

The origin of Burgers Park

In Pretoria's early days the only public open spaces were Church Square and the Outspan, which later became the Market Square and is now known as Strijdom Square.

On 8th October, 1874, nearly 20 years after the founding of Pretoria, the Volksraad of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek approved the proposal by State President Thomas François Burgers that eighteen erven in Pretoria be reserved for a "botanical garden".

The decision was put into effect on 7th December, 1874, when State Secretary N.J.R. Swart entered into a contract with John Hunter McLea in terms of which he was appointed a "curator" of the garden at a salary of £300. On 25th May, 1875, the Volksraad refused to confirm the contract, and it seemed that the plan of Burgers, who at that time was overseas, would fail.

Members of the public, however, elected a committee under the leadership of D. M. Kirsch to continue the work on the Botanical Garden. As a result of the financial assistance from the public, the committee was able to obtain permission from State Secretary Swart for the park area to be held in trust by responsible persons.

After his return from Europe, Burgers endeavoured to obtain from the treasury £250 annually, for a period of two years, for the development of the park. He also offered to make £25 of his salary available monthly to the committee should the funds be inadequate. Burgers also requested the committee to appoint a sub-committee to draw up rules and regulations for the garden.

It was not until 1876 that the appointment of the *Comité voor de Botanischen Tuin* was officially announced. The public's

interest waned, however, and without the necessary income not much could be done.

During the British Siege (1877-1881) the development and maintenance of the Botanical Garden were discontinued. Sir Theophilus Shepstone had other objectives. He appointed a committee to find a suitable site for an experimental farm where exotic trees and plants could be acclimatized. The Botanical Garden was too small for this purpose.

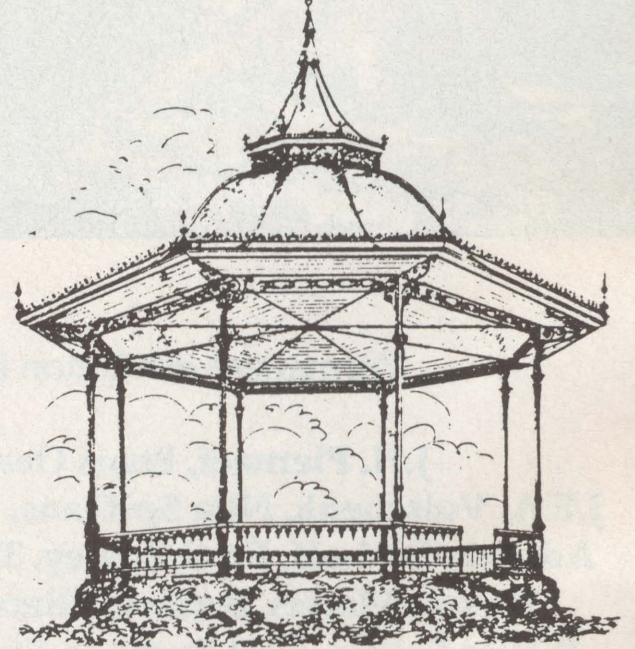
The members of the original committee, which initially wished to continue its work under the British regime, all resigned when they came to hear of Shepstone's objectives, and consequently the Botanical Garden became forgotten. The land was, however, not sold and although nothing was done to maintain the garden, it was accepted that the site would remain a public garden.

It was only in 1888 that the matter of the park was again raised when Dr. Ameshoff, a Pretoria advocate, proposed that a hotel and sportsground be established on the site. The matter was submitted to the Volksraad, but members of the public by means of a "petition" undertook to have the area fenced to plant trees and to maintain it for public use.

and to plant trees and to erect a fountain. The work was completed in 1892. A caretaker, with an annual salary of £200, and a servant, at £24 per annum, were appointed.

The site was then named "Burgers Park" and regulations for the management of the park were drawn up.

The revenue from the park was totally inadequate and had to be supplemented by means of treasury funds. In 1897 the Government had to pay for the erection of the kiosk and improved fencing. The band-



The band-stand was very popular



The Botanical Garden with Melrose House at the turn of the century

Ameshoff's scheme was dropped, apparently as a result of objections from the public.

The next development was that the Executive Committee decided that the land could be leased out for 25 years on certain conditions if it were retained for public purposes. George Jesse Heys of Melrose House was granted a contract to convert the old Botanical Garden into an equestrian and pedestrian park, as well as to fence the site

stand was also provided during this period.

In 1910 palm trees were planted and in 1913 rubber trees on the Van der Walt Street side. In the early years of this century many mayoral receptions were held in the park and band performances were given at regular intervals. Moses Kottler's statue of President Burgers was unveiled in the park in 1954.



The old house of the supervisor