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## HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM

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

**NAME OF PLACE:** First National Bank Building

**Previous/alternative name/s** : Colonial Bank Building  
Western Bank Building (reference of 1976)  
National Bank Building (reference of 1995)

**LOCATION:** Street : Market  
Street number : 78  
Stand number : 4460 (previously 746, 747)  
Block number : D

**ZONING:** Current use/s :  
Previous use/s :

**DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:**

Upper and lower ground floor; seven storeys; one basement.

The following references to external finishes appear on the original plans: (roof) canopy (capping) faced in white terrazzo; pale blue terrazzo and adjustable glass louvres; bronze breast panels; white marble between ground and first floors; columns in pale blue terrazzo; tinted plate glass with adjustable louvres on the shop fronts (i.e. Market Street elevation); broken granite panels (i.e. Simmonds Street elevation).

The Colonial Bank is a building that has a sculptural façade of deeply cut precast window panels with an ochre pigment; and elegant, closely spaced ground-floor colonnade on the pavement edge; a theme of white marble facings in a narrow-width faggots on the columns; and a white marble band on the column architrave forming a polished vertical surface for the freestanding name letters. In addition, there is a white marble transom on the narrow-width shop-fronts, white onyx floor-tiles and wall panels at the entrance. A sub-theme of polished red granite occurs on the recessed skirtings and recessed capitals to the colonnade, an edging theme which continues at the red granite entrance steps and the imitation granite scoreboard risers, and which echoes the polished red granite on the historic Corner House complex opposite. There is a thread of slim anodised aluminium on the shop-fronts, and there are freestanding sculptural

panels placed between the inter-columniations on the east pavement – terracotta in colour, with relief sculpture in faceted, triangular, pyramidal and wedge shape made up out of four or five basic mould forms re-arranged in endless permutations. This was the work of Edoardo Villa in his prime, and it forms an appropriate contrast to the crisp clean details of the marble-and-glass ground floor and an anticipation, too, of the upper-level modelling. Incidentally, those sculptured ground-floor patterns are the origin of hundreds of decorative relief panels that would appear on scores of Johannesburg buildings over the next two decades.

#### **CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:**

Walls : reinforced concrete, clad with concrete modules.

Roof : flat, concrete.

Windows: fixed windows, steel frame, light green glass.

#### **SITE FEATURES:**

#### **ALTERATIONS:**

Internal alterations (partitions) for the *Colonial Banking & Trust Company Ltd.*

Architect : M. Sack

Plans passed : March 1960

New nine-storeyed addition facing Simmonds Street for the *Colonial Banking & Trust Company Ltd.*: the architect's intention was clearly to match this new construction with the existing building – e.g. "Pre-cast facings to match existing, Pre-cast capping to match existing..." etc.

Architect : M. Sack

Plans passed : October 1965

Completed : 1967

Minor internal alterations (e.g. dry-wall and glazed partitioning, new false ceilings) throughout building – these alterations were necessitated by revised office layouts for *Western Bank.*

Architect : M. Sack

Plans passed : November 1970

Construction of new fire escape for *Barclays National Bank.*

Architect : Cooper, Messaris & Louw

Plans passed : August 1984

#### **INTEGRITY:**

The architect's intention to match the new addition with the existing building was successful.

#### **INSCRIPTION:**

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:**

First building : Townsview Estates: Monty Sack  
(See GENERAL NOTES)

New addition : Townsview Estates: Monty Sack

**CONSTRUCTION DATE:**

On plan : first plans submitted in 1958  
Completed : 1960

Plans passed : October 1965  
Completed : 1967

**BUILDING STYLE:**

Johannesburg Modular Regionalism. (Urban Features)

**BUILDING TYPE:**

Bank and office building (office building: 2002).

**ENVIRONMENT:**

Height of building is aligned to that of the surrounding buildings, resulting in a smooth roof silhouette. However, the light green colour of the glazing (window glass) conflicts with that of the surrounding buildings. ( RAU Report, June 1976). Refer GENERAL NOTES

**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	<input type="checkbox"/>
	national heritage site	<input type="checkbox"/>
	provisional protection	<input type="checkbox"/>
	heritage area	<input type="checkbox"/>
	listed in provincial heritage resources register	<input type="checkbox"/>

Relevant Gazette Notice:

Gazette description:

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

**NOTES:**

**DEEDS INFORMATION:**

Original ownership: Colonial Banking & Trust Co.  
 1964: Grant No. G86/1964 (Stand Nos. 746 and 747 consolidated into Stand No. 4460)  
 T17359/1981 First National Bank Group Pension Fund  
 T64994/1998 First National Bank of Southern Africa Ltd  
 T64994/1998 Firstrand Bank Ltd

**PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:**

By 1889 a corrugated iron house with covered stoep which extended around a flattened corner stood on this Stand, i.e. at 78 Market Street. In 1895 this was replaced with the Robinson Bank Building, designed by the architects Reid & Green. It was a four storeyed (Neo-Baroque façade) building decorated with corner pediments and mouldings, a corner turret and a tilted roof.

**HISTORY:**

**GENERAL NOTES:**

Monty Sack – the Architect: “In Johannesburg, the most accomplished interpretation of the new building technology associated with curtain-wall corporate America was to be found in the work of Monty Sack. Sack was the architect chosen to project the second-generation image of the Schlesinger Organisation, an insurance, banking and property empire owning some of the ‘finest blue-chip sites in the country.’ ...In Monty Sack the Schlesinger executives found the perfect instrument for their drive to modernity: second-generation Schlesinger modernity. Sack confirms that in the 1950s and 1960s he was strongly influenced by developments in North America, particularly by ‘functionalist buildings expressing mechanical systems on the façade.’ He visited New York in 1957 and returned home with ideas which came to fruition in his

subsequent work. The first fruits of the American visit were the near-contemporaries built in the same historic city block: the Colonial Bank Building (1958-9) in Market Street (at the corner of Simmonds), a neighbour to the face brick Volkskas building; and the African Guarantee Building (1960) at the corner of Commissioner and Fraser Streets – the first precast-clad building on a podium. The two buildings, though quite different in appearance, nevertheless reflected a single design intelligence – the same sense of proportion and elegance, the same restraint in the use of materials.” (Chipkin)

The consolidation in 1964 of Stand No. 746 (on which the first Colonial Bank building was constructed) and the adjoining Stand No. 747 (south of the former), made it possible to effect the new addition facing Simmonds Street.

The plans of the new building of 1958-1960, made provision for the division of the banking hall at ground level into a “Public space for Europeans” and a “Separate public space for Non-Europeans”. By 1970, the banking hall was still divided into a “European Banking Hall” and a “No White Banking Hall”.

At the time of the proposed construction of the building in 1958, the plans of the building were rejected by the City Council due to excessive ground floor coverage. In a letter of response dated 22 October 1958 to the Johannesburg City Engineer, Monty Sack asked that this position be reviewed. His representation in this regard is of interest from the point of view of the requirement that had to be met in terms of heights: “As you are aware our plans for this building were recently submitted to the Elevation Control Committee for approval. In order to comply with the wishes of this Committee we willingly increased the height of the ground floor bank...to line up with the adjacent building frieze. This, together with an increase in the size of the marble band at the base of the building...has had the effect of increasing the entire volume of the bank space. In addition to this we increased our floor to floor heights...in an attempt to line up the top of our building with the adjacent building cornice.”

## **SOURCES:**

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

NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/124

Photograph (coloured) – north elevation ca. '88 : NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/124

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

City Engineering Department, Consolidated Stand No. 4460, Township Johannesburg (Planning Department), City of Johannesburg

Johannesburg Building, Space & Urban Feature Classification, 1998: Inner City - Metropolitan Planning, Johannesburg Metropolitan Council (Cool Factory)

Registrar of Deeds, Johannesburg

## **RECORDED BY:**

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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