

The Macro Scale

The earliest records of Pretoria

The earliest written records of Pretoria,¹ date back to the early 1800s and were compiled by various white travellers comprising hunters, traders, scientists and missionaries. Prior to that, Pretoria's history was transmitted orally in accordance with the tradition and custom of the indigenous black people that inhabited the area. According to legend, the Bakwena, a western Sotho people, were the first to settle along the banks of the Apies River .

The founding of Pretoria

The Great Trek began in 1835 with the Transvaal² Boer's departure from the Cape Colony. Their first settlements in the Transvaal include Klerksdorp in 1838 and Potchefstroom in the same year, followed by Lydenburg in 1849. It was only in 1855 that Mathinus Wessel Pretorius³ founded Pretoria. He later became the first president of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek , which was founded with the construction of a church on

1. Andrews & Ploeger (1989:2)

2. Today, a geographical area stretching from the Limpopo in the north to the Vaal in the south, with its east and western boundaries defined by Mozambique and the Kalahari Desert respectively (Fisher, Le Roux & Maré 1998: xvii)

3. Mathinus Wessel Pretorius (1819-1901)

what is still known as Church Square. In 1860, Pretoria became the seat of government of the ZAR.⁴

Church Square

The original church, completed in late 1856, was built by William Skinner and the brothers Louis and Lionel Devereux. Its walls were built of mud with “crow stepped gables” and the roof was thatched, like the other buildings surrounding the square. It seated 700 people. However, it burned down in 1882 and was replaced with a Victorian gothic structure. Yet, within 20 years, the tower became unstable and the whole church was pulled down to make way for the increasing traffic at the major intersection at the site.⁵

The heart of the city

The founding of Church Square was primarily to accommodate the farmers, who on a quarterly basis congregated at Church Square for several days for *nachtmaal*.⁶ The space, therefore, was large enough to accommodate farmers and their families, ox wagons and any other accompanying animals. The square became the heart of the settlement and thus, the road leading to the square derived its name: Church Street.⁷

Pretoria's naming Tradition

According to Andrews and Ploeger,⁸ Pretoria had a naming tradition which related to prominent figures and the specific uses of space within the city:

“These names were in the past not given, as often today is the case, as the result of a whim or fad, but because it expressed something that belonged to the place or thing.”

Hence, *Marktstraat*,⁹ today known as Paul Kruger Street,¹⁰ derived its name. Paul Kruger Street forms the north-south axis of the city grid and Church Street, which intercepts Paul Kruger Street at Church Square, forms the east-west axis. (refer to figure 5.01)

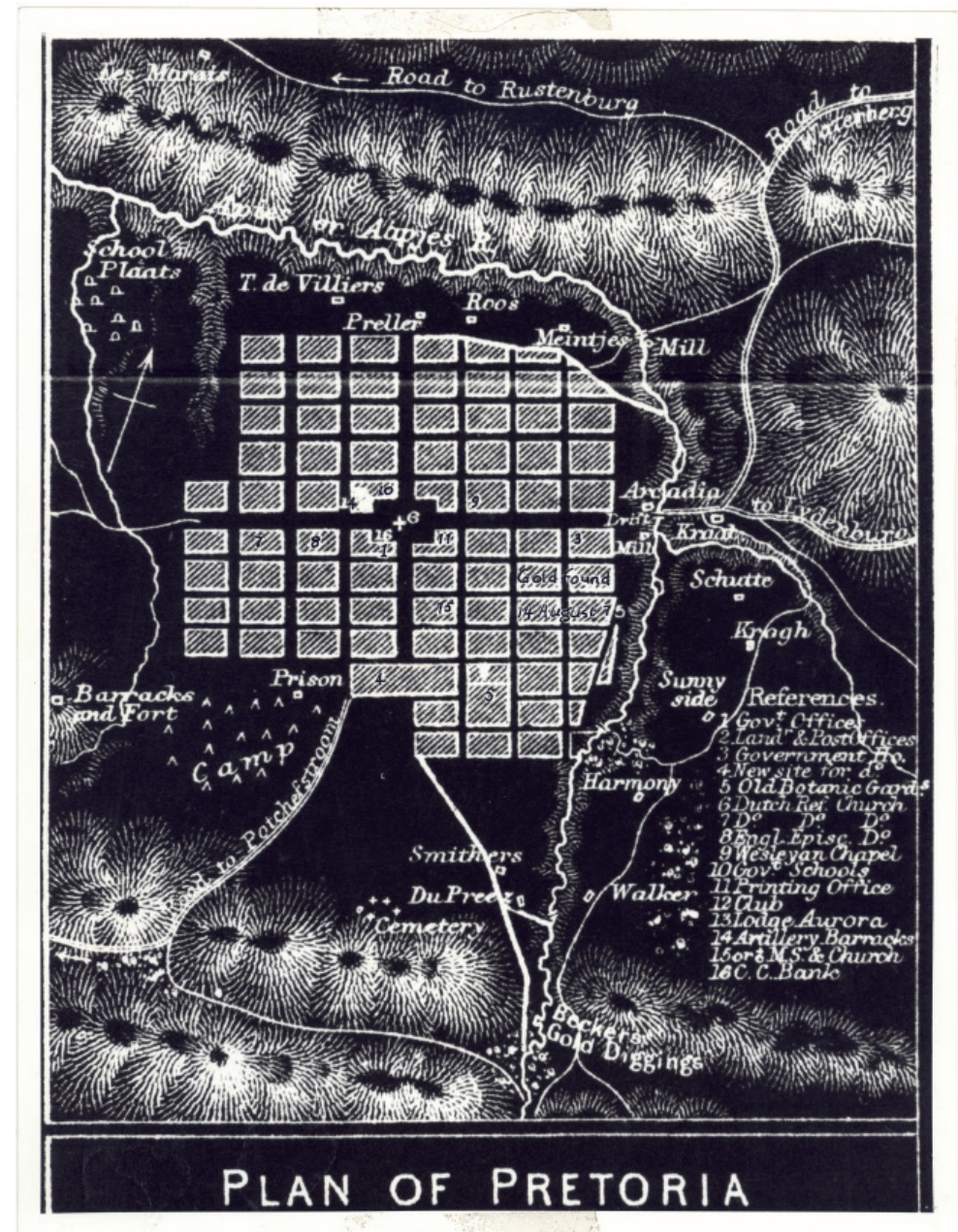


Figure 5.01. Plan of Pretoria dating from approximately 1870s

- 4. Andrews & Ploeger (1989:5-6)
- 5. Allen (1971:22)
- 6. Afrikaans for holy communion
- 7. Holm in Fisher, Le Roux & Maré (1998:59)
- 8. Quote by Eugene Nielen Marais (Andrews & Ploeger 1989:1)
- 9. Market Street
- 10. According to Andrews & Ploeger, the street name changed during Voortrekker celebrations to commemorate President Stephanus Johannes Paul Kruger (1825-1904)

Holford's Government Boulevard

Eaton, who not only founded the Pretoria Architectural Society (PAS),¹¹ but found himself at the forefront of the organisation, brought about an awareness and concern for the growth and development of the city of Pretoria. His active role and persistence is referred to by Harrop Allin¹² as “Eaton’s crusade for the architectural well-being of the city”. It was on the suggestion of the PAS that the city council invited the British town planner Sir William Holford to visit South Africa and make a proposal for the city in the 1930s.¹³

Holford identified the intersection of Struben Street and Paul Kruger Street, with its impressive views of the Union Buildings and Church Square, and proposed that all government departments should be located along this symbolic east-west axis. The proposed government boulevard terminated at the intersection with a large park. Holford’s proposal was never executed and, until recently, remained on the city council’s agenda for the city. In spite of the changes, several government departments continue to locate themselves on the symbolic east-west axis.¹⁴

It is at the intersection of this historic north-south axis on Struben Street that the selected site is located.

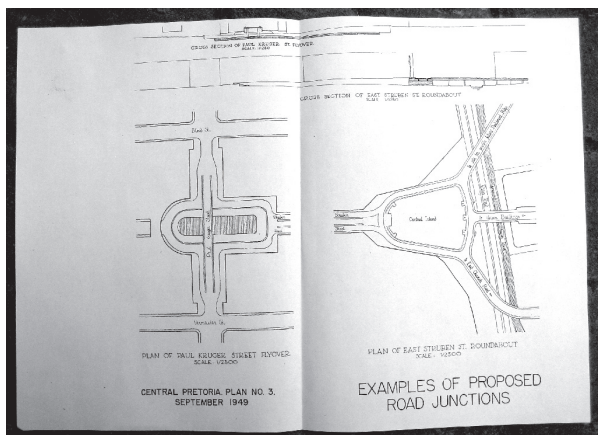


Figure 5.02. Example of proposed road junctions

The Transformation of Pretoria

Designed to achieve urban unity, Pretoria was laid out on a rigid orthogonal grid in contrast to the surrounding natural environment. Symbolic references to its surrounding natural environment suggest the Afrikaner’s interpretation of the *genius loci*.¹⁵ It was the Dutch engineer and architect Sytze Wopkes Wierda,¹⁶ appointed as the head of the Department Pulieke Werken (PWD) in 1887, that set the transformation of the nachmaaldorp into the capital of the republic in motion.¹⁷

Architectural Context

The emergence of the third endemic architectural expression, referred to by Fisher¹⁸ as “The Third Vernacular”, came about in Pretoria in the 1930s and 1940s. The first vernacular, being the Cape Dutch Style, which as the name suggests originated in the Cape, was an adaptation of the colonial style. It was followed by the second vernacular, the adaptation of 19th century English Georgian architecture in the Eastern Cape. Pretoria Regionalism, the third vernacular, is therefore the regional adaptation of the International Style. It was especially influenced by Le Corbusier’s climatic responsiveness of the *brise soleil*, as seen executed in South America.¹⁹ The emerging style responded to its contextual restraints in terms of: climate, available materials, site, defence, economics, religion and in some instances, the cultural expression of a community .

Characteristics of Pretoria Regionalism

The following characteristics define Pretoria Regionalism:²⁰

- “Traditional plan-forms
- Rustic brick, either directly as clinker or whitewashed stock
- Low-pitched iron roofs
- Deep shaded eaves and verandas
- Sun-shy windows
- Sensitivity to landscape and land features
- An architecture responsive to climatic constraints”

11. The PAS was founded in 1945 and is known as the Pretoria Institute for Architecture (Pretoria Institute for Architecture 2007: www.pia.org.za)

12. Harrop Allin (1975:57)

13. Harrop Allin (1975:55)

14. Barbir 2007: personal interview

15. Holm in Fisher *et al* (1998:61)

16. Wierda’s main contribution was the introduction of brick, a Dutch tradition that was introduced due to the availability of clay in Pretoria (Holm in Fisher *et al* 1998:66)

17. Holm in Fisher *et al* (1998:66)

18. Fisher in Fisher *et al* (1998:123)

19. Fisher in Fisher *et al* (1998:136)

20. Fisher in Fisher *et al* (1998:125)

Today, the Pretoria inner city is scattered with predominantly modern buildings. (refer to fig. 5.03 - 5.10)

Materials used

According to Fisher,²¹ Pretorians were generally not as wealthy as their Johannesburg counterparts, resulting in careful material selection. It was by means of Wierda's influence from within the PWD that the use of brick became widespread. The Scottish contractor, John Kirkness²² established the brick-making tradition in Pretoria, which was later used throughout South Africa. Roofing material, originally consisting of thatch, eventually gave way to corrugated iron. It was the inverted box-rib (IBR) sheet, patented by Thomas Warren that "became part of the Regionalists' repertoire of materials". Furthermore, standard steel window frames determined the module of Pretoria buildings at the time.

These characteristics prevailed in the work of local architects such as Gerhard Moerdyk, Gordon Leith, Norman Eaton and Gordon McIntosh.²³

21. Fisher in Fisher *et al* (1998:129-132)

22. Kirkness' bricks were used to build the Grootte Schuur Hospital in Cape Town and the post office in what is known as Harare today (Fisher in Fisher *et al* 1998:129)

23. Gerhard Moerdyk (1890-1958), Gordon Leith (1886-1965), Norman Eaton (1902-1966) & Gordon McIntosh (1904-1983)

24. Fisher in Fisher *et al* (1998:140)

25. Holm in Fisher *et al* (1998:72)

Pretoria's character vs. that of Johannesburg

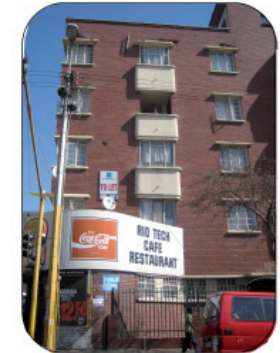
The Afrikaner's strong connection to the earth and landscape through their agricultural heritage and history led to a climatically sensitive and contextual architectural response.²⁴ While Pretoria developed according to its socio-religious values, Johannesburg established as a mining settlement and grew into a city driven by entrepreneurship and modern rationale.²⁵ This mutually supportive difference in character is still evident today, allowing Pretoria to function as the administrative and governmental capital, while Johannesburg remains the commercial capital of Gauteng.



5.03



5.04



5.05

Figure 5.03: Hallmark and Koopkrug Buildings

Figure 5.04 Poynton's Building

Figure 5.05 NHG Building

Figure 5.06: Sammy Marks Centre

Figure 5.07: Wachthuis

Figure 5.08: Nederlands Bank, Pretoria

Figure 5.09: Woltemadegebou

Figure 5.10: Meat Board Building



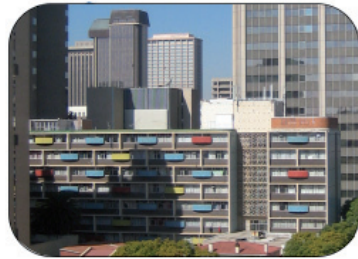
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5.06



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5.10