



Karel Erasmus se seun, Jochemus Johannes Petrus, het die plaas geërf en was self 'n uithaler boer. In 1903 het hy oor die middele beskik om vir hom een van die merkwaardigste woonhuise in Suid-Afrika te bou. Daar word vertel dat sy vader, voor hy gesterf het, hom die opdrag gegee het om vir hom 'n "ordentlike" huis te bou. Dit het Jochemus wel gedoen. Die huis wat hy laat bou het, en wat op vroeëre kaarte van Pretoria aangedui is as Erasmus-kasteel, is sekerlik die enigste kasteel wat ooit in Suid-Afrika op 'n Boereplaas gebou is. Daar is in 1903 begin met die bou van die huis en dit is in die jaar daarop, ongeveer 12 maande later, voltooi. Die huis is met 'n groot plegtigheid ingewy. Die argitek van die huis was 'n Hollander, ene Van der Bemm. Die huis het 'n eg Victoriaanse styl: dit het 'n breë veranda aan drie kante van die huis wat pragtige houtreëlings en mooi versierings bevat; die dak word gekenmerk deur verskillende gebroke vlakke, is onsimetries, en word versier deur verskeie geweltjies en torinkies. Dit is interessant om daarop te let dat daar, sover bekend, geen ander huis in Suid-Afrika is waarvan die styl presies ooreenstem met dié van die Erasmus-kasteel nie. In hierdie opsig het die argitek beslis 'n oorspronklike werkstuk gelewer. Hierdie feit maak van die Erasmus-huis 'n des te merkwaardiger gebou waarvan die argitektoniese styl beslis uniek is. Die kontrakteur wat die huis gebou het, was 'n Italiaanse immigrant, G. Monbello. Dit het hom en agt blanke vakmanne plus 'n aantal swart werkers 'n jaar geneem om hierdie huis te voltooi. Die koste van die huis was £6 800 plus nog £400 wat later betaal is vir ekstras; voorwaar 'n enorme bedrag wat deur 'n boer in daardie dae vir 'n huis betaal is.

Die Erasmus-kasteel was nog al die jare een van Pretoria se bekendste landmerke waar dit op 'n heuweltjie langs die militêre pad ten suidooste van Pretoria pryk. Dit kan ook goed vanaf die oostelike verbypad gesien word. Die indrukwekkende gesig van die trotse kasteel wat oor die golwende landskap troon, is voorwaar 'n toneel wat die verbyganger nie maklik vergeet nie. Die onderste twee vlakke van die huis bestaan uit 17 vertrekke waarvan 6 slaapkamers is. Net die onderste twee vlakke word bewoon. Boontoe is daar 'n solder en nog hoër 'n platform wat met 'n leer bereik word en vanwaar trappies lei tot teen 'n stutpilaar hoog bo in die toring vanwaar 'n klein venstertjie op die hoëveldse landskap uitkyk. Die kombuiskompleks was vroeër heeltemal los van die huis gebou en het uit 'n kombuis, 'n maalkamer, 'n meelkamer, 'n spens, 'n kelder en 'n outydse bakoond bestaan.

Gedurende die veertigerjare het 'n ernstige teëspoed die Erasmusse getref. Die huis is ontruim en het baie verweer en agteruitgegaan. In 1946 is 'n Afrikaanse film gemaak waarin die bekende El Debbo en Frederick Burgers gespeel het, en waarin spooktonele verfilm is wat in die Erasmus-huis geneem is. Dit het die ongelukkige gevolg gehad dat die ou huis baie jare lank bekend geword het onder die naam "spookhuis". Dit is jammer dat hierdie statige ou

woning met hierdie naam opgesaal is. Tien jaar gelede het die huidige eienaar van die huis, mnr. Emus Erasmus, egter 'n bedrag van R35 000 gespandeer aan die restaurasie van die huis en vandag kan hierdie statige gebou inderdaad as 'n ware herehuis bestempel word waarvan die gelyke in Suid-Afrika baie skaars is.

Die oorspronklike plaas, Garsfontein, het 'n belangrike rol gespeel in die ontwikkeling van groter Pretoria, veral met betrekking tot die woongebiede in die suidoostelike gebiede. Die woongebiede Erasmusrand, Waterkloofrif Uitbreiding II, Elarduspark, Wingatepark, Constantiapark, Morelettapark, Garsfontein, ens. is uitgelê op grond wat oorspronklik deel van Garsfontein was. Mnr. Emus Erasmus het Erasmusrand self ontwikkel. Hy, sy vrou Ramona, en hul seun, Carel, is na alle waarskynlikheid die laaste Erasmusse wat die ou kasteel sal bewoon. Klein Carel, in standerd vier, verteenwoordig die vierde geslag wat in hierdie sonderlinge gebou woon. Mnr. Erasmus, wat tans die groot huis van die Provinsiale Administrasie huur, is reeds besig met die bou van 'n nuwe huis, ook op 'n deel van die oorspronklike plaas geleë ten weste van Waterkloofrif Uitbr. II, vlak langs die Delmaspad. Die huis, wat weliswaar nie die sonderlinge argitektoniese styl van sy voorganger het nie, is eweneens 'n baie groot huis. Dit bestaan uit 3 verdiepings, het ruim vertrekke en 'n hele aantal interessantheide wat dit miskien in ander opsigte ook 'n merkwaardige woning maak. Na verwagting sal hierdie huis, wanneer dit voltooi is, mnr. Erasmus meer as R170 000 uit die sak gejaag het.

Die vraag wat bewaringsbewuste Pretorianers vandag vra is: wat gaan word van die Erasmus-kasteel? In hierdie stadium is daar nog geen duidelikheid in hierdie verband nie. Die moontlikheid is nog sterk dat die hospitaal hier opgerig gaan word en dit sal meebring dat daar nie in hierdie stadium reeds gesê kan word wat van die ou huis gaan word nie. Daar sal alle pogings aangewend word om die huis te bewaar, maar totdat die beplanning voltooi is, kan 'n finale woord in hierdie verband nie gespreek word nie. Mag ons hoop dat ons owerhede op die hoogste vlak sal besluit dat hierdie gebou nie gesloop sal word nie. Indien die Erasmus-kasteel wel bewaar sou word, ontstaan 'n verdere vraag: wat gaan daarmee gedoen word? Leegstaan kan dit nie. 'n Moontlikheid is dat dit as kantoor-akkommodasie gebruik sal kan word. Ek wil egter graag voorstel dat dit as 'n museum ingerig word. Samewerking tussen die Transvaalse Provinsiale Museumdiens, die Genootskap Oud-Pretoria en die Stadsraad van Pretoria kan die moontlikheid realiseer om hier 'n museum met as tema die geskiedenis van Pretoria tot stand te bring. So iets sal nie alleen 'n sierraad en toeriste-aantreklikheid vir Pretoria en Transvaal wees nie, maar sal ook reg laat geskied aan hierdie historiese gebou en les bes die geskiedenis van die hoofstad van Suid-Afrika wat helaas nog nie vir die inwoners van Pretoria en Suid-Afrika iewers sigbaar gestel is nie.



Besoek aan die Erasmus-kasteel deur die Genootskap Oud-Pretoria  
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# THE POST OFFICE IN PRETORIA

by Mervyn Emms

*Curator Post Office Museum, Pretoria*

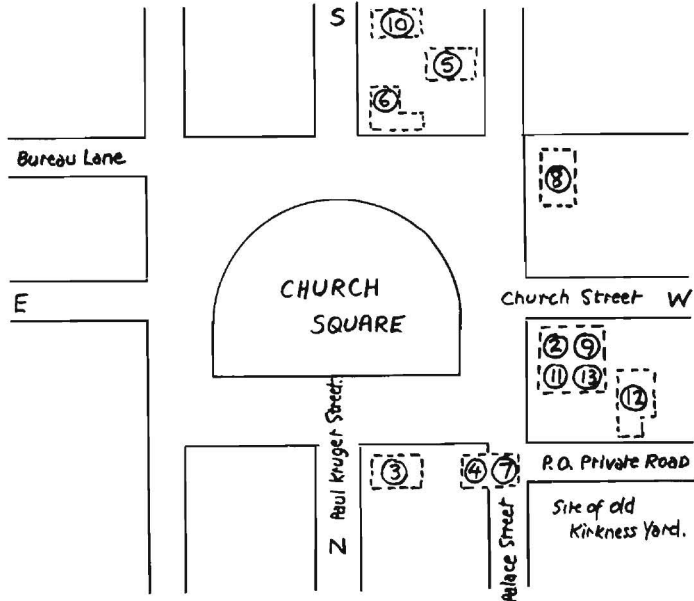
Today the north-west side of Church Square is entirely taken up with buildings belonging to the Post Office though originally only one of them was built as a Post Office. The buildings in question are the present Post Office erected in 1910, the old National Bank building erected in 1890 and now used as the Post Office Parcels Office, the old Mint Building erected in 1903 (at rear of Old National Bank) and the Old National Bank Chambers Building functioning at present as the headquarters of the as yet unopened Post Office Museum and finally although just off the square is the old Bank of Africa Limited in use at present as the insured parcels section downstairs and housing Engineering maintenance staff upstairs.

Although the Post Office has grown to encompass all of these buildings it has been a gradual process and a multitude of moves have been made over the years. There are no positive office records so much of our knowledge of precisely where the post office was housed at any particular time is often based on speculation, hearsay or deduction. Let us however consider all of the relevant speculation as well as the known facts, so that we may at least gain some idea of the location and evolution of the post office in early Pretoria.

The first semblance of any official post office dates back to 20 September 1848 when the Volksraad sitting at Ohriststad decided to appoint "Post Kaffirs" to carry the official mail. Before this there was a total lack of any organised postal facilities and mail was dependent on the good will of travellers or special messengers had to be sent.

In the early years postal duties became the responsibility of Field Cornets or where landdrosts existed it was handled by the landdrost or more to the point the landdrosts clerk. The Volksraad sitting at Lydenburg decided on 27 May 1850 to set up a regular letter post and this was arranged to operate between Lydenburg and Potchefstroom via Renosterspruit en Suikerbosrand. The costs of the service were met by voluntary contributions, the contributors being allowed free postage. Non-contributors had to pay for each letter at a prescribed tariff.

1 Plan of Church Square — separate caption attached.



## The establishment of Pretoria

Although it was not until 1855 that the name Pretoria was fixed by a resolution of the Volksraad sitting at Potchefstroom, nevertheless by 1854 it had become a “church place” that is a general gathering place for the “nagmaal”. This was held on the farm “Elandspoot” which had been bought by Commandant General Marthinus Wessel Pretorius with the object of founding a central town where the Volksraad sessions could be held. By August of 1854 the first church was in the course of erection in the place later to become Church Square.

Post up until this time would have been handled through the agency of Andries van der Walt who was the local veldkornet. He had settled on the west bank of the Apies river as early as 1844 and in fact his was one of the farms bought for the future town. His house stood in the immediate vicinity of the house of Jan du Preez, later known as “Jess Cottage” and situated near the present Railway Station.

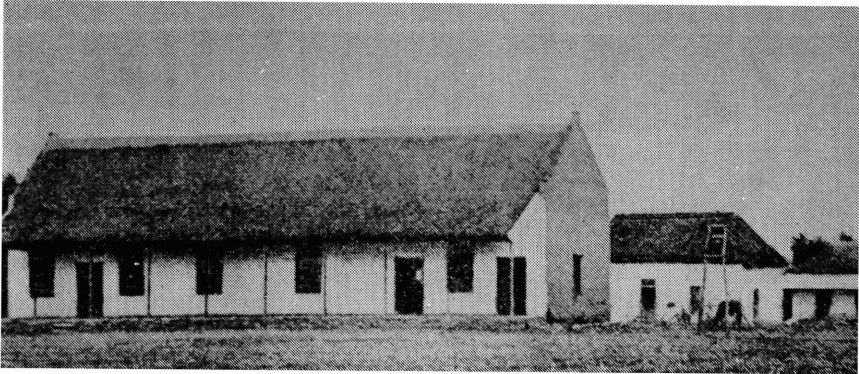
## SITES OCCUPIED BY G.P.O. PRETORIA

- 1 1844—circa 1855 House of Andries v.d. Walt near station.
- 2 Circa 1855 House of Phillip Bronkhorst (on present P.O. site).
- 3 1857—1862 Landdrost's Office (House built for M.W. Pretorius Komdt. Generaal).
- 4 1862 School building erected 1859 and used as Landdrost and Post Office in 1862.
- 5 Circa 1863 Building on Raadsaal site. Erected 1859/60.
- 6 1866 Possibly housed in wing of Raadsaal.
- 7 1870 Old School Building. Erected 1859.
- 8 1872 Building of van den Hove. Later to become the South African Hotel.
- 9 1874 Austin Building (on present P.O. site).
- 10 1886—1887 Temporary premises in old Gaol.
- 11 1887—1909 New single storied P.O. Building.
- 12 Temporary premises in Old Mint Building, entrance via Harkness Yard.
- 13 1910 Existing building still in use.

His house has the honour of being the first house erected in Pretoria and technically it can be said to have been the first post office, since Van der Walt handled the mail.

There is some evidence pointing to the fact that Phillip Bronkhorst whose house was one of those that sprang up around the church on the square acted, possibly unofficially, as landdrost. Dr. G.S. Preller in fact actually lists him as Pretoria's first landdrost. His house was on the site of the present Post Office on the north west corner of Church Street and it appears this became the focal point for the little mail that existed. Possibly he simply carried out the then simple postal functions on behalf of Fieldcornet Van der Walt, because his (Bronkhorst's) house was so centrally situated.

In 1857 Pretoria became the official seat of Government but due to various reasons this only became finally effective in 1860, however, the first Landdrost Andries Francois du Toit was appointed from 1857 and the post now became his responsibility.



- 2 The little building behind the first Raadsaal building is believed to have functioned as the Post Office in about 1863. Note the bell and donkey which were probably used for announcing the arrival of mail and the transportation of mail respectively.

Phillip Bronkhorst, shortly after relinquishing the postal duties to Du Toit, left the town to stay in the country and the official seat of the post office now became the Landdrost's office.

In 1856 a house had been built as a dwelling for Commandant General M W. Pretorius, but it transpired that he was never to occupy this house. It was here that in 1857 Du Toit set up as landdrost and also as the official responsible for post. Pretorius incidentally continued to live in Potchefstroom and shortly after 1860 when the Government headquarters were finally moved, he was deposed. The position of this house was on the site of the existing Palace of Justice. It occupied two erfes but the house was built on the Eastern Erf.

### **Pretoria's First Postmaster**

Although Pretoria was officially included in the Postal Route from 1857, nevertheless it was actually not until March 1859 that Landdrost du Toit was finally able to introduce a regular post. This post left Pretoria every Wednesday and Potchefstroom on the return journey every Saturday. Four to six "post kaffirs" were used for this service. Andries du Toit remained as Landdrost until 1859 when he was succeeded by J.J.P. Prinsloo and at the same time J.G.C. van Leenhof was appointed as landdrost's clerk. Postal matters were now out of the direct charge of the Landdrost as Van Leenhof was also appointed as the first Postmaster of Pretoria from 1860.