

The idealism of architectural competitions: The case of the Free State Province¹

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Abstract

Procuring designs by way of competitions is a well-established practice of both public and private clients. The territory that now encompasses the Free State Province has seen this method being applied nineteen times in its history; fourteen for buildings or projects, three for monuments of commemoration; and two for ideas competitions. It is interesting to note that ten of the competitions served to define the noble street of the capital, President Brand Street and its immediate surrounds, and that landscaped solutions for monuments were early on considered an appropriate form of commemoration. Yet, competitions remain an idealism often associated with inconvenience or changes, of which the Free State Province has witnessed its share. They are costly to stage and enter and the quality of the jury is crucial for the outcomes. As entries are anonymous, some competitions were won by distinguished architects who might otherwise never have built in the Free State Province. However, winning designs may not necessarily always result in the best building, but they certainly indicate the paradigm of the era and in that sense can serve as architectural barometers.

Keywords: Architectural competitions; Idealism; Landscapes of commemoration; Free State Province; President Brand Street, Bloemfontein.

As Appendix see a series of images (Image 1-19) on the buildings in the Orange Free State, built in different periods of time.

Introduction

In this article the aim is to examine the role of competitions in procuring quality designs for both building projects and memorials. It will appraise the role played by the assessors, a decisive party to any competition, and reveal that from winning a competition to realisation can be a long and arduous

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road, with changes in appointee, collaborator, site, brief and budget. Despite the sometimes frustrating or challenging journey, the authors of this article seeks to affirm competitions as an important procurement method, and it will thus conclude with some considerations for their success.

Throughout its existence, the territory that now encompasses the Free State Province has seen nineteen competitions for fourteen building projects, of which two have since been demolished, as well as five competitions for monuments of commemoration or ideas.² In this article will be covered the full ambit, each with a concomitant explication so that readers can know the intention of the respective competition; understand the winning design and historical context within its era, as well as the current status, as all were inspected. Photographs of those extant are composed in Image 1 (That includes 19 photographs of buildings).

A degree of idealism is inherent in all architectural competitions. The process allows the opportunity to source architectural solutions from architects outside the local or known circle. By exploring this mechanism, the promoters allow their ideals, values and principles to take priority over the pragmatic, everyday business of producing normative architecture. However, few of the Free State Province projects escaped the compromises in being translated into the physical world. Available materials, organisational skills and resources all influenced the outcome. These influences are modifying influences; they do not erase the original premise of the project, nor does any political influence or posturing negate the fact that the selected proposal fitted the jurors' ideals at the time best.

As Iain Borden writes in the foreword to a remarkable study of five post-1994 architectural competitions in South Africa, "We learn at length ... about the way in which [the architectural projects] have been produced as part of processes of debate, discussion and participation. Architecture emerges not as the projected image of a single mind, but as it most often is, as the product of a hugely complex intersection of ideas, individuals, groups, thoughts, intentions and propositions".³

2 By way of comparison, the province of KwaZulu-Natal has staged some 24 competitions, but this image excludes the twelve competitions in the 'new South Africa' since 1994. Bearing in mind the sparse population of the Free State Province, but for the last period, the output is indeed comparable. See W Peters, "Buildings in KZ-N which resulted from architectural competitions", *Journal of the KwaZulu-Natal Institute for Architecture*, 3, 2001, pp. 2-3.

3 I Borden, "Foreword", J Noble, *African identity in post-apartheid public architecture: White skin, black masks* (Farnham, Surrey, Ashgate, 2011), p. xvii.

While it is characteristic of buildings resulting from competitions that this fact is often generally known, the material for this article is based on documentary publications or theses, and for the most part from the journal of the architectural profession, *South African Architectural Record*, its predecessor or successor in title, as it remains standard procedure that competitions and winning entries are mentioned, even if not always featured.

Boer Republic of the Orange Free State, 1854-1902

The first competitions in the Boer Republic served to establish the basic public and civil framework of church, town hall, presidency and parliament. Unlike the Boer Republic of the Transvaal, the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (ZAR), the Free State had no republican style; means were limited and buildings modest.

Tweetoringkerk, 1878⁴ and Bloemfontein Town Hall, 1883

The inaugural competition immediately put idealism to the test. It was for the mother church of the Dutch Reformed congregation in Bloemfontein, the *Tweetoringkerk*, which terminates Church Street, now OR Tambo Road. The competition was for the second church on the same site and, obviously, the design was to provide an appropriate termination to the original southern entrance to the capital. The submission by Cape Town architect, WB Hays, was declared the winner. However, the design soon proved to exceed the budget substantially.

Under these circumstances, a local architect, Richard Wocke,⁵ was approached to modify the design and, unbelievably, saw the costs halved, although he could still produce a twin-towered design, as its name says (Image 1.1). While still a place of worship, with the demographic changes in the city centre, today the Romanesque revival building is without a traditional congregation, but it remains relevant by serving a social outreach programme.

Wocke squarely won the next competition for the original Bloemfontein Town Hall at 41 Charlotte Maxeke (Maitland) Street in 1883, which, however, carries the unfortunate record of being the first competition-winning building to have been demolished.

⁴ K Schoeman, *Vrystaatse erfenis. Bouwerk en geboue in die 19de eeu* (Human & Rousseau, Cape Town, 1982), p. 47.

⁵ L Roodt, "The architecture of the Orange Free State Republic 1854-1902" (PhD, UOFS, 1987), p. 101.

Presidency and Fourth Raadzaal, Bloemfontein, 1884⁶

Two competitions with wide-ranging urban implications were staged simultaneously and both were won by the same little-known architects from Queenstown in the Cape Colony, namely Lennox Canning and Frederick Goad. The two projects, the Presidency, to replace the modest official residence of the reigning republican presidents, and the Fourth *Raadzaal*, a dedicated plenary chamber for the *Volksraad* of the Boer Republic were to mark the beginning of what became President Brand Street. This street was the first in the extension to Bloemfontein, which land surveyor Gustav Baumann had designed as a north-south axis three years earlier, in 1881, and he distinguished the street by its width of 32m to create a tree-lined, noble boulevard.⁷

Interestingly, the pretentious Presidency⁸ was given priority (Image 1.2). The size was not only conditioned by the large family of the first occupant, President JH Brand, but also because the house was to function as a state house and serve as the venue for official receptions. During construction of the baronial mansion, the architects were to complain without success about the savings that the impoverished government implemented, including the decision that the former Presidency's kitchen was good enough to be retained for use in the new one and the reason for the odd composition to the principal elevation. On the other hand, the client had reason to complain when the ambitiously designed segment arch at the entrance started to sag, and the roof, replete with roof lights and a complex network of box gutters, leaked like a sieve. The arch was infilled with three regular arches while the whole was later covered by a further roof. Restored during the 1970s, the Presidency was designated a museum in 1985.

Five years after the 1884 competition, which, significantly, had attracted 50 entries, including some from Europe and USA, the project of the Fourth *Raadzaal* could be rekindled. However, the officials could not find the winning entry and the architect himself had problems locating his drawings. However, that was only the beginning. It took three contractors to complete the building, and Canning himself was replaced.⁹

6 A Roodt, "Die argitektoniese bydrae van Francis Lennox Canning 1884-1895" (MArch, UOFS, 1990).

7 G Baumann & E Bright, *The lost republic. The biography of a land-surveyor* (Faber & Faber, London, 1937), p. 80.

8 A Roodt, "Die argitektoniese bydrae..." (MArch, UOFS, 1990), p. 225.

9 A Roodt, "Die argitektoniese bydrae..." (MArch, UOFS, 1990), pp. 524-525.

The plenary chamber in which all furniture was custom-designed¹⁰ is a simple rectangular brick building colonnaded on three sides and elevated from its garden setting, which, enclosed by a distinctive wrought iron palisade fence, takes up the block. It is distinguished by an exceptional front to President Brand Street, topped centrally by a dome, the roof type associated with the most important buildings in a town, a cathedral, or parliamentary building, and from which symbolism the fledgling republican government did not shy away (Image 1.3).

When the Fourth *Raadzaal* could be inaugurated on 5 June 1893, President FW Reitz could contain neither his patriotism nor his ideals for the building:

In vroegere tijden word onder de boomen geraadpleegd, maar hoe hooger een volk de trap der beschaving opklimt, hoe meer het gevoelt wordt dat de Raadzaal als een zinnebeeld moet zijn voor de wetten die gemaakt worden. Welke Amerikaan is niet trotsch op het Kapitol; welke Engelschman niet op zijn Westminster! En zoo kan ook de Vrijstaat trotsch zijn op de Raadzaal.¹¹

The Fourth *Raadzaal* has continuously been used for the purposes for which it was designed, today to accommodate the legislature of the Free State Province.

Orange River Colony, 1902-1910

As a consequence of the Anglo-Boer War/South African War (1899-1902), the Boer Republic of the Orange Free State lost its independence. It was colonised by Britain as the Orange River Colony, which itself ceased to exist only eight years later. However, in that short period more buildings than ever before were erected, and with a particular Englishness,¹² which the first competitions of the era well demonstrate.

Town Hall, Kroonstad, 1906¹³

Interestingly, the inaugural competition was not for a building in the capital but for one to the north in Kroonstad. The competition, held 1906, was for

10 A Roodt, "Die argitektoniese bydrae..." (M.Arch, UOFS, 1990), pp. 544-565.

11 *The Friend*, 6 June 1893, A Roodt, "Die argitektoniese bydrae..." (M.Arch, UOFS, 1990), p. 577.

12 K Schoeman, *Vrystaatse erfenis. Bouwerk en geboue in die 19de eeu* (Human & Rousseau, Cape Town, 1982), p. 126.

13 Anon., "Kroonstad town hall", *South African Architect, Engineer & Surveyor's Journal*, October 1906, p. 2; November 1906, pp. 1 & 19; June 1907, p. 153.

the Town Hall, and it was won by two Johannesburg architects and brothers, John and Albert Till.

The town fathers had selected an elongated island site, for which the brothers proposed an axial concept. The front section accommodated the municipal offices on the ground floor and the council chamber and mayor's parlour on the first, with a reception room or minor hall, conveniently opening onto a balcony atop the *porte-cochère* (Image 1.4). While the hall is mansard roofed, its interior is characterised by arched portals to a restrained barrel-vaulted section, stretching to the back of the building, and marked by the pronounced fly tower with clerestory lighting over the stage.

The exterior is of ashlar throughout, noted for its precision. This composition is Edwardian, with borrowings from the Baroque revival, like the groupings of cupolas to either side of the front pediment, and Art Nouveau detailing demonstrated in the ironmongery, stained-glass windows and faience tiles.

The town hall was opened on 8 June 1907, by no less an authority than the Lieutenant-Governor of the Orange River Colony, Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams, but today, almost 110 years later, the local chamber of business holds custodianship of the little-wanted building.

High Court (originally Law Courts; formerly Supreme Court), Bloemfontein, 1906¹⁴

In Bloemfontein, the period of the Orange River Colony began with two important civic buildings being put to competition in 1906 and 1907, namely the High Court and the (National) Museum, respectively, which brought the skills of distinguished Cape Town architects Hawke and McKinlay to the capital.

Some of the inconveniences associated with competitions had already surfaced, now with the High Court came a change in site, from being directly opposite the Fourth *Raadzaal* to the southern end of President Brand Street parallel to Bloemspruit, and the necessity therefore of mirroring the courthouse plan. Nevertheless, the “stolidly secure ‘citizen’ of the Edwardian period”¹⁵ is recessed from all three of its street boundaries and elevated on a plinth, not only to emphasise its importance, but also to create semi-basement spaces, including holding cells (Image 1.8).

14 Anon., “New law courts, Bloemfontein”, *South African Architect, Engineer and Surveyor's Journal*, December 1906, p. 49; January 1907, p. 67, with second premiated design, March 1907, pp. 99-100, 120.

15 D Picton Seymour, *Historical buildings in South Africa* (Struikhof, Cape Town, 1989), p. 128.

The public entered a hall, byzantine in form and scale and certainly “worth half an hour of anybody’s time”,¹⁶ (Image 1.7) which gave access to the two court rooms, top-lit by roof lights, and the building could have been one of the first in Bloemfontein to be ventilated by artificial means, heated or cooled.

Museum, Bloemfontein, 1907¹⁷

Although not directly in President Brand Street, the (National) Museum on the former Warden Square sits in Aliwal Street, diagonally opposite the Fourth *Raadzaal*. This was the first dedicated museum building; the collections had formerly been accommodated in the extension to the original First *Raadzaal*.

Like the Law Courts, this civic building was also set back from each of the three street boundaries to its site. The original front is the recessed portion on Aliwal Street (Image 1.5), with windows arranged in a Palladian motif and enriched with plaster details embracing the two storeys. The portal is characterised by two sets of giant-order sandstone coupled columns of the Composite order and the ogee-headed classical doorway. In use as designed, the side spaces along the two parallel streets were filled in, which is why the original front is recessed.

National Women’s Memorial, Bloemfontein, ca 1907

It was custom to erect monuments of commemoration to victors and place these in prominent positions, but quite the opposite happened here. Not only was the first memorial put to competition erected in memory of the vanquished and not placed on the southern periphery and not in the centre of town, but the concept of a memorial was also reconsidered and a landscaped solution resulted. However, it should be noted that the Women’s Memorial did not arise from any reconciliatory politics of the Orange River Colony, and in that sense, is somewhat misfiled in this era.

The memorial has its origins in a meeting held in Bloemfontein in 1906, which sought to commemorate the women and children who had died in the Anglo-Boer War, in particular those who had perished in concentration camps. The last President of the Boer Republic of the Orange Free State,

¹⁶ D Greig, *A guide to architecture in South Africa* (Howard Timmins, Cape Town, 1971), p. 84.

¹⁷ Anon., “Notes and news”, *The South African Architect, Engineer and Surveyor’s Journal*, May 1907, p. 131.

MT Steyn, since retired, became the champion.¹⁸ A fund was launched, but raising money proved difficult, as it was the vanquished, who had lost virtually everything in the war, who were the most supportive. Nevertheless, designs were invited from architects and sculptors for the competition, probably held in 1907.

The jury advised on two entries, one by Hawke, McKinley and White of Cape Town, who had earlier won the competitions for the courthouse and museum in Bloemfontein, and the other jointly by Frans Soff, an immigrant Dutch architect who had formerly served in the Department of Public Works of the ZAR, and the sculptor Anton van Wouw, who had established his reputation with the Kruger statue in Church Square, Pretoria. Why the committee chose the latter could not be established.

This project consists of a 36.5 m-high obelisk with a sculptural group on a pedestal at its foot, placed inside an ovalsque surround entered up a staircase opposite (Image 1.6). This design rendered an urgent critique of the self-righteous reasons for the imperial war that had been fought here in South Africa. Was the Empire really to the benefit of every new territory added to its dominions, and at any price? Fisher and Clarke make the remark that Steyn, Soff and Van Wouw were experimenting with a remarkably contemporary attitude towards war:¹⁹

It is considered one of the earliest of the anti-monuments, an architectural attitude at the fore, ever since the atrocities of the Second World War and beyond ... where the evils ... are memorialized rather than victories celebrated.

The memorial was unveiled in 1913 by the widow of MT Steyn (bronze plaque), and remains at the head of an axis of 'pilgrimage', since added to and, perceptively, much visited.

Union of South Africa, 1910-1961: Orange Free State Province

The half century of Union brought balance to the civil framework of church, presidency and parliament with civic quality. The central market of Bloemfontein was relocated. The square it occupied was freed of cattle and horses and transformed as Hoffman Square, "more in keeping with the

¹⁸ K Schoeman, *Imperiale somer: Suid-Afrika tussen oorlog en Unie 1902-1910* (Pretoria, Protea, 2015), p. 160.

¹⁹ R Fisher & N Clarke, "Wilhelmiens aftermath and legacy. The diaspora of practitioners and hybridity of later styles", K Bakker, N Clarke & R Fisher, *Eclectic ZA Wilhelmiens* (Brooklyn Square, Visual Books, 2014), pp. 201, 203.

progressive spirit and character” taking root in Bloemfontein.²⁰ A commercial headquarters building added architectural definition to the Square, and in relocating from the centre of town the Methodist church and the new city hall opened up the northern extension of President Brand Street.

Hoffman Square, originally Market Square, Bloemfontein, 1917²¹

In a planning reconsideration of the capital, the market, which since the inception of Bloemfontein had occupied the heart of town on Charlotte Maxeke (Maitland) Street, was relocated to Baumann Square. Consequently, the “Corporation of Bloemfontein” put to competition the design for the redevelopment of the square with the town engineer as sole juror. The winner was Vivian Rees-Poole of Pretoria, a Herbert Baker scholar who, appropriate to this narrative, had won the competition for the redesign of Church Square, Pretoria in 1912.²²

The square surrounded by a double perimeter of trees, was designed in two sections bisected by OR Tambo Road (Church Street), and each was given a central rectangular motive with axes. The larger portion, on the east, additionally had diagonal walkways, while the smaller on the west, was provided with a pavilion of sandstone as a terminal for tramways, and hence located on Charlotte Maxeke Street.

The execution appears to have been only slightly at variance with the proposal due to the inclusion of the cenotaph to the fallen of World War I, placed on the central longitudinal axis, yet recessed eastward from OR Tambo Road to maintain the termination of the visual axis on the *Tweetoringkerk*. Renamed Hoffman Square after inaugural Republican President JP Hoffman in 1925, the square was subjected to a *tabula rasa* in the 1960s and 2015.

South African Mutual Life Assurance Society, Bloemfontein, 1928²³

The inclusion of the Free State within the Union of South Africa saw companies seeking national status establishing bases in each of the four

20 K Schoeman, *Bloemfontein. Die ontstaan van 'n stad 1846-1946* (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1980), p. 256.

21 Anon., “News and Notes”, *Building. The Journal of the Association of Transvaal Architects*, June 1917, p. 81; “Our illustrations”, September, pp. 48, 58.

22 M Keath, “The Baker School. A continuing tradition 1902-1940”, R Fisher, S le Roux & E Maré (eds), *Architecture of the Transvaal* (Pretoria, University of South Africa, 1998), p. 83.

23 Anon., “The S.A. Mutual premises competition, Bloemfontein”, *South African Architectural Record*, December 1928, pp. 218-221; February 1932, p. 26 and May 1932, p. 139.

provinces. One such company was the South African Mutual Life Assurance Society, which followed the example it had set elsewhere and called for designs in competition for its new premises in Bloemfontein in 1928.

The insurance company decided upon the site formerly occupied by the Bloemfontein Club, and the new building was to define architecturally the northwestern corner of Hoffman Square and the principal east-west axis of the town, now Charlotte Maxeke Street. Interestingly, sole assessor, architect Fred M Glennie of Cape Town, found “no ideal solution” from among the 37 entries and proffered entry No.13, submitted by local architect HAC Wallace, as the “most satisfactory basis for further development”.²⁴

The five-storey building consisting of shops, offices and a residential attic floor was executed by Wallace and Stewart who applied the basic formula of the Italian palazzo, the preferred model for banks and insurance companies (Image 1.9), with a central light well to illuminate and ventilate the interior spaces while allowing for the maximisation of lettable space. Elevators, possibly the first in Bloemfontein, were positioned on the short internal side. The large shop windows were provided with marquises on scrolled brackets, all of cast iron, with glazed valances at the extremities and clerestory windows. An altogether well considered and detailed design for a city building, which despite the Mutual lettering remains in use by others.

Trinity Wesleyan Church, Bloemfontein, 1929²⁵

Also not situated directly on President Brand Street, but within its ambit in Charles Street, the Wesleyan Methodist congregation of Bloemfontein decided upon a design competition for its third place of worship. Geoffrey Pearse, inaugural professor of Architecture at the University of the Witwatersrand, was appointed sole assessor, and advised on the submission by Frederick W Masey, half-brother to Francis Masey, partner of Herbert Baker.²⁶

Masey’s Neo-Gothic design made use of clay products for which purpose bricks were imported from Pretoria and roof tiles from Grahamstown. While the local Anglican cathedral might have provided the precedent, economy was probably the main reason for the bare red brick exterior, with sandstone

24 Anon., “The S.A. Mutual ...”, *South African Architectural Record*, December 1928, p. 218.

25 Anon., “Wesleyan church, Bloemfontein”, *The South African Architectural Record*, March 1929, pp. 33-34.

26 J Mouton, “Honorary life membership”, *South African Architectural Record*, August 1965, p. 39.

reserved for the plinth, mouldings and stringcourses, profiles and other more complicated decorative details. However, some of the stone elements are, in fact, of pre-cast concrete, suitably tinted to pass, and used higher up. Interesting external features of the nave are the buttresses, which penetrate the roof and terminate in elongated pinnacles, and the eaves that flare (Image 1.10), while internally, electric lighting and heating radiators were built into wall recesses, a novelty for Bloemfontein at the time.

In placing the later hall opposite the west portal, a forecourt could be created and a larger hall was subsequently added parallel to the church. This respectful siting preserved the integrity of Trinity church.

City Hall, Bloemfontein, 1930²⁷

This was the most important national competition during the Great Depression and attracted 54 entries for solo assessing by William Hawke of Cape Town, co-winner of the competitions for the Bloemfontein courthouse and museum. Hawke pronounced as winner the submission by Gordon Leith of Johannesburg, interestingly labelled No. 1. Leith had trained at the AA in London, on returning worked briefly in the office of Herbert Baker, and as the inaugural Baker scholar studied at the British Schools at Rome and Athens, 1910-13.²⁸

The site was on the western side of the northern or upper end of President Brand Street between Charles Street on the south and St John's Street, now Nelson Mandela Drive, on the north. However, to create an island setting for the city hall complex, Henry Street, which bisected the site, was de-proclaimed between President Brand Street and a new parallel street, De Villiers Street, was created on the west.

The competition conditions had stipulated that the main eastern approach should be from Henry Street, and this vista was to be "definitely terminated". Furthermore, the municipal offices were to be entered from President Brand Street; the minor hall should serve the public hall as a supper room and, in turn, the main committee room should act reciprocally for the minor hall. Thus, including the Council chamber, the complex would consist of five elements, three of which had to be linked as described.

²⁷ Anon., "Bloemfontein town hall competition", *South African Architectural Record*, December 1930, pp. 112-119.

²⁸ M Keath, "The Baker School. ...", R Fisher, S le Roux & E Maré (eds), *Architecture of the Transvaal* (Pretoria, University of South Africa, 1998), p. 82.

Leith's submission was deemed "extraordinarily simple and straightforward". The public hall was placed centrally on the site on the north-south axis and distanced by elongated courtyards from two parallel wings, one containing the municipal offices on President Brand Street and the other the minor hall and committee rooms on De Villiers Street. This meant that access to the public hall would be from the north and that the hall could be naturally ventilated and lit by way of the courtyards.

The council chamber projected from the general mass of the building and was accessible by a looped service road from Charles Street (Image 1.13). Due to the fall of the site southward, the chamber was placed half a level up and the *porte-cochère* – with groin vaults – half a level down. In the development of the design, the chamber became octagonal and clearly articulated as a distinctive building element, making for one of the finest in the country, with the spiral staircases giving direct access for the press and public, masterfully expressed externally as conches to the walls. The chamber, tiered in the original submission, eventually had only the perimeter raised at a line coincident with the clerestory.

Leith's design was without a bell or clock tower, *de rigueur* in most city halls. This departure from tradition saw a major redesign of the portal on President Brand Street, which was given a pair of classical towers with hipped roofs, and at the bell stage below, elongated aedicules, open but without bell or clock (Image 1.12). The doorway remains mean in capacity for a public building, at the height of the plinth, from which multiple fluted columns rise *in antis*. However, the cottage fenestration of the large windows designed to illuminate the staircase now became enriched by artist-craftsman and architectural wood-sculptor Herbert Meyerowitz²⁹ (Image 1.14).

The public hall is entered through a travertine-finished vestibule, neo-classic in composition while the interior is executed in face brick of Flemish bond, tuck-pointed up the staircase to the gallery, but otherwise bush-hammered, apparently to make a virtue of poor workmanship. The minor hall named Clarendon is plastered and painted with alternating oval and rectangular panels at high level depicting indigenous and Boer folk scenes, not what one might expect. However, the centenary of the Great Trek was already gaining momentum, and this was the time of transition from English to an Afrikaans

²⁹ E-mail: H Prins (Former Bloemfontein resident)/W Peters (Co-author), 17 September 2015. An article on Meyerowitz can be found in *South African Architectural Record*, March 1928, p. 11.

city council. The Bloemfontein city hall was the last of the grand classicist English designs, or as Michael Keath put it "... in many ways the definitive building of the extended Baker tradition".³⁰ Hereafter the modern movement began to take root in the Free State.

High School, Harrismith, 1948³¹

Due to the absence of an architectural department within the Free State provincial administration, a rather unusual building type was subjected to an architectural competition, namely the High School in Harrismith, won by architects Kantorowich, Hope and Barnett of Cape Town. The designer was Jack Barnett, then aged 24, who won the competition from a total of 95 entries, which large number says something of the state of the economy, post-World War II. One of the two assessors was WD Howie of Johannesburg, later a Professor of Architecture at Wits.

The site on a slight incline to the east of the town centre is today literally up against the bend in the N3 highway, at the foot of the majestic Platberg. Barnett's design was placed high up where it could best command the views. It was compact to withstand the climate and promote functional efficiency (Image 1.11), and thus skew on the site plan. It was aligned to capture the favourable orientation, and it made use of an existing avenue of fir trees to shield the building from the west winds. All of these considerations are characteristic of design intentions of modern architecture. Having chosen durable materials, the utilitarian building is still in a good condition and, wisely, recent additions have followed the founding principles of Barnett.

Civic Centre, Welkom, 1955³²

Despite the limited population of the new town of Welkom, proclaimed in 1948, and its location in the middle of the maize fields, the Village Management Board made no small plans, and called for designs in competition for a civic

30 M Keath, "The Baker School. ...", R Fisher, S le Roux, & E Maré (eds.), *Architecture of the Transvaal* (Pretoria, University of South Africa, 1998), p. 82.

31 Anon., "Architectural competition for the new high school at Harrismith, Orange Free State", *South African Architectural Record*, March 1950, pp. 46-62; Anon., "Prize-winning high school at Harrismith", *Public Works of South Africa*, March 1955, pp. 20-24.

32 Anon., "Competition results for Welkom civic centre", *Architect & Builder*, August 1955, pp. 61-69; Anon., "Competition for Welkom town hall and municipal offices", *South African Architectural Record*, October 1955, pp. 37-45.

centre comprising three buildings, ballroom, municipal offices and town hall. The site is a large rectangle on the northern side of Stateway, the wide, main thoroughfare of Welkom, and almost literally the setting-out point for the horseshoe layout of the central business district.

Interestingly, this successive competition was also won by architects R Kantorowich and J Barnett of Cape Town, this time from 72 entries. The three buildings were located to define a public plaza with clock tower as landmark, and each was of face-brick with deeply oversailing hip roofs covered in Marseilles tiles, a low maintenance, economic scheme, with appropriate civic dignity. However, the large yet simple design was to hang in abeyance for nine years until its construction in 1964-1967, for which reasons it is more appropriate to discuss the project within the next era.

Republic of South Africa, 1961-94: Orange Free State Province

During the period of the Republic of South Africa, 1961-1994, the Orange Free State Province was ruled by the National Party, which not unnaturally, prioritised the commemoration of Afrikaner heroes and deeds. Besides the monument to the founder of the Party, JBM Hertzog, there remained the unfulfilled promise of a Voortrekker monument at Winburg, and a new monument commemorating the (Voortrekker) battle of Vegkop of 1836. Despite a notification and the announcement of the jury,³³ nothing came of the last.

While the period is littered with unusual issues arising from the competitions, as will be shown, under circumstances of political hegemony it is especially important that the anonymity of entrants be observed to ensure competitors entered on an equal basis, and that entries be judged on merit alone. For example, it is highly unlikely that a member of the Communist Party would have received a commission from a town council or provincial administration ruled overwhelmingly by the National Party since 1948. Conversely, it is important that the identities of a jury are revealed at the outset and that architects enter on that understanding or not at all. Nevertheless, the powers of the promoters to change briefs or collaborators could still be underestimated.

33 Anon., "Monument prysvrag", *Plan*, 7, 1974, p. 17.

Civic Centre, Welkom, 1955³⁴

Although the competition was held during the era of Union, design development and technical documentation was delayed, and the reasons are particular to the successive political era.

The first was the Sharpeville massacre, which took place on 21 March 1960, and which emergency legislation gave the police the power to arrest people without the necessity of first taking them to court. In this context, the architect of the Welkom Civic Centre, Jack Barnett, together with thirteen others, was duly arrested and detained without trial at Roeland Street Prison, Cape Town, without warrant or reason given.³⁵ Barnett, the winner of the competition for the Welkom Civic Centre was a member of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), which, on being outlawed in 1950, saw a new white, left-wing, Marxist organisation, the Congress of Democrats, come into being in 1953. This attracted many former members of CPSA, including Barnett.³⁶

Second was the establishment of Performing Arts Councils in each province under the chair of the Provincial Administrators.³⁷ In this way, the Performing Arts Council of the Orange Free State (PACOFS) came to fall under Mr JWJC (Sand) du Plessis, Administrator from 1959-1969. While formerly serving as the mayoral couple of Bloemfontein, Sand and his wife Martie had earned a reputation for furthering the stage arts. Thus, in 1961, encouraged especially by Martie, the precocious Welkom Town Council changed the brief to upgrade the town hall to a fully-fledged theatre, named in memory of the late mining magnate Ernest Oppenheimer (1880-1957).³⁸

On being released from incarceration, Barnett changed the town hall block to accommodate a horseshoe-shaped auditorium with continental-type seating (Image 1.16), but the upgraded brief was not without architectural implications. The most intrusive was the fly tower over the stage, which to integrate saw a change from hip and tile roofs to copper-clad mansard roofs, atop the face-brick walls of all three buildings (Image 1.15). Despite re-roofing and a recent fire, the Welkom Civic Centre continues in the use it was designed for, namely to serve its citizens.

34 W Peters "Competitions, politics, and the production of modern architecture: Jack Barnett's Free State oeuvre", *South African Journal of Art History*, 3, 2016, pp. 1-13.

35 Anon., "12 city detainees sent petition from gaol", *Cape Times*, 7 May 1960; Anon., "14 men threaten hunger strike", *Cape Times*, 13 May 1960.

36 W Peters "Competitions, politics,..." *South African Journal of Art History*, 3, 2016, p. 17.

37 Anon., *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa*, 8, 1973, pp. 505-506.

40 Anon., *Welkom. Capital of the OFS goldfields* (Felspar, no date), pp. 125-131.

JBM Hertzog Memorial, Bloemfontein, 1961³⁹

This competition was for a memorial to South African Prime Minister JBM (Barry) Hertzog (1866-1942), which, like the National Women's Monument, resulted in a landscape of commemoration. The site is surrounded by the (National) Museum on the east in Aliwal Street, the Fourth *Raadzaal* on the south in Charles Street and the City Hall on the west in President Brand Street. However, that was not the originally chosen site, and one of the unintended outcomes of the competition.

In 1960, the committee tasked with erecting a monument to Hertzog initiated a design competition for a *koppie* (hillock) in Pretoria, between Schanskop and Klapperkop, near Fountains. On seeing the call for entries, the late sculptress Elly Holm approached both her architect sons of which, Albrecht was willing and able. Their proposal saw a file of columns rising to the edge of the site where a sculpture of Hertzog was placed on a pedestal at the foot of the tallest, inspired by the 'Charioteer of Delphi'. After some time, a letter arrived advising of partial success; henceforth, Albrecht Holm would be working with the sculptor Danie de Jager, whose entry consisted exclusively of sculptures. Such is the power of promoters.

It then dawned on the committee that, in fact, Hertzog had shaped his career in the Free State, for which reason the location ought to be reconsidered. The jury, which included renowned Pretoria architect, Norman Eaton, duly appointed Holm and De Jager for the preparation of a new proposal on a site in Bloemfontein. Eager to please, the twosome conceived of a design on the southern edge of Naval Hill, not unlike the Pretoria setting, which overlooked the city centre. This proposal was accepted by the committee, but unattainable due to the presence of the radio mast. Today the statue of Nelson Mandela, occupies this position.

The committee thus settled on a parking lot opposite the City Hall in President Brand Street, as described above and, obviously, a further design was necessary, as was the approval by Eaton. Whether on studying the conditions of the competition for the City Hall or by instinct, Holm preserved the axial arrangement of the city hall portico along Henry Street, now de-proclaimed between Aliwal and President Brand Street, by proposing a large reflecting pool within the vestiges of the roadway. He separated this design from the site of commemoration, partly by way of a long, low wall of off-shutter reinforced concrete.

39 E-mail: A Holm (Architect of Hertzog Square)/W Peters (Co-author), 25 April 2016.

The 'monument' was conceived of as an informal, open air theatre for which the descending topography was shaped to create a web of clay-brick lined terraces at different levels within a rectilinear matrix, a wholly modern design. The boundary to Aliwal Street was marked by two overlapping parallel off-shutter concrete walls, the inner of which became the backdrop for a group of sculptures by De Jager. The horizontality of the walls was countered by a tall stele of bare concrete, which provides the backdrop for the twice life-size statue of Hertzog, leaning forward from a pedestal overlooking the pool⁴⁰ (Image 1.17).

Today the trees have matured and the terraces are much in use, almost as outdoor rooms, while pedestrians enjoy traversing the shaded paved areas, arranged on shifting axes, which effectively bring nature, man and monument together in a landscape of commemoration. While the water filters have ceased operating, the park is maintained, but it is doubtful whether any user of the park, probably the most used in Bloemfontein, realises that the statue represents the founder of the (Apartheid) National Party.

Voortrekker Monument, Winburg, 1964⁴¹

Winburg, which had witnessed the largest gathering of the Great Trek before dispersing in 1837, had in 1931 lost out to Pretoria, which got the Voortrekker Monument, won in competition by architect Gerard Moerdijk.

However, there had been a promise of a minor monument for Winburg, which eventually came to fruition with a competition in 1964.⁴²

The organisers appointed as assessors a cultural historian and two architects: Leon Roodt, then practising in Welkom, and an academic at the University of Natal, Dr Barrie Biermann. Because he held this jury competent to adjudicate a modern, abstract commemorative design, Hans Hallen of Durban, an avowed liberal, entered and won from 36 entries.

The generative idea of Hallen's design was the laager, here defined by the cluster of five crescentic shafts of exposed reinforced concrete, which heights were governed by the tallest objects in the Free State landscape, grain

⁴⁰ The concept of the stele Holm concedes was inspired by the simplicity of the Danie Theron monument outside Potchefstroom, a tall structure of concrete topped with a metal acroteria.

⁴¹ Anon., "Prysvraag: Voortrekkermonument, Winburg", *South African Architectural Record*, August 1965, pp. 28-30

⁴² W Peters, "Voortrekker monument at Winburg. Threshold for a new generation of commemorative architecture", *Journal of the South African Institute of Architects*, June/July 2012, pp. 36-45.

silos (Image 1.18). The shafts of differing radii were symbolic of the main Voortrekker parties, each of which was identified at the base by the surname of a leader.

The cluster was bonded by a roof at low level, conceived as a cistern, from which five spouts cantilevered to decant into large, oval, stone-lined bowls at the foot of each intercolumniation. Like the Pretoria counterpart, the roof was distinguished by a central oculus to throw light on the bronze tableau on the floor, and to provide the monument with a sense of immanence. However, and most importantly, this abstract monument broke the mould for the new generation of commemorative monuments in South Africa.

Civic Centre, 'Glaspaleis', now Bram Fischer Building, Bloemfontein, 1986⁴³

In January 1986, architects practising in Bloemfontein received an invitation from the city council to participate in a design competition for a new civic centre on the block bounded by De Villiers Street on the east, Voortrekker Street (now Nelson Mandela Drive) on the north, Markgraaff Street on the west, and a vestige of Henry Street on the south. However, as the site was contiguous with the block occupied by the City Hall, the northward passage of De Villiers Street was terminated at the service road of Leith's design to create a continuum of the civic square.

The conditions made clear that the new building "should in no way harm the image" of the City Hall but, on the contrary, "in some way compliment [sic]" the City Hall in a unity, yet be immediately recognisable as "the pride of the city".

When the jury consisting of four city councillors, the city engineer, the president of the Orange Free State Institute of Architects, and senior Johannesburg architect Jan van Wijk⁴⁴ pronounced the 22-storey design by local architects, JC de K Witthuhn and Maree as the winner amongst thirteen entries, the announcement met with public outrage.

Objectors were most concerned about the scale as there was no need for a high-rise structure, certainly none dictated by land values, or the image

⁴³ W van Zyl, "The Bloemfontein civic centre competition", *Architecture SA*, September/October 1986, pp. 33-36.

⁴⁴ H Koorts, "Nuus uit OVS – Bloemfontein nuwe burgersentrum", *Architecture SA*, July/August 1986, p. 24.

in the context of the “finely articulated sandstone neighbours”. This was defended by saying that the building would “blend with the surrounding through contrast”, an issue which the public concluded had more to do with *grootdoenerigheid* (ostentation).⁴⁵

After high-level approaches by architectural academics and the Institute, the City Council opted for a metamorphosis of the winning scheme and the ‘also ran’ proposal by Kesting-Beukes, which too was a high-rise scheme, but more compact and with a greater variety of form. This resulted in a slightly lower building, shaped by a fusion of forms from different prototypes. It was clad in a light-blue tinted glass curtain wall and the stepped podium was fronted with precast textured concrete panels, some canted, and coloured to ‘match’ the city hall, with in the interior, a full-height atrium (Image 1.19).

Dubbed *Glaspaleis* (palace of glass), the building was inaugurated six years after the competition, on 11 April 1992. While some critics had reconciled themselves that a design dictated by the perceptions of the late 1980s, would be of little importance in the lives of future generations, interestingly, the logo of what became Mangaung Municipality, ‘at the heart of it all’, bears a striking resemblance to the profile of the *Glaspaleis*. Still today, despite the re-naming as Bram Fischer building, ‘the pride of the city’ is either met with indifference or as an object of contempt – as a legacy of a bygone era.

Following that controversy, perhaps as an appeasement to the profession, the Bloemfontein City Council subsequently staged two ideas competitions. The first in 1986 was for a face-lift to the 1904 canalisation of Bloemspuit⁴⁶ won by local architects Wills and Van der Merwe, and in 1991 for the revitalisation of President Brand Street,⁴⁷ which in 1989 had been declared a Conservation Area in terms of the National Monuments Act, won by The Roodt Partnership, also based in Bloemfontein.

Nothing came of the first, and with the advent of democracy then in reach, perhaps prudently, the city council conceded to only the pedestrian need, and realised some brick paving to the pavements of the latter. However, commitment is one of the general problems associated with any ideas competition.

45 D Yuill, “The proposed Bloemfontein civic centre”, *Architecture SA*, November/December 1989, pp. 43-45.

46 W van Zyl, “Bloemspuit as an urban design challenge”, *Architecture SA*, March/April 1987, pp. 17-19.

47 Anon., “President Brandstraat kompetisie”, *Architecture SA*, May/June 1991, pp. 33-35.

Findings and conclusions

This explication has brought to the fore that almost every competition held in the periods of the Boer Republic of the Orange Free State and the Province of the Orange Free State of the Republic of South Africa, experienced problems of various kinds. Unrealistic budgets were the main reasons in the former; in the latter it was the subsequent changes and, in the case of the *Glaspaleis*, an inappropriate jury composition.

Balancing wishes and budget is always a difficult challenge, especially in a fledgling community, but this should not douse the pursuit of an ideal. Some change to any premiated design must be accepted, but as promoter and architect only meet after the announcement of the composition outcome, a good deal of professionalism could be needed, especially where the parties are of different political persuasion, failing which the project could suffer. Jurying, however, is comparable with peer review, and the best juries are composed of professionally qualified assessors, who are equipped with appropriate design skills and have the intellectual capacity and respect, which Fred Glennie, Geoffrey Pearse, William Hawke, Leon Roodt and Barre Biermann clearly had. Besides the nature of the jury, effective design competitions provide briefs beyond accommodation schedules and budgets, and especially stipulate the overall intentions the project should fulfil. This appears not to have been the case in the *Glaspaleis*. The jury consisting of a majority of city councillors had obviously never been scrutinised for its appropriateness. Architects should have refused participation *en masse* in protest, but such was the politics of the day, and the outcome messy.

Competitions are held for the purposes of obtaining the best possible design for a project, and any decent competition follows the guidelines set by the institute, best with an architect of requisite experience as a professional adviser to draft the conditions and run the competition, with assessors brought in only to judge the submissions on the basis of the brief and select the winning designs.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, one can never exclude the possibility of political or bureaucratic interference on the part of the promoters, post announcement.

A building won in a competition holds special status; many brought innovations like elevators, electric lighting and heating radiators, artificial ventilation and even glass curtain walling, and these facts stimulate popular

⁴⁸ J Strong, *Participating in architectural competitions. A guide for competitors, promoters and assessors* (London, Architectural Press, 1976), p. 67.

interest in architecture. However, the process makes huge demands on resources, in which context one needs only consider the numerous 'also rans'. But competitions can bring the skills of distinguished architects from beyond the geographic location and it is also this fraternity whom is owed the concept of a landscape of commemoration. It is similarly interesting to note that four firms each won two competitions, and that despite the cachet of 'outside' architects, seven of the nineteen premiums went to Bloemfontein practices.

President Brand Street probably presents the densest environment of competition-winning projects in South Africa. This street and its ambit saw no less than ten competitions, of which only the last two went unexecuted. Seven important public buildings and Hertzog Square are the products of competitions, and were, undoubtedly, keystones to the declaration of the street as a conservation area in 1989. Most competition-winning buildings here advanced the local architectural culture and continue to do so, are of sandstone finish, which unified the whole and were placed in landscaped settings, and a few went on to be declared national monuments. President Brand Street remains a testament to the value of design competitions.

No architectural competition has been held in the Free State of the post-1994, new South Africa. However, one was stillborn. Early in the process, while consultants were busy preparing the brief for a new legislative assembly, politicians, fortunately, chose rather to conserve the Fourth *Raadzaal*, the 'pride of the province'. However, the idealism of competitions continues in the rest of South Africa; it's just that 21st century Free State has yet to learn of the old adage 'competition is good'. Based on the overall outcome and the arguments advanced, this article wishes to affirm competitions as an important procurement method.

Boer Republic of the Orange Free State, 1854-1902

Image 1: Extant buildings resulting from architectural competitions in the Free State*

Tuenterkerk, 1878



Presidency, 1884



Fourth Roadzaal, 1884



Orange River Colony, 1902-1910

Kroonstad Town Hall, 1906



National Museum, 1907



Women's Memorial, ca 1907



Public Hall in High Court



High Court, 1906

Photo: Kobus Greyvenstein (Image 1.7).

* The dates refer to the years of the competitions; unless otherwise mentioned all buildings are located in Bloemfontein and all photographs are by the authors.

Union of South Africa, 1910-1961: Orange Free State Province

SA Mutual, 1928



Trinity Methodist Church, 1929



Harrismith High School, 1948



Republic of South Africa, 1961-1994: Orange Free State Province

City Hall, 1930



Council Chamber



Wood carving to window by Meyerowitz



Welkom Civic Centre, 1955



Oppenheimer Theatre



Photo: Louis vd Riet (Image 1.16).

Hertzog Square, 1960



Voortrekker Monument, Winburg, 1964



Civic Centre (Glaspari), 1986

