloemfontein, Free State. The property is a declared National Monument and is part of an important historical area of Bloemfontein.

The whole area in general and the old stables in particular are in an advanced stage of neglect and should receive immediate attention (Gericke 2007a, 2007b, 2007c).

Large trees, which are clearly very old, form part of the layout behind the Presidency and the old stables and should be considered for preservation.

Not all the remaining features will be affected by the proposed developments. However, the drastic transformation will have a serious impact on the historical and cultural value of the Presidency and the stables.

The excavations and building activities could result in permanent damage and final destruction of the archaeological finds and cultural remains in the form of foundations, stone-walls and ash heaps on the site.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I recommend that the planning of the proposed developments may proceed, providing that all cultural remains should be avoided and that the necessary precautionary measures should be taken to retrieve as much of the cultural and historical material, that might be discovered as possible.

I likewise recommend that the archaeologist should be allowed visit the site prior to the commencement of any excavation work, to inform officials who will be in charge of the work on the site, about the possible discovery of ash heaps and other cultural material of former residents and the remains of foundations of earlier structures.

Please note that the area might include cultural and historical material dating from the early days of Bloemfontein. It would be essential, therefore, to clear out the matter with the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) and relevant experts on the history of the Bloemfontein and the Presidency.

No developments should be placed near the source of the spring. Care should be taken to avoid damage or the destruction of the remains of ash heaps during the excavation and building phases at the site.

MITIGATION

Provision should be made for regular site monitoring during the excavation and construction phase.

Officials who will be in charge of the work on the site should be educated about the possible discovery of rubbish dumps or object of cultural and historical significance.

In case of the discovery of any cultural or historical material in the form of an ash heap or any other objects, the work in the specific area should immediately be stopped for investigation by the archaeologist or any other specialist.

The archaeologist must be consulted before and during the planning and building stages of the development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank Anton Roodt and Mari Rossouw of the Roodt Partnership, Bloemfontein, for involving me in the project and Mr Louis Holtzhausen, Deputy General Manager, Facilities Management Division, South African Reserve Bank, Pretoria, for patience with the completion of the report.

I also owe gratitude to Mariaan Botes of the History Department, National Museum, Bloemfontein, for discussions and to Engela Wessels and the staff of the library at the National Museum, Bloemfontein, for access to the literature. Marcel van der Walt from the Bloemfontein Town Planning Department, supplied maps and aerial photographs.

Otto Liebenberg, Curator of the Nasionale Afrikaanse Letterkunde Museum (NALN), Bloemfontein, spoke at length about the times and achievements of Prof. P.J. Nienaber.

PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

I owe gratitude to the following persons who supplied information:

Mr Marthinus P Jansen van Rensburg, 22 Coales Street, Hospital Park, Bloemfontein. 051-522 2171. Former Deputy Director, Parks Department, Municipality of Bloemfontein.

Dr Lucas Stoltz, former Director, Free State Nature Conservation, 072 605 8919.

Dr Nico du Buisson, Chairman, Friends of the Old Presidency, 051-522 2493.

Mr Marius Krige, Horticulturist, formerly at PWD, Bloemfontein 082 411 7708.

Mrs Denise Krige, Horticulturist, formerly at PWD, Bloemfontein 082 570 5104.

Me Nancy Bialowons, former Curator, Museum Old Presidency 051-430 7179.

Mr Cliff Smith of Pretoria, former Head of the PWD Nursery 012-430 3739.

Mr PW Dry former head PWD Nursery, 12 Burger Street, Pretoria North,
012-546 2774

Mr Rupert Marais Tiptop Nursery, Pretoria, 012-542 2103.

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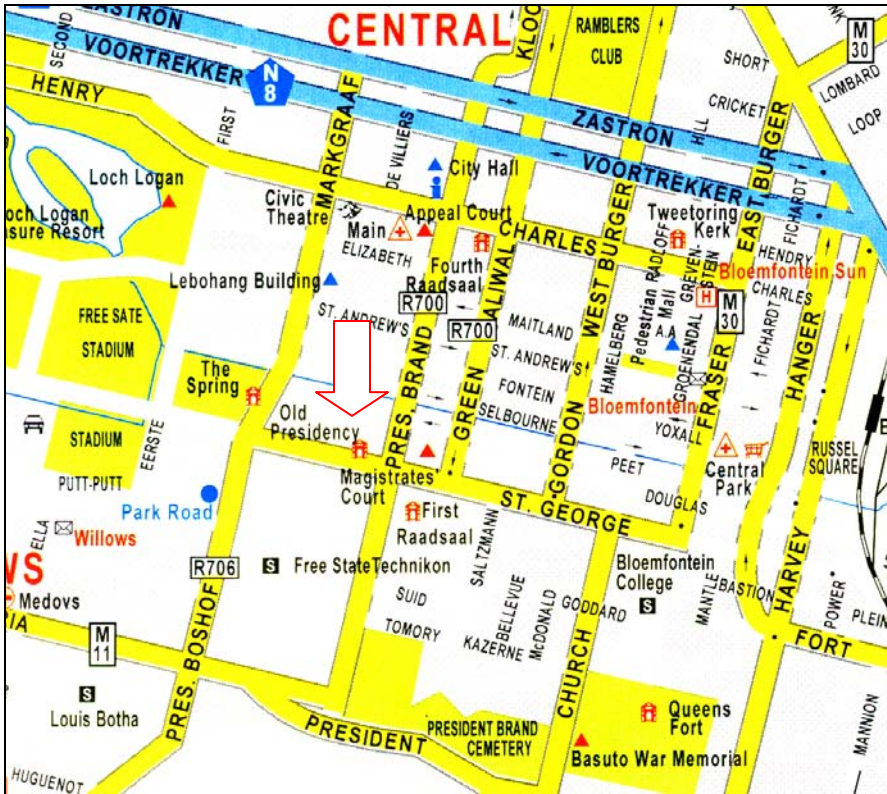
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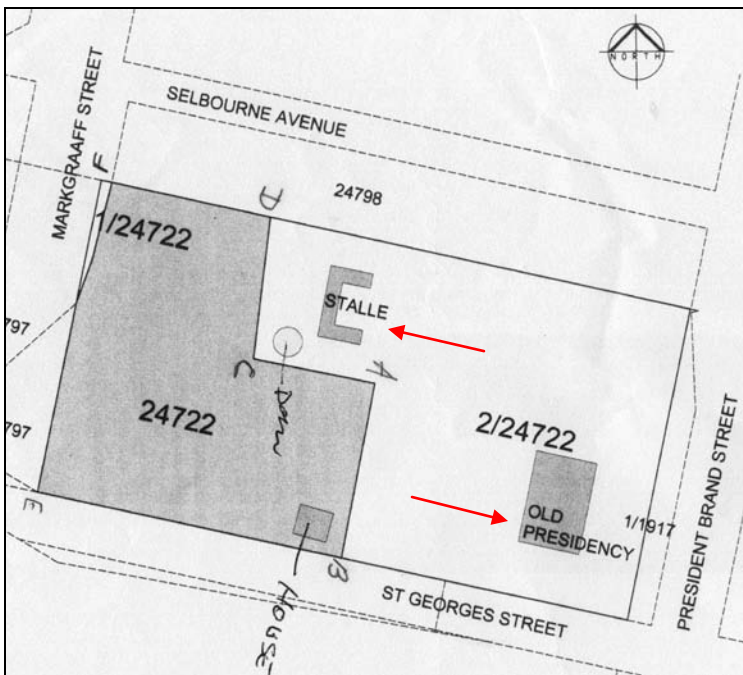
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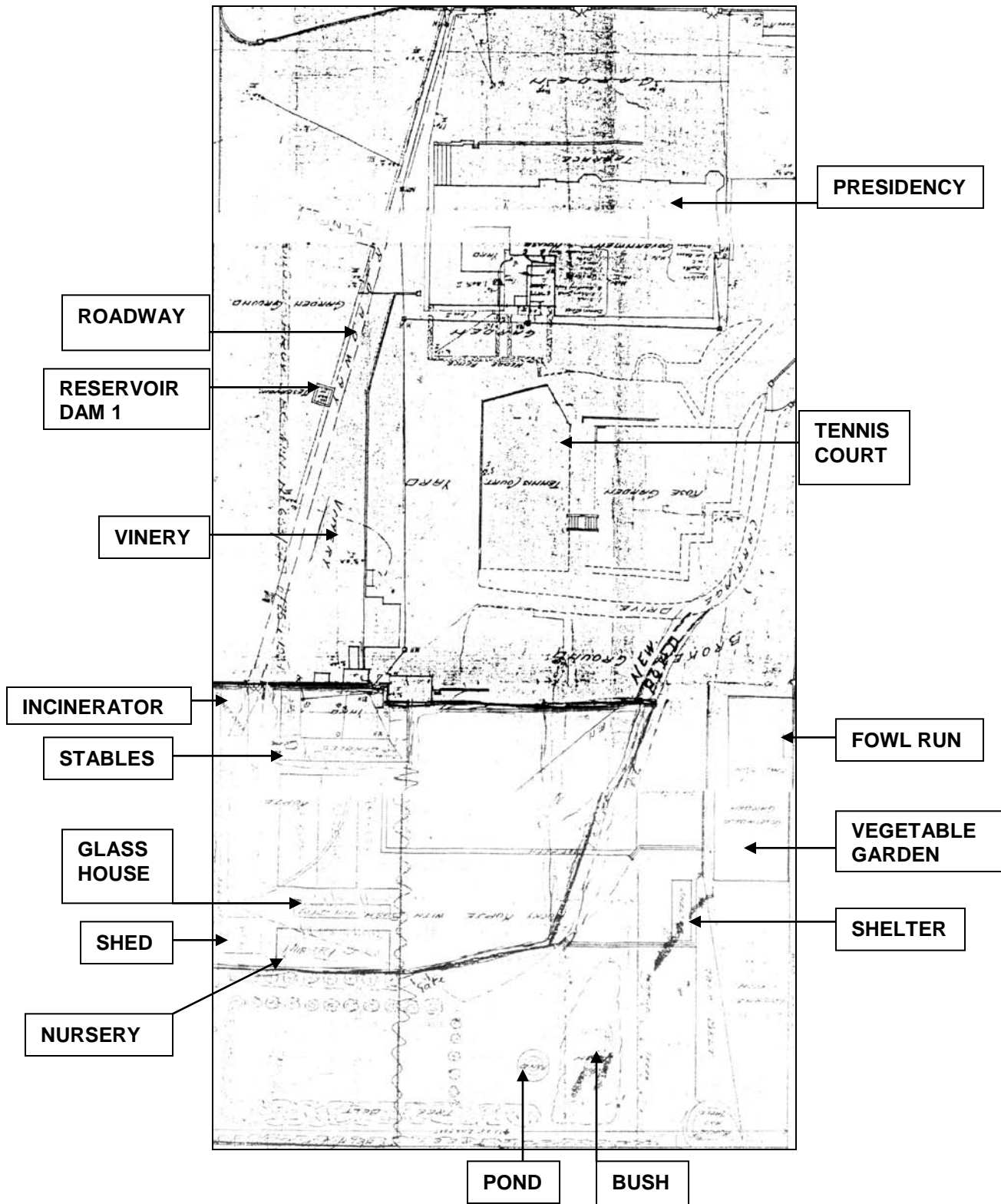
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS



Map 1 The Central business area of Bloemfontein showing the locality of the Old Presidency.



Map 2 Layout of the planned developments on Erf 24722 in relation to the Old Presidency, the stables and other features on the site. GPS points are indicated from A-F.



Map 3 Site plan (1912) Eunice High School Hostel stand No 1917 & 1918 (Free State Archive Box PWD 1/2 No 6003/8 File B5/495).

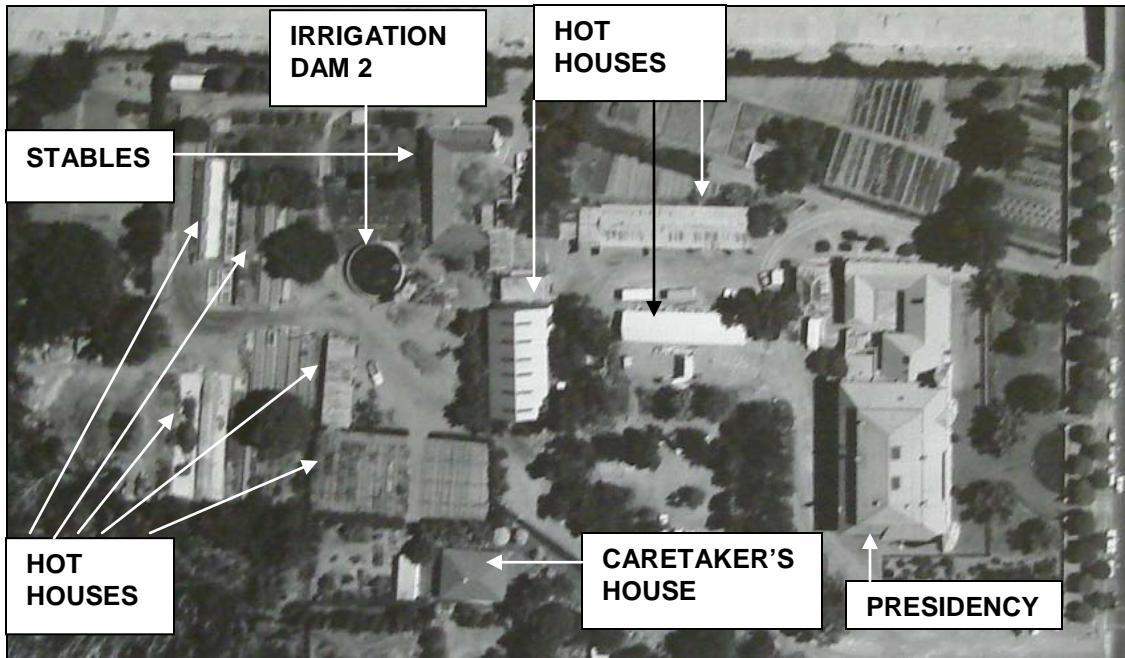


Fig.1 Aerial photograph of the Presidency taken in 1968 (Bloemfontein Townplanning Dept.).

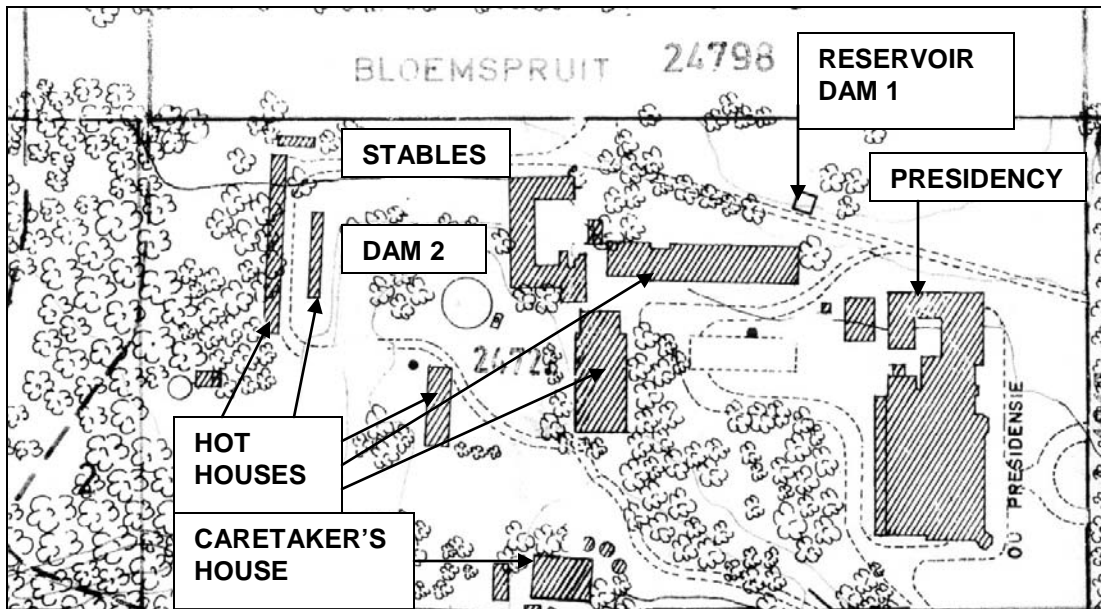


Fig.2 Plan drawing of the site dating from 1971 (Bloemfontein Townplanning Department).

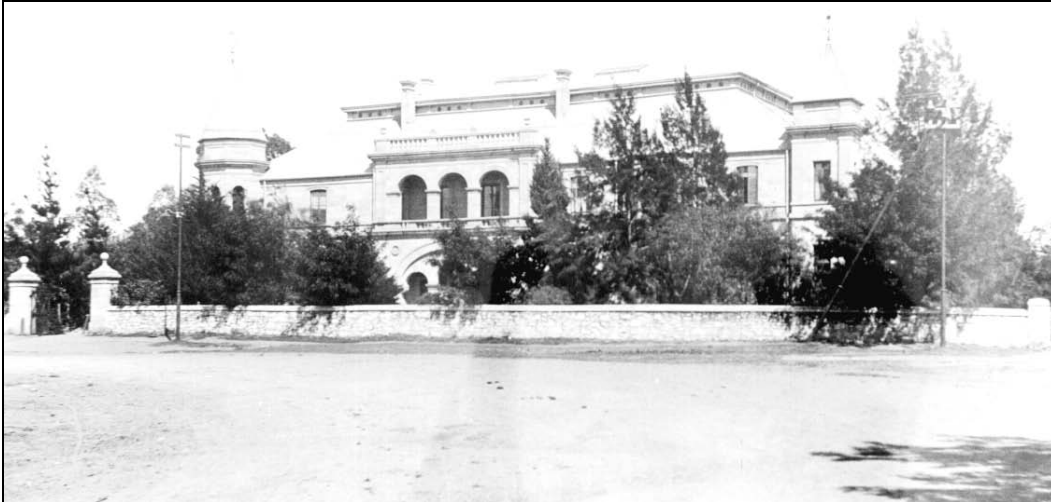


Fig.3 The Presidency, Bloemfontein, photograph taken by an unknown British soldier, Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902 (J.C. Looch Private Collection).



Fig.4 The Stables behind the Old Presidency with the grape vine at the front.



Fig.5 Part of the original Stables, which could have been the coach house.



Fig.6 The building and stable doors are still in good order.



Fig.7 Interior of the Stables. Floorboards are vandalised by roaming homeless persons.



Fig.8 The extent of the vandalism is becoming serious.



Fig.9 Interior of the Stables facing towards the kitchen.



Fig.10 Detail of the interior ceiling of the stables.



Fig.11 North wall with kitchen back entrance.



Fig.12 Position of the National Monuments plaque possibly removed by vandals.



Fig.13 Bust of Johan Nicolaas Brits, first owner of the land near the fountain.



Fig.14 Reservoir dam 1, allegedly built during the time of Pres. Reitz (1889-1895).



Fig.15 Some of the pear trees had allegedly been planted by Johan Nicolaas Brits.



Fig.16 Point A at the base of an earlier hot house.



Fig.17 Point B near the caretaker's house.



Fig.18 Point C near the water reservoir dam.



Fig.19 Point D.



Fig.20 Point E.



Fig.21 Point F in the corner between Markgraaf Street and Bloemspruit.



Fig.22 Point F at the crossing of Markgraaf Street and Bloemspruit.



Fig.23 Point F. View along Markgraaff Street towards the Park Road Police Station.



Fig.24 Olive (*Olea europaea sub sp. africana*).



Fig.25 Pepper Tree (*Shinus molle*).



Fig.26 Pine tree (*Pines harlepenensis*).

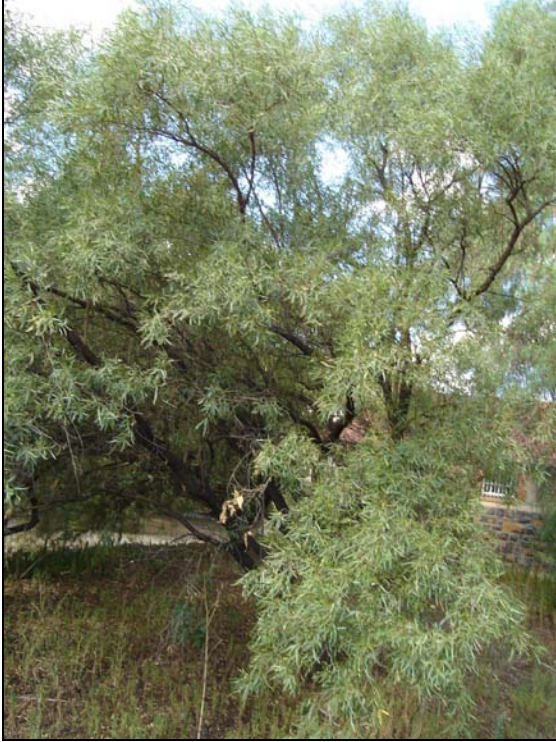


Fig.27 Karee (*Rhus lancea*).



Fig.28 Honey Suckle (*Lonicera* sp.).



Fig.29 Witstinkhout (*Celtis africana*).



Fig.30 Wit Karee (*Rhus viminalis*).



Fig.31 Fallen Cape Oak Tree (*Quercus robor*).



Fig.32 Thick stand of young Poplar Trees (*Populus sp.*).



Fig.33 Privet Hedge (*Ligustrum lucidum*) in the northwest corner of the property.



Fig.34 Lemon Tree at the stables.



Fig.35 Caretaker's house on the premises of the Presidency.



Fig.36 Water reservoir dam 2 and tank installation at the borehole.



Fig.37 Structure of unknown purpose.



Fig.38 Prefabricated asbestos ablation block.



Fig.39 Corrugated iron building arranged as a smithy by the Free State Provincial Museum service.

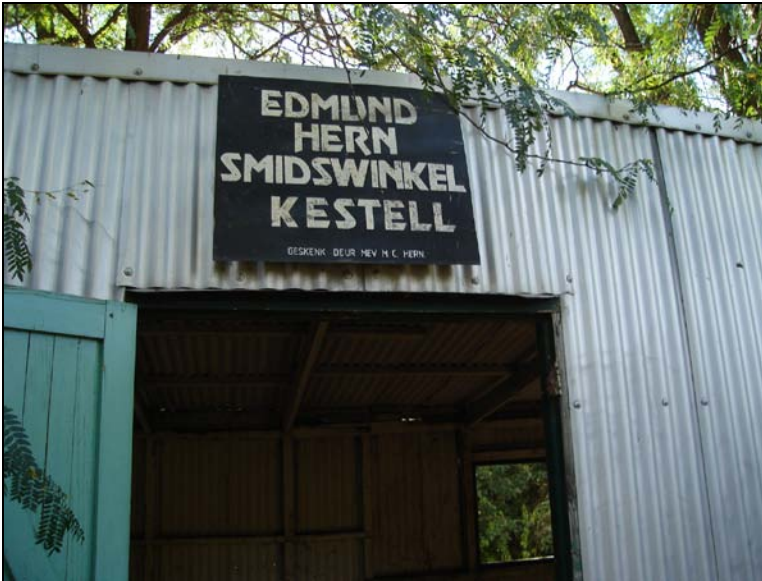


Fig.40 Notice above the door indicating the origin and purpose of the display.



Fig.41 The old bellows that had been part of the displays is still inside the building.



Fig.42 Small corrugated iron structure used as rest room by labourers at the nursery.



Fig.43 Corrugated iron shed near the water reservoir at point C.



Fig.44 The original brick paved floor of the shed is still intact.



Fig.45 Concrete steps and stone terrace walls behind the kitchen (stables).



Fig.46 A very prominent stone terrace wall behind the stables



Fig.47 Terrace stone-wall and concrete pathway, had been part of the nursery.



Fig.48 Stone-walled terrace next to and running behind the stables.



Fig.49 Dolerite terrace steps in back yard.



Fig.50 Dolerite terrace wall near large concrete slab.



Fig.51 A prominent floodwater ditch enters the site at the south western corner.



Fig.52 Rainwater forms a permanent pool against the old dam wall.



Fig.53 This concrete feature known as a “mist-propagation bed”, part of the PWD nursery.



Fig.54 Concrete paving and irrigation furrow.



Fig.55 Concrete irrigation furrow.



Fig.56 Rim of a concrete floor of unknown origin.



Fig.57 Large concrete floor that had been part of the nursery.



Fig.58 Discarded sculptured sandstone blocks were part of the frieze of the Fourth Raadzaal.



Fig.59 Concrete block of unknown purpose and origin are scattered on the ground.



Fig.60 Some of the concrete blocks have been numbered.



Fig.61 An ash heap with coal cinders and bone fragments on the surface.



Fig.62 The Swamp Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*) across Markgraaf Street that used to be part of the garden of the Old Presidency.



Fig.63 The Swamp Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*).



Fig.64 Mrs Denise Krige with the shed that used to be her office at the PWD nursery at the old Presidency. The structure was moved to the War Museum of the Boer Republics during the dismantling of the nursery.



Fig.65 Ceramic kerbstones rescued from the old rose garden at the front of the Presidency.