



will be more immediately revealing about the people. Of course, even the term 'Afrikaner' is contentious, but in the setting of the University of Pretoria's early days we will take it to mean those who used Afrikaans as their language of preference and identified themselves with the cause of group identity and Afrikaner advancement in the institutions of state, church and academia.

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2 Early nationalism

The idea for a Voortrekker monument on campus housing a library dedicated to Afrikaans literature had already been mooted in 1920, but lost momentum. The project was revived in 1934, and Moerdyk, who was probably instrumental in this, was given the commission. The Library was built by public subscription, and the main subscriber, the mining and forestry magnate Hans Merensky, lent it his name. The second-biggest donor was Pretoria's Jewish community, a fact Moerdyk acknowledged in the Star-of-David screens around the gallery. Ironically, Moerdyk's brother-in-law, Oswald Pirow, who served as Minister of Defence in the 1930s, was a staunch Nazi supporter and once proposed to buy bombers for the South African Air Force from Hitler.

The Library building foreshadows the Voortrekker Monument in many ways, both in form and materials. The grey granite exterior presents a very stolid appearance. The building is set back from the transverse axis of the campus, allowing for a view of its shallow saucer dome and for a gathering area in a forecourt. The battered walls create an illusion of greater height and lend a remarkable monumentality to a relatively small structure.

The entrance portico is pinched, more like the stoep of a traditional Boer house, but the interior is one of Moerdyk's more successful secular spaces, bilaterally symmetrical with ancillary rooms off a central domed area. A gallery at first-floor level is concealed behind screens, which fill the windows in the arches beneath the dome. Originally the ground floor had a central circular cut-out to the basement, and a Foucault pendulum swung from the dome and inscribed its path beneath. Like the oculus of the Voortrekker Monument, this gave the local a universal, even cosmic dimension. Unfortunately the pendulum has now been removed and the floor closed over. The invented Corinthian capitals of maize leaves and cobs provide a particularly local flavour. In spirit and motif the

Merensky Library, west elevation.