

JOHANNESBURG METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

HERITAGE ASSESSMENT SURVEYING FORM

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

NAME OF PLACE: National Bank Building

Previous/alternative name/s : Barclays Bank (Head Office Building) (reference of 1976)
First National Bank Building (reference of 1995)

LOCATION: Street : Commissioner
Street number : 85, 87
Stand number : 5294 (previously 889-891)
Block number : F

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

DESCRIPTION OF PLACE:

Ten storeys; one basement.

March 1991 – “This 10 storey building is elegantly designed so that the lower 4 floors form a block of similar height to its neighbours while the 6 higher floors are well set back. The double storey Banking Hall is not expressed externally.

The ground floor is rusticated horizontally[sic.]. The first and second floors are joined in a composition with tall fluted Classical columns on the north and west elevations. The fenestration of the third floor matches that of the 6 upper floors.”

According to Chipkin, “Barclays Bank (1931) headquarters building (on the corner of Commissioner and Harrison Streets) is a severe, impersonal statement of a bank building made up of large cubic setback forms, horizontal shadow lines as remnants of string courses, and plain squared-off window surrounds. Once there was fine bronze lettering in Trojan script spelling out the legend ‘Barclays Bank Dominion Colonial and Overseas’ but this has now gone. Again, there are giant colonnades associated with modernistic details, which enter as a sub-theme throughout the design. The giant compositive capitals have been reshaped into

rectilinear Grecian forms, the acanthus leaves reduced to fronds, and the column fluting converted into decorative wrappings to the column shafts. The interior Bank Hall – a large, double-volume space – retains its magnificence today. Here the square classical columns, which are load-bearing structural elements, have been faced with sleek light-grey marble. Composite capitals are made up in geometrical forms as if they had been designed by Mondrian.”

Van Der Waal describes the building as follows: It was designed “in the formal Beaux Arts classicist style of the previous period. The architects, Gordon Leith & Partners, largely followed the model of the Reserve Bank, but with a clear articulation between the public section on the ground floor and the office premises above. While the first four storeys with the rusticated base and composite columns of the colossal order had a certain ‘realism’, the top six storeys were conceived in the form of an abstract block with perforations in the shape of framed windows. The underlying grid structure, only suggested in the façade, was pointedly reflected in the interior, especially in the high banking hall with the striking grid pattern in the marble floors, walls and columns as well as the windows and ceiling lighting.”

CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS:

External

Walls : reinforced concrete with reconstructed sandstone facing.

Roof : flat, covered with hollow tiles.

Windows: steel frames bronzed, pivoting and casement.

Doors : hardwood.

Verandah/stoep : on the south and west elevations there is a double storey verandah with fluted stone columns.

Decorative elements: the corner first floor rooms have balconies with bronze balustrades.

Internal

Walls : brick plastered; some timber panelling.

Floors : marble in Banking Hall; elsewhere timber block.

Ceiling: plastered generally; Banking Hall has highly decorated ceiling and its columns match the external columns in design.

Doors : timber.

SITE FEATURES:

ALTERATIONS:

No plans in respect of alterations / additions could be found.

INTEGRITY:

The building appears true to its original design. No evidence was visible of the loss of any original fabric.

INSCRIPTION:**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:**

Gordon Leith & Partners

CONSTRUCTION DATE:

On plan : 7 March 1938
Completed : approximately 12 January 1942

BUILDING STYLE:

"The last fling of the Classic Revival".

"The exterior is not in the 'classical style of the previous period', as some commentators have stated. It is in essence the purified classicism of the Fascist New Era, and its counterparts could be found in contemporary Rome and Berlin. New Era classicism of this type abounded in Rome wherever Mussolini's hand could be seen – along the new Via della Conciliazione or on the new Piazza Augusto Imperatore, for example. Where such buildings occur in New York, architectural writers have not been bashful in identifying these as revealing 'nationalist influences' emanating from Fascist sources. Leith's building has a familial likeness to contemporary, Mussolini-inspired architecture in Rome, but I feel undecided to what extent this architecture reflects currents then prevalent in Britain." (Chipkin)

**BUILDING TYPE:**

Office building.

ENVIRONMENT:

The building is matched in height to that of the Norwich Union Castle whilst its four lower storeys match with the Meischke Building and Victory House. (RAU Report, June 1976)

March 1991 – "This building occupies an important corner site. The ground, first and second floors are on the street frontage and the third floor set back a little, thus to line in with the neighbouring buildings. The higher floors are well set back."

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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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: D(?) S. Haddon

By 1976: Barclays Bank D.C. & O.

By 1991: First National Bank

T78729/1999 Firstrand Bank Ltd

PRE-HISTORY OF SITE:

On the corner stand of this site stood the four storey *Bank of Africa* (this building was constructed in 1889-90 and was demolished in the 1920s) and next to it the Goodman Building, the town's first two-storeyed building, occupied by lawyers and estate agents.

"The Bank of Africa" according to Van Der Waal, "drew attention to itself by focusing emphasis on the two facades by way of central parties with pediments, pilasters and balconies above the

entrances. The smooth brick-wall surfaces were framed by classicist ledges and rustic work, while the roof line was interrupted by snub pinnacles above the vertical bands."

On the Commissioner Street section of this site stood by 1920 the two storey *Elephant & Castle Bar*.

HISTORY:

GENERAL NOTES:

The following appears on a temporary sign at the main entrance of the building: "This branch will be moving to 80 Market Str in Sept 2002 Cnr Commissioner and Harrison"

SOURCES:

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

Photographs (coloured) West/South elevation ca. '88: NMC File 3/1/3/Joh/124

NMC File 9/2/228/5, Vol. I: Conservation Area, Central Business District, Johannesburg

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

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:

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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