



The Standard Bank and Grand Hotel (Photo G.B.&Co.) Notice the open 'horse tram'. This photo was taken about 1903

PRETORIA FIFTY YEARS AGO

III

By C. J. BEANES

In the previous issue Mr. Beanes described Pretoria's transport system, sanitary system, drainage and entertainment offered by a city with its own traditions and peculiar way of life. The value of Mr. Beanes' contribution lies in the fact that he is able to vividly describe the past with a clarity and comprehensiveness not always found in ordinary eyewitness accounts. In this article he again takes us back to the Pretoria of 1900 to 1910.

As there was no Shop Hours Act, it was usual for the shops to remain open on Saturdays until 9.00 p.m. or later. I do not think that much actual business was done but it was an evening out for the entire family who would promenade up and down Church Street, visit the shops and chat with friends. Both sides of Church Street were packed and it was looked upon as a regular social gathering—but never to the extent of the gatherings on the eves of Christmas and New Year when the whole town appeared to assemble on Church Square. When the clock on the Raadzaal chimed at

midnight hand clasped neighbour's hand and all joined in singing Auld Lang Syne. The beverage of Scotland was only 6s. 6d. a bottle and was very much in evidence at these gatherings.

These celebrations on Church Square lost their sociability and charm when squirters, squibs, paper tassels on wooden sticks and other annoyances and dangers were introduced.

On Saturday nights a band played in the Market Hall but, notwithstanding the crowd promenading round and round, the atmosphere of the place was dismal. Such a building cannot be properly illuminated and it was much more cheerful outside in Church Street.

The post office also remained open for all classes of business until 8.00 p.m. on Saturdays and the clerks were kept busy.

The layout of Pretoria was fixed by A. F. du Toit in 1855, but the appearance of the town has been changing ever since, but never, I imagine, to the same extent as it has during the last seven years.

In 1902 few buildings were of more than one storey yet some of those one-storey premises still remain. The residential part of the town has gradually been pushed further and further away from the centre, and there are no longer private dwellings behind the Palace of Justice or at the south-west corner of Church and Koch Streets as was the case fifty years ago. For many years later the Old Club Boarding House stood on the site now occupied by the Reserve Bank.

Church Street, east of the Square, has been largely rebuilt, but some of the old premises still survive as the following list will show: Balzam, the jeweller's shop at Nos. 216 and 218, and the bottle store next door at Nos. 220 and 222; only the western half of A. W. Davis at 230 belongs to the 19th century when it was the office and printing works of "The Press"; Dodo and Holdens, two shoe stores; Gemeken, the jeweller; and the Stag bottle store at Nos. 272, 274, 276 and 278 have had new fronts but remain structurally the same; and the same applies to Edworks Shoe Store at 286 and also Nos. 292 and 294, now occupied by Folkey and Jacqueline. Beckett's departmental store at 298 has been altered several times but the two long side walls and roof remain.

Beyond van der Walt Street there are four shops, the Natal Fisheries at 314; Indian shops at 316 and 318 and Central Cycle House at 320, which form one two-storey building and are unaltered; while at the Indian store, No. 336 is a building of which the Director of the Publicity Association has a photograph taken in the late 1880's. So between Church Square and Prinsloo Street on the north side of Church Street there are, say, ten buildings of nearly 20 shops that have survived for more than 50 years.

On the south side of the street the first to be noticed is Polliack's music shop at 241. I first remember that as the Metropole Bar and Restaurant kept by the respected German, H. F. W. Burger. He told me that on being commandeered for the South African War he was exempted when he

explained that his two sons, both Pretoria-born, had cleared across the border and joined the British. The Johnstone-Woolworth Building has been very much altered but I think that the main walls still remain and it cannot be looked upon as an entirely new building. Phillips chemist at 267 is certainly a museum piece—and not a disagreeable one either—and it is interesting as being on the exact site of an earlier building in which the early 1860's a Mr. C. Moll printed a combined newspaper and Government Gazette—the first in Pretoria.

The African Arcade occupies the site of Redpath's Auction Mart, the last wood and iron building to survive in Central Church Street, demolished in the early years of the century.

The Glen-Uniewinkel building was originally Payne Bros. Store. It has an entirely new front but, like other such buildings, has not been entirely re-built. Part of Henwood's old store was pulled down to make Central Street and the new boot store, but notwithstanding the date 1877 appearing at the top of the building, it was built about thirty years later. The 1877 refers to the year Henwoods opened in Pretoria. Raworth's chemist at No. 295 was formerly Isaak Haarhof's farm implement store, and was built before the turn of the century. The Market Buildings were erected about sixty years ago but in a fire some years afterwards, the interior was burnt out and in the re-building the Municipality insisted that the fire wall should go through the roof—but otherwise there has been but little change. .

Pretorius Street, between Paul Kruger Street and the Caledonian Grounds has, I think, changed much more than any other street in Pretoria. The old Town Hall was erected on that particular site because the office of the Pretoria Waterworks Company (which the Council had but recently acquired) occupied the site. The council offices were previously in the building on Church Square now occupied by the Postmaster and staff.

Memory brings to mind that on Sunday afternoons a favourite rendezvous was the newly established Zoological Gardens where a military band was in attendance to provide good music. The director, Dr. Gunning, fostered gardening and organised annual chrysanthemum and dahlia shows in the gardens.

A great change in our daily life is that to-day imported goods are not the be all and end all of our requirements as was the case 50 years ago. Cattle were not slaughtered for three years after the war, so we ate imported meat; eggs and fowls were scarce; while milk was generally produced locally and was delivered in whisky bottles; butter was imported from Australia, New Zealand and the Argentine. Market Gardeners could not supply all the vegetables needed for the increased population so that tinned beans and peas were imported. Even cakes from Australia were sold in tins. Nearly all the furniture was imported as also wearing apparel for men, women and children. The large stores advertised "Suits made to measure. Delivery in six weeks." In point of fact, it was usually eight weeks before the suits

arrived from England and Belgium. Even in the 1920's the Director of Census reported that the census returns showed that there was not one South African-born tailor. South Africa has become more self-contained since then.

Changes in the week-end household arrangements were brought about by an alteration in the hours of business for butchers' shops. It was originally the practice for the butchers to be open on Sunday mornings for the sale and delivery of meat, a facility which enabled families to have hot meat for the Sunday dinner.

The day came when shops were prohibited from selling meat on Sundays, and subsequently the delivery of meat was forbidden, which meant that during the summer months, the majority of households had to eat cold the meat that had been cooked on Saturday. Then ice-boxes came along and it was possible to keep the meat over for a day even in the summer months. To-day, when every home has a refrigerator, it is difficult to appreciate the distress when butchers were not allowed to conduct business on a Sunday.

The Lowveld and the land below the Bon Accord Dam provided no vegetables 50 years ago. The population at that time was dependant on the local market gardens. In addition to those below the Fountains there were several in the town itself: one at the corner of Visagie and du Toit Streets where the school and church are to-day while another was on the ground between Pretorius and Church Streets and Beatrix Street and the river. This last was irrigated by a furrow that ran from just below the tram bridge, along the southern boundary of the ground that now forms the swimming bath and paddling pool, across Walker Spruit and along Beatrix Street.

The Council purchased the water right together with the triangle of land between Voor and Schoeman Streets so that a road could be made along Schoeman and Park Streets from the river to Troye Street. Previously, Meintjies Street stopped at Voor Street and the only entrance into the Caledonian Grounds was over a private bridge across the river near Pretorius Street. During the war period or directly afterwards there was a skating rink in a building on the South-East corner of Vermeulen and van der Walt Streets; very small and with an ordinary wooden floor, but a few years later Pretoria boasted three good rinks. The first appeared on the south side of Church Street between Prinsloo and du Toit Streets. It was such a success that another was built on the corner of Andries and Pretorius Streets where Sanlam Building stands to-day and then Carl Beck built another behind the theatre on the ground where the Capital Theatre now stands. For a few years they were well patronised from about 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. The doctors did well putting broken arms in splints. One day a woman skater was told she was wanted at the door and when she arrived she found her bed made up on a mule wagon. Her mother evidently thought that the daughter spent too much time away from home!

(To be continued).