
JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM

Compiled by: Dr JJ Bruwer, 2002-07-29 JJ Bruwer ©

NAME OF PLACE: Absa Building

Previous/alternative name/s : Volkskas Building (1995 reference)
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LOCATION: Street : Market
Street number : 74, 76
Stand number : 5151 (previously 744, 745)
Block number : D

ZONING: Current use/s : Business one
Previous use/s :

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

11 storeys; two basement levels.

"The details are significant in themselves. The fenestration comprises Cape residential-style-windows in hardwood. There are fluted pilasters, a *disselboom* frieze and ox-wagon motifs. The work of Willem Hendrikz is visible on the bronze door-panels and in the marble engravings at pavement level. These depict a people of both skilled workers and businessmen, an alliance of agriculture and industry, of working and professional classes, in accord with representatives of new financial interest, of which the Bank is a prime example." (Chipkin)

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

Walls : reinforced concrete, clad with (golden-brown) ochre-coloured face brick. The first three storeys are clad with polished red granite.

Roof : flat, concrete.

Windows: timber frame casements, with panes.

SITE FEATURES:**ALTERATIONS:**

Internal alterations and additions two lower three storeys. NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/124.

INTEGRITY:

There is no evidence of any physical interventions affecting the original fabric of the building since its completion.

INSCRIPTION:

The following appears on the plaque in the main entrance foyer:

Hierdie Plaat Is Onthul Deur Professor L.J. Du Plessis (Voorsitter Volkskas 1934-1944) Ter Herdenking Aan
Die Amptelike Ingebruikneming Van Hierdie Gebou Op 23 Januarie 1950
Direkteure
W. Buhrmann J.H. Greijbe Dr A. Hertzog P.J. Hugo C.C. Kriel Prof Dr. A.I. Malan S.J. Naude J.E. Reeler
Prof Dr. J.P. Van Der Merwe
Hoofbestuurder
J.J. Bosman
Argitekthe: Louw en Louw Toesig: Philip Nel
Bourekenaars: Borckenhagen en Louw
Bouaannemers: Reid en Knuckey (Edms) Beperk
Beeldhouer: W. de S. Hendrikz

ARCHITECT/BUILDER:

Louw & Louw

CONSTRUCTION DATE:

On plan : 10 May 1946
Completed :
Plans of the building not found.

BUILDING STYLE:

The building is "a ten storey slab block (clad in golden-brown facebrick) in the Cape town-house style, commemorating the "dawn of volk economic consciousness", as the Bank announced at the time." (Chipkin)

BUILDING TYPE:

Bank and office building.

ENVIRONMENT:

“The closed brick façade forms an accent in the block and in the Western half of the South façade on Market Square. With reference to height and composition there is a coherence with other buildings on this side of the street.” (NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/124) This is not completely correct. Refer to height difference between the building and the RSA Building.

CONDITION:

Good.

URGENT ACTION:

SAHRA RECORD REGARDING ALTERATIONS, RENOVATIONS, RESTORATION:

PROTECTION STATUS: (under National Heritage Resources Act, 1999)

- General protection: Section 34(1) structure/s
- Formal protection: provincial heritage site
- national heritage site
- provisional protection
- heritage area
- listed in provincial heritage resources register

Relevant Gazette Notice:

Gazette description:

FORMER PROTECTION STATUS: (under National Monuments Act, 1969)

NOTES:

DEEDS INFORMATION:

Original ownership: Volkskas Bank

T18625/1982 A B S A Bank Ltd

PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:

By 1889, the corner of this site was occupied by a single storey structure with saddleback roof and verandah. By 1904 this site was shared by two buildings; on the eastern part was a brick shop of M.D. Sack and on the western part a corrugated iron structure of Standard Cycle Works. By 1906 a verandah, facing Fraser Street, was added to the western building. By 1906 the building had been replaced with a one storey brick structure with large display windows and a verandah as a shop for G.J. Nathanson by the architects Aburrow & Treeby. In 1889 a low corrugated iron structure with verandah stood on the middle portion of this site, facing Market Street, which was replaced (circa 1903) by Grisco Café. This was a single storey brick building with large display windows and an arched ornament above the entrance.

The most easterly part of this site (i.e. 76 Market Street) was the property of Hart & Henochsberg in 1889; it was a low corrugated iron structure with verandah. In ca. 1896 the African City Properties Trust Building which was designed by A.H. Reid & A.C.B. Williams, replaced the iron structure. It had a richly decorated neo-Venetian-Gothic façade with marked vertical articulation.

The Transvaal Goldfields Building stood by 1900 on the site facing Fraser Street.

HISTORY:

"Volkskas was founded in Pretoria by J.J. Bosman in 1935 with this branch being opened in 1950. Louw & Louw of Cape Town were the architects and they designed the building to incorporate Cape Dutch architecture in a multi-storey building. The wood-framed windows with portholes at the top give a nautical air reminiscent of some old Cape buildings and buildings in Amsterdam. The lantern with the motif of ox heads and chains was made by Willem de Sanderes Hendriksz, as also the base of relief. The bronze doors illustrate the bank's motto of Arbeidsaamheid/Dilligence."

GENERAL NOTES:

Chipkin, C.M. – "At the time of its construction, the building was considered to be the first major piece of architecture to be erected in Johannesburg by the emergent forces of Afrikaner finance capital – they too decided (such as was the case with the Voortrekker Monument (1938-49) to adopt a distinctive national style, a *volksargitektuur* based on *volksgeskiedenis*. The building was erected on the site of the original African City Properties development on Market Street...An observer, looking at the building when it was brand new in 1948 (on the eve of the Nationalist election victory), would be forgiven if he or she saw this as the future house style of emergent Afrikaner capitalism. Such an assumption would prove to be incorrect. It would not take into account the expectations or yearning for modernity of the new generation of architects who loosely constituted the Pretoria School."

SOURCES:

Opname Historiese Geboue In Johannesburg, Second Report June 1976, Inner City, RAU

NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/124

The Johannesburg Historical Foundation (Norwich, I ; Grant, B.L. ; Saul D) Some Historic Drives & Walks of Johannesburg Framic, no date

Chipkin, C.M.: Johannesburg Style; Architecture & Society, 1880s – 1960s, David Philip, 1993

The Market Square Of Johannesburg: Catalogue of buildings on and around the square till about 1920 (Compiled by G.M. van der Waal), Public Library, Johannesburg, 1971

Van Der Waal, G-M.: From Mining Camp to Metropolis, The buildings of Johannesburg 1886-1940, Chris Van Rensburg Publications, 1987

Registrar of Deeds, Johannesburg

RECORDED BY:

Johann J and Catharina JM Bruwer.
Photographs by Chris JH Coxen (unless otherwise indicated).

ASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Historic Value:

- Associated with historic person, group or organisation
- Associated with historic event or activity

Architectural/Aesthetic value:

- Important example of building type
- Important example of a style or period
- Fine details, workmanship or aesthetics
- Work of a major architect or builder

Social/Spiritual/Linguistic value:

- Associated with social, spiritual, linguistic, economic or political activity
- Illustrates an historical period

Scientific/Technological value:

- Example of industrial, technical or engineering development/achievement
- New, rare or experimental building techniques