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HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM

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

NAME OF PLACE: Johannesburg Public Library and the Dr Beyers Naudé Square

Previous/alternative name/s : Library Gardens' / previously known as the Harry Hofmeyr Gardens named after Johannesburg's Mayor of 1910-1911

LOCATION: Street : Sauer
 Street number : 48, 50, 42
 Stand number : 1/5109 (previously Ptn 1 of 12)
 Block number : L

ZONING: Current use/s : Municipal
 Previous use/s : Municipal

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

Ground; Mezzanine and two floors up.

"The architectural style is Italian, with slight modern tendencies in detail. The doorways to the main entrance are of solid cast bronze, surmounted by a trio of deep graceful arches, with heavily coffered intradoses and carved keystones. The whole is surmounted by a carved frieze and fully mounted cornice with an attic storey which carries the Italian tiles roof. Moses Kottler was responsible for the eight large figures representative of Art and Science on the exterior of the building and Dr P Kirchhoff sculptured in the rondels between the large windows in Market and President Streets eminent men in literature and science. B Smith carved South African animal heads on the keystones. John Harcus carved the teak fanlights over the entrance to the Lending and Reference Libraries. The cast bronze main entrance doors were made by the Birmingham Guild. (NMC reference)

The exterior walls are of dressed Flatpan stone from the Free State with brick lining. Floors and pillars are of reinforced concrete. The ceiling is of pre-cast fibrous plastered sheets. On the façade is carved the Library's Motto, *Libri Thesaurus Animi*. The building is well proportioned and dignified and the works of art are unobtrusive, blending to make a satisfactory whole."

The motto above the entrance...means books are the treasure house of the mind. On the corner are eight figures symbolising history, medicine, philosophy, architecture, sculpture, painting, music and literature sculptured by Moses Kottler. The roundels facing President and Market Streets portray men in literature, art and science and were sculptured by Dr Peter Kirchoff (men such as Goethe, Dante, Shakespeare, Homer, Pasteur, etc.). The stained-glass window in the foyer came from the first Corporation Building which housed the Johannesburg Municipality and *The Standard and Diggers News* whose presses were bought for printing *The Rand Daily Mail* (whose first editor was Edgar Wallace).

1985 – Architect Andre Van Graan’s assessment of the building, is as follows: “A late Classical building, it shows the return to the stripped Classicism that dominated Beaux Arts architecture in the years leading up to the Second World War. As with the Johannesburg Station building it returns to the Roman classical motifs and displays a flatter more two dimensional modulation in its use of the classical orders. The east entrance façade is dominated by three giant arches decorated as the vaults of the baths of Coracalla in Rome. The small sepulchre... entrances are similar to those used in the Reserve Bank building by Gordon Leith. The Library has a very confident feeling in its siting opposite the City Hall and across from one of Johannesburg’s few central city open squares. The internal double volume entrance is superbly detailed with fine stained glass windows and ...(demonstrates a) Baroque use of space in the relationship between the stairhall and the main entrance hall. ”

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

External

- Walls : granite socle; sandstone dressed plaster (moulded); marble.
- Roof : low pitched roof; Tuscan tiles.
- Windows: steel frame; some stained glass.
- Ceiling: coffered plaster moulded.
- Doors : decorative timber; the doorways to the main entrance are of solid cast bronze.
- Decorative elements : decorative drums above main doors; round headed arches forming central feature on main façade.

Internal

- Walls : plaster moulded in part; marble faced columns.
- Floor : marble; timber.
- Ceilings: coffered plaster; moulded.

SITE FEATURES:

The bronze sculptures (by Ernest Ullmann) near the main entrance to the Library date from the latter part of the 1960s. These sculptures and the fountain were donated by The Star.

INSCRIPTION: "This Sculpture And Fountain Were Presented To The Citizens Of Johannesburg By The Star.

INSCRIPTION:

"BR BEYERS NAUDÉ SQUARE
THIS SQUARE, FORMERLY KNOWN AS THE LIBRARY GARDENS, AND THE VENUE FOR SO MANY GATHERINGS OF THE PEOPLE HAS BEEN RENAMED AS A TRIBUTE TO THE REV DR. BEYERS NAUDÉ, A FEARLESS CHAMPION OF DEMOCRACY. UNVEILED BY HIS WORSHIP THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF THE CITY OF JOHANNESBURG CLR AMOS MASONDO
ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2001."

ALTERATIONS:

In May 1933, a decision was taken to add an additional storey to the building."

At the time of the construction in 1968 of the Harry Hofmeyr municipal underground parking (i.e. under the Library Gardens), the original layout of this urban space was changed. A fountain was constructed where the four Lombardy poplars originally stood.

In 1990, James Clarke expressed disgust at the development taking place at the Library Gardens: "Many people who have seen what is happening to Johannesburg's Library Gardens are quite horrified. Me too. Although I saw the original plans for the Civic Spine it was not apparent to me that a 4 m-high brick wall would wreck the openness of the square." (The Star, 29 December 1990 – "Civic Spine looks crushed by that ghastly brick wall")

RHG Erasmus (Director: Planning, Johannesburg) responded to James Clarke's criticism by mentioning that consultations in regard to the Civic Spine had taken place with various stakeholders, including the NMC, and that historical requirements were incorporated into the proposals. On the subject of the walls, he mentioned that the walls "are part of a design solution to the two-fold problem created by the existing vehicular ramps giving ingress and egress to the parking garage and the impact of noise and fumes generated by eight lanes of major road traffic. The design, by increasing the height of the walls, which already exist along the ramps, makes provision for various facilities, including restaurants and shops within the walls and above the space occupied by the ramps, overlooking the Library Gardens." (The Star, 12 January 1991 – Letters to the Editor: "Bone of contention in the spine will soon be resolved") See INTEGRITY.

The NMC in a letter during 1992 to the Director: Library & Museum Services, City of Johannesburg, clarified its position with respect to alterations to the building that were apparently being considered at that stage: "In considering any proposed alterations, not only structural changes. 4.1 What impact would such change have on the architectural integrity of the buildings character? 4.2 Will it diminish the major features including: - quality of space in the double volume reading rooms, mezzanines and galleries or staircases; - the integrated design; - rich decorative elements eg wrought-iron work, brass and bronze work, decorative plasterwork, stained glass, sculpted stonework and fine timber finishes? 4.3 Are the proposed additions appropriate in design and detailing? 4.4 Does the proposed work remove extraneous or intrusive additions? (Obviously the NMC would be delighted if some of these could be removed!) 5. We understand that when alterations were made to the Library theatre, the City Council was at pains to preserve as much as possible. Only the raking floor and stage were removed. This is the kind of alteration which we support because the original could always be reinstated. 6. The relationship of the Library to the Market Square, City Hall and Post Office should be maintained. The distinction of the Civic buildings and spaces needs to

be retained. 7. The external facades should be kept intact. Minor alterations would be permitted only in exceptional circumstances. 8. Regarding the conceptual proposals made by Fassler Kamstra & Holmes, we cannot commit the NMC to accepting any major alterations without detailed drawings demonstrating that the changes meet the criteria listed in Point 4 above. 9. The Library's need for additional reading rooms and stack space has been noted and proposed changes which respond sensitively to the scale, texture and overall form of the building would be acceptable. 10. Ultimately alterations and additions to the Johannesburg Public Library should be kept to the minimum. There are very few buildings of such quality in the Transvaal and indeed in South Africa. The objective should be to adapt the spaces with minimal interference to the fabric."

The NMC during 1994, refused the planned closing up of the opening in the geology room (i.e. the opening between the Geology Room and the Upper Gallery). "The loss of this double volume and this historic amenity would be a tragedy." The NMC did however approve the construction of new toilets.

INTEGRITY:

The changes that were effected to the Library Garden (now Dr Beyers Naudé Square) during the early 1990s as part of the Civic Spine development, had a detrimental effect on both the integrity as well as the historical context of this public space. "The new buildings lining the northern and southern sides of the garden cause the chasm-like quality of President and Market Streets to be extended. This has the effect of cutting the streets and the buildings from the urban space. The historic buildings, which previously defined the urban space and gave it its distinguished character, are now only partially seen across a barrier...The spatial relationship of the Library to the City Hall and to all the surrounding buildings to the gardens has been changed in so doing, the historical value and significance of the precinct has been damaged... The detailing of the new buildings is undistinguished. Lessons which might have been learnt from the historic buildings were apparently not understood. The way the Library is detailed to meet the ground and to touch the sky, is beautifully handled. This cannot be said of the new buildings, to mention but one aspect of design which has been poorly demonstrated." (Prins, H.)

INSCRIPTION:

CITY OF JOHANNESBURG
THIS STONE WAS LAID BY
THE MAYOR
COUNCILLOR D.F.CORLETT
OCTOBER - VI - MCMXXX11.
COUNCILLOR J. F. HILSON
CHAIRMAN LIBRARY COMMITTEE
- S.B.ASHER - JOHN PERRY F.R.I.B.A.-E.H.WAUGH -
LIBRARIAN - ARCHITECT - CITY ENGINEER
H.BERRYMAN AND SON PTY LTD CONTRACTORS

ARCHITECT/BUILDER:

John Perry
(represented locally by the architect A.J. Marshall)
Contractor: H. Berryman and Son Pty Ltd

CONSTRUCTION DATE:

On plan : approximately 1932

Completion date : 1934

BUILDING STYLE:

"The architectural style is Italian, with slight modern tendencies in detail." (NMC statement)

"The style is Italian with slight modern tendencies in detail. The treatment of the elevation has been one of restraint, relying on correct proportions and refinement of detail and modelling. With the 'gracenotes' of sparingly-placed sculptured features rather than on an elaboration of ornament." (Leyds)

BUILDING TYPE:

Library building and public open space.

ENVIRONMENT:

"Dignified Façade to Square." (NMC statement)

"The Library" according to Van Der Waal, "was isolated from its environment by its location in a fairly dilapidated part of the city centre, its closed block form and the raised entrance which could only be reached by high steps. To this day the Library, which should have had the capacity to stimulate cultural activities around it, has failed to exercise any noteworthy influence on the adjacent buildings."

CONDITION:

Good.

URGENT ACTION:

SAHRA RECORD REGARDING ALTERATIONS, RENOVATIONS, RESTORATION:

External restoration to the building was completed towards the end of 1990. The contract involved the cleaning of the stone facades; repointing defective joints between sandstone blocks; replacement of sandstone sills where necessary; and the restoration of the ornate, decorative wreaths below the cornice. The fact that the wreaths are gilded was obscured for many years by accumulated grime.

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

General protection: Section 34(1) structure/s

Formal protection: provincial heritage site

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| 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:

By 1994, the NMC had approached City of Johannesburg with a view to the declaration of the building. Miss E.J. Bevan (Acting Librarian) in a letter dated 4 May 1994 that was furnished to the NMC, objected however to the NMC's declaration proposal: "The declaration of the public library building...would limit our scope for altering the building in order to meet changing needs...Plans are already afoot for the conversion of the second floor into an Art and Music library. Having to get permission from the National Monuments Council for any alteration would add unnecessary extra red tape and costs to the procedure."

NOTES:

DEEDS INFORMATION:

See also HISTORY

Original Ownership:

T2245/1929 City of Johannesburg

HISTORY:

The Johannesburg Public Library was started three years after the proclamation of the goldfields. At a meeting of interested individuals on 20 March 1889, a committee was appointed to form a library. Through apathy on the part of many of its members and because of the collapse of the share market at the time, the committee's appeal for money fell flat. The library was consequently opened with insufficient funds. Later that year, books to the value of R1 000 were ordered from England. "This" according to Van Der Waal, "would seem to give the lie to the perception that the mining camp's inhabitants were a rather uncivilised lot." The library finally opened its doors to the public in June 1890, and was at first served by committee members working on a voluntary basis. In February 1891 Mr Robert C. Hemming was appointed Librarian.

The first library was housed in the Old Church Building at the corner of Eloff and Church Streets in 1893. In due course, funds became sufficient to erect a new building and Mr William Leck of Belfast, Northern Ireland was appointed architect. The new library opened in Church Street (where a Woolworths outlet later stood) in September 1898, Mr C. Woods being the Contractor.

When war broke out in October 1899, the librarian and his assistant left Johannesburg. A Mr A.G. Rossouw was asked to keep an eye on the Library premises. He not only took care of the

premises until Lord Roberts entered Johannesburg in June 1900, but opened the Library and controlled it until the return of the Librarian. After the war he refused to accept any remuneration for his services. The Committee however, voted him honorary life membership of the Library.

The affairs of the Johannesburg Public Library improved when it received its first Town Council grant of £650 in 1904. Other grants were made by the Milner Administration and various organisations, including the Witwatersrand Council of Education. In the following year the collection was classified, a catalogue was published and the method whereby books were issued was improved.

Since its founding the Library had been run on a subscription basis with control vested in an elected committee. As the Library grew however, income from subscriptions became inadequate for its maintenance. For some years prior to 1922 regular grants were made by the Transvaal Provincial Administration and the Johannesburg Town Council and these authorities had the right to appoint representatives to the committee. In that year the provincial grant was withdrawn and to make good on this and other losses, the Council increased its financial support. In so doing it automatically gained control of the committee and in 1924 it took over the Johannesburg Public Library. The latter was beginning to take on something of its future form. The first consultative committee, 'consisting of persons of eminence in literary, science and education...to whom literary and other library questions may be referred', was appointed. Since then the Library has been administered as a municipal department and has never looked back.

It eventually became clear however, that a completely new building was needed to serve the growing population. As early as 1919 when plans were revealed to carry out extensions to the Rissik Street Post Office, the architectural press suggested however, that the latter should rather be demolished and that a new post office should be erected on the western portion of Market Square! A lengthy memorandum was submitted by the Association of Transvaal Architects and the Town Planning Association (Transvaal) to the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs in which the following proposals were made: "1. The Rissik Street Post Office was an 'obsolete building' which did not warrant additional expenditure. It should rather be demolished to make way for a larger square in front of the City Hall. 2. At the same time the Standard Building and Theatre should be abolished and a worthy modern city theatre built instead. 3. For practical and visual reasons, the new Post Office should be built on the western end of Market Square." These representations however, came to nothing. In 1920, the City Council decided not to transfer the western section of Market Square to the government for its post office, but to use it for a new library building instead.

Towards the end of 1929, the then City Librarian, S B Asher, submitted proposals to the Johannesburg City Council for the erection of such a new building. The Council agreed and a competition was held to select an architect for the project. Refer GENERAL NOTES. There were 46 entries and the winner was John Perry of Cape Town. As he was unable to transfer to Johannesburg, he was represented by a local architect, A J Marshall. It is interesting to note that the design of Gerhard Moerdijk of Pretoria was placed second and the design by Cowin, Powers and Ellis of Johannesburg third. Perry was formally appointed architect for the new building on 13 March 1931.

The foundation stones (one English and one Afrikaans) were laid by the Mayor, Councillor D.F. Corlett and by Councillor J.F. Hilson, the Chairman of the Library Committee, on 6 October 1932. (According to a report in The Star of 5 October 1932, "...a casket was placed under each stone. In each casket were: miniatures of the Union Jack and the Union Flag, a set of South African Coins, a list of names and addresses of members of the standing committees of the Council, a roll of the Library staff and current issues of The Star, Rand Daily Mail and Die Volkstem....")

The Library moved to the Market Square building on 27 January 1935. The new building was officially opened by the then Governor-General, the Earl of Clarendon.

The new Library was a handsome structure built when solid granite, bronze and marble were the only recognised materials for civic buildings, and sculptures adorning facades were mandatory. One of the half-forgotten elements of the design was a small theatre which became one of the city's chief venues. Originally intended for a more literary purpose – as a lecture theatre... it soon developed into an active playhouse, where some of the city's best talents were nurtured and to which audiences were quite happy to flock.

In 1936 the Council authorised the establishment of school libraries throughout the City and this proved an immediate success. The reality was that this pointed to the absolute need that existed for branch libraries. Two such libraries were established, followed by a hospital library, and deposit libraries in clubs, fire stations and workshops. A travelling library (bookmobile) was also started. The returnable cash deposit was abolished and the Library became truly free. In 1940 the Library opened the first branch in its own specially constructed building. This was the Winifred Holtby Memorial Library in Soweto. The Library found great pride in this development as it was the first municipal library building in the country built especially for black people.

At the beginning of 1990, the JPL as it became known in the library trade – celebrated its centenary. From the smallest of beginnings, the institution had grown into one of excellence. It was now in the words of Kennedy, housed in "a richly ornamented and stately building on Johannesburg's historic Market Square where once the early hucksters set up their stalls, an edifice home now to more than a million and a half books, patronised by more than 200,000 members yearly, and with a circulation of three and a third million volumes. Special collections of note which the Library came to curate are The Seymour Memorial Library of science and technology, once described as 'perhaps the finest scientific library in South Africa', the Strange Collection, being one of the world's major collections of books on Africa south of the Zambesi, the Michaelis Art Library, The Music Library and the Municipal Reference Library."

By 1990, the Library could proudly take stock of what had been accomplished: it had a book stock of 1 544 435 volumes, a membership of 208 015 borrowers, and an annual circulation of 3 252 061.

Today, the citizens of Johannesburg have ample reasons to be proud of their library. Its standing is reflected in the words of Dr Louis Shores, one of America's greatest librarians, who wrote after a visit, "Johannesburg was first introduced to me by that touching novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*. But the city will always live in my memory because of its great public library, where I found intelligent reference services, creative book selection, professional awareness exceeded nowhere in the Library world."

GENERAL NOTES:

The Conditions of Competition (i.e. in 1929) required competitors to 'rely on good proportion and fitting architectural expression rather than on elaborate decoration and detail'. In this, John Perry was eminently successful. The building is well proportioned and dignified, and the works of art with which it is decorated are unobtrusive; they blend to make a satisfactory whole. (Kennedy)

The area in front of the Public Library was renamed the Harry Hofmeyr Gardens by the City Council on 19 December 1939.

Van Der Waal believes that the Library was completely isolated from local building developments, in view of the nation-wide character of the architectural competition. "The most striking feature was the lack of articulation in the closed cuboid, followed by the flattened line of the tiled roof. The original design excluded an attic and the roof would have provided a more supple occlusion of the whole. Completely foreign to Johannesburg at the time was the abstract treatment of the carved arches over three storeys above the entrances, even though

these arches, repeated in the windows of the lateral facades, were conceived in a specific tradition of library construction which can be traced back to McKim, Mead & White who designed the Public Library (1888-92) in Boston, which also boasted the general block form of Johannesburg's Library. The JPL, as the Library is known in library circles, still has a certain charm derived from the pleasant proportions of the exterior with its sculpture and relieve, the rich building materials and the woodcarvings in the high vaults of the interior."

Compare the above assessment by Van Der Waal with the following description as published in The South African Architectural Record not long after the completion of the building: "Faced with the problem of designing a building on an island site with its principal façade against the falling ground, it has been necessary to lift the principal floor sufficiently above the ground level to achieve the necessary dignity of entrance, this also provided good reason for a heavily rusticated podium enclosing the semi-basement floor containing the News and Reading Room, the Stack and Strong Rooms, and the Lecture Theatre and its attendant rooms, which have access at the pavement level on the West side in Sauer Street."

SOURCES:

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

Photographs (coloured) ca. 1988 of main elevation : NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/124

Johannesburg, 100. 1986 : One Hundred Places of Outstanding Cultural, Historical, Architectural And National Interest, April 1986.

NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/94 : Jhb. Openbare Biblioteek, Markplein, Johannesburg : Photographs (coloured) ca. 1987 included

NMC File 9/2/228/66: Library Building, Market Square, Johannesburg (included in this file are measured drawings of the Library by Mira Fassler Kamstra & Holmes Architects)

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

Shorten, J.R.: The Johannesburg Saga, John R. Shorten, Second impression, 1966

Leyds, G.A.: A History of Johannesburg; The Early Years, Nasionale Boekhandel, 1964

Kennedy, R.F.: Johannesburg Public Library Centenary (Lantern, October 1990)

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

South African Architectural Record, September 1935 (The New Library - Johannesburg) / this article contains detailed information on construction materials and design aspects)

South African Architectural Record, October 1947

Conserva, Summer 1991 (The Civic Spine)

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