

“The idea of beautifying the surroundings”: Bloemfontein’s (Mangaung) Batho location a “garden location”?¹ (ca. 1918-1939)

Derek du Bruyn²
National Museum, Bloemfontein
derek@nasmus.co.za

Marietjie Oelofse
University of the Free State
oelofsem@ufs.ac.za

Abstract

In 1918, the Municipality of Bloemfontein saw the establishment of Batho as the new location for the town’s black and coloured people as an opportunity to not only establish a so called model location but also a garden location. Batho’s founding must be viewed within the historical context of British-style town and urban planning, as well as the racist and segregationist policies implemented by the Union Government. The model location ideology not only encompassed proper layout and improved amenities but also meant striving towards aesthetic ideals. Such ideals implied the beautification of Batho by means of laying out domestic and public gardens, as well as the mass planting of trees. In order to turn Batho into a garden location, the Town Council implemented certain initiatives which included efforts to secure a reliable water supply and to introduce special water tariffs; the allocation of allotment gardens; the provision of a fresh-produce market for location residents; the distribution of trees free of charge, and other tree-planting initiatives; and, finally, the provision of a public “park” for Batho. While some of the motivations behind these initiatives were, indeed, driven by aesthetic ideals, others were deeply rooted in segregationist thinking and ideology. The municipality’s efforts and initiatives, as well as the Batho residents’ reactions to these, were key factors in the quest to turn Batho into a garden location. These efforts, initiatives, and reactions are investigated and critically assessed in order to determine whether the municipality’s attempts to create a garden location were “successful”. This article focuses on the period considered to be Batho’s “golden age”, that is, 1918-1939.

Keywords: Batho; Bloemfontein Municipality; Segregation; Gardens; Water; Allotments; Market; Tree-planting; Park; Garden location.

Introduction

Batho³ was officially established in 1918 by the Municipality of Bloemfontein (hereafter also referred to as the municipality) as a properly-planned and well-

1 FSPA, MBL 1/1/1/34, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Town Council, 28 August 1936, p. 453.

2 Research Fellow, Department of History, University of the Free State.

3 A Sesotho word meaning “people”.

laid-out residential area or so-called "location"⁴ for the town's black⁵ and coloured⁶ people. The use of the terms "properly planned" and "well laid-out" indicates a shift away from the haphazard manner in which South African locations had originated until then.⁷ The planning and subsequent establishment of Batho heralded a different approach because it significantly raised the bar for location planning, layout and administration. In this regard, the white administration were of the opinion Bloemfontein's municipality succeeded in creating an "exemplary" location that was considered a "model location"⁸ both locally and nationally. The model location ideology was not limited to a sound layout, proper housing, and public amenities since it also meant striving towards aesthetic ideals. Essentially, such ideals implied the beautification of Batho by means of laying out both domestic and public gardens, as well as the planting of trees. As a result, the idea of turning the model location into what may be termed a "garden location" became the ideal for senior municipal officials, such as the superintendent of locations, the superintendent of public parks and Bloemfontein's mayors.

The establishment of Batho as a model location and its subsequent development into a garden location should be positioned within the segregationist discourse of the post-Anglo-Boer (South African) War (hereafter also referred to as the war) of 1899-1902 which provided the rationale for its creation. Although the informal planning of urban land use in South Africa dates back to the 1850s, it was only during the 1920s that town and urban planning became a serious concern. Due to the fact that South Africa had been a British colony until 1910 and then a dominion of the British Empire until 1961, local town planning discourse was heavily influenced by developments in Britain.⁹ The Garden City Movement of Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928) strongly influenced town planning in Britain and its colonies. Howard promoted the idea of the "garden city"¹⁰ consisting of "garden suburbs".¹¹ At the same time, South Africa's urban landscape was shaped by the rapid urbanisation of black and coloured people and the ad hoc implementation of

4 During the time of the colonial, Union Government, and the apartheid era, the word "location" was commonly used to refer to informal residential areas earmarked for black and coloured people. These racially-segregated areas were usually located on the outskirts of white towns and cities, and are now called "townships".

5 People of African descent.

6 People of mixed race.

7 K Sevenhuysen, "Owerheidsbeheer en -wetgewing rakende stedelike swart behuising voor en gedurende die Tweede Wêreldoorlog", *Historia*, 40(1), May 1995, p. 93; DDT Jabavu, *The black problem: Papers and addresses on various native problems* (New York, Negro Universities Press, 1969), p. 11.

8 The use of the term "model location" and other similar terms should be seen in the context of the segregationist policies enforced during the period under discussion. It is not the authors' intention to glorify or justify segregationist ideologies and constructs by using historical terminology.

9 R Home, "Colonial urban planning in Anglophone Africa", C Nunes Silva (ed.), *Urban planning in Sub-Saharan Africa: Colonial and post-colonial planning cultures* (New York, Routledge, 2015), p. 59; A Mabin, "Origins of segregatory urban planning in South Africa, c. 1900-1940", *Planning History*, 13(3), 1991, pp. 8-11.

10 E Howard, *Garden cities of to-morrow* (Eastbourne, Attic Books, 1985), pp. vi-viii.

11 M Clapson, "The suburban aspiration in England since 1919", *Contemporary British History*, 14(1), 2000, p. 152.

segregationist policies by anxious whites in response to this trend.¹² According to social historian, Maynard Swanson, segregationist thinking was reinforced by the perceived dangers to public health caused by overcrowding, slum conditions and poor sanitation in the locations. Swanson coined the term “sanitation syndrome” to describe white South Africans’ use of medical terms to justify racial segregation during the period under discussion.¹³

Although mostly informally enforced in urban areas across the Union of South Africa (established in 1910), the idea of territorial segregation became the guiding principle which informed all racial policies on municipal level.¹⁴ For example, Bloemfontein’s Town Council (hereafter also referred to as the council) found it necessary to introduce a “definite native policy”¹⁵ which conformed to the “general segregation principles”¹⁶ laid down by the Union Government in the form of new legislation, notably the Natives (Urban Areas) Act (no. 21 of 1923).¹⁷ This Act became the blueprint for urban segregation and allowed for the creation and administration of segregated locations. In terms of segregationist thinking, towns and cities were regarded as whites-only creations while the locations had to accommodate only those black and coloured people who were in the employ of the whites.¹⁸ Location residents were considered sojourners and were therefore denied property rights. At the same time, location administrators argued that if locations were to be accepted as permanent features of the urban landscape, then such locations had to be orderly, “civilised” and sanitary. It is on the basis of this thinking that the idea of the garden location as a sanitary location emerged. White town planners saw the British garden city concept as a frame of reference for the creation of the location as an aesthetically pleasing garden suburb or, for the purpose of this article, a garden location.¹⁹ Thus, it is argued that racial prejudice, segregation, the “sanitation syndrome”, town planning, garden cities and the garden location idea are all interlinked in some way or another.

12 PB Rich, “Ministering to the white man’s needs: The development of urban segregation in South Africa 1913-1923”, *African Studies*, 37(2), 1978, pp. 180-191.

13 MW Swanson, “The sanitation syndrome: Bubonic plague and urban native policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909”, *Journal of African History*, 18(3), 1977, pp. 387-391, 408-410; M Swanson, “Urban origins of separate development”, *Race*, 10, 1968, pp. 33-34.

14 See, for example, the regulations included in the republic of the Orange Free State’s Law No. 8 of 1893. This law governed black and coloured locations in the Orange Free State until 1923.

15 Free State Provincial Archives (hereafter FSPA), Municipality of Bloemfontein (MBL), 3/1/19, Mayor’s minute 1926-1927, p. 12.

16 FSPA, MBL 3/1/19, Mayor’s minute 1926-1927, p. 12.

17 Statutes of the Union of South Africa 1923 with tables of contents (alphabetical and chronological) and tables of laws, etc., repealed and amended by these statutes: Natives (Urban Areas) Act (no. 21 of 1923), p. 140.

18 P Maylam, “The rise and decline of urban apartheid in South Africa”, *African Affairs*, 89(354), January 1990, pp. 66-67.

19 N Coetzer, “Langa Township in the 1920s – an (extra)ordinary Garden Suburb”, *South African Journal of Art History*, 24(1), 2009, pp. 1-2, 5-6, 17; MW Swanson, “The sanitation syndrome...”, *Journal of African History*, 18(3), 1977, pp. 408-410; RK Home, “Town planning and garden cities in the British colonial empire 1910-1940”, *Planning Perspectives*, 5(1), 1990, pp. 31-32.

The main purpose of this article is to explore the role played by the municipality in turning Batho into a garden location. This article focuses on the period 1918-1939, which is considered to be Batho's golden age, if only from a garden perspective. The initiatives and practical steps taken by the municipality to turn Batho into a garden location during this period will be identified and discussed. These include efforts to secure a reliable water supply and to introduce special water tariffs for Batho's residents; the allocation of allotment gardens; the provision of a fresh-produce market for location residents; the distribution of trees and shrubs free of charge and other tree-planting initiatives; and, finally, the provision of a public park for Batho. The motivations behind these beautification initiatives, and the way in which Batho's black and coloured residents responded to these, will also be investigated. In the article it is considered why the municipality saw a need to turn Batho into a garden location within the context of the early segregationist South African state at the local level, and the practical measures taken to achieve this. The question as to whether the municipality's efforts to turn Batho into a garden location were successful or not, so to speak, will also be addressed since attempts to create similar garden locations elsewhere in the Union mostly failed.

Garden areas and gardening facilities for a model location

Towards the late 1890s, Waaihoek, which was Bloemfontein's main location for black and coloured people and which had been situated close to the centre of town, became stretched to capacity when all the available plots (stands) were occupied. Due to the ever-increasing numbers of newcomers who applied to live there, the council was forced to consider the laying out of a new location elsewhere.²⁰ After the war ended, even greater numbers of black and coloured people who had been devastated by the war, migrated to Bloemfontein and other towns in the Orange River Colony (formerly the republic of the Orange Free State) in search of employment. Since Waaihoek was situated conveniently close to the town centre and the adjacent white residential areas where employment was available, most of these newcomers opted to settle there, resulting in overcrowding.²¹ As a result, the slum conditions which had developed in Waaihoek,²² became one of the main driving forces behind the municipality's pursuit of a solution for what was considered its "pressing question".²³ On the one hand, Waaihoek could not be extended because it had reached maximum capacity while, on the other, the only other location where black and coloured people could be settled, namely Kaffirfontein [sic], was overcrowded, decrepit, and situated

20 FSPA, MBL 3/1/5, Mayor's minute 1897, p. 5.

21 FSPA, MBL 1/2/4/1/3, Letter from acting Superintendent of Locations to Town Clerk, 18 November 1918, p. 3; K Schoeman, *Imperiale somer: Suid-Afrika tussen Oorlog en Unie* (Pretoria, Protea Boekhuis, 2015), p. 177.

22 K Schoeman, *Bloemfontein: Die ontstaan van 'n stad, 1846-1946* (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1980), p. 285; J Haasbroek, "Founding venue of the African National Congress (1912): Wesleyan school, Fort Street, Waaihoek, Bloemfontein", *Navorsinge van die Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein*, 18(7), November 2002, p. 133.

23 FSPA, MBL 3/1/8, Mayor's minute 1903, p. 10.

too far away from the town.²⁴ Thus, the council saw a potential solution in laying out a new location that was situated closer to town than Kaffirfontein but not as near the town as Waaihoek.

In addition to the growing urbanisation of black and coloured people,²⁵ and the growing slum problem, other factors also played a role in the council's decision to lay out a new segregated location east of the Johannesburg-Cape Town railway track. These factors, which are only mentioned briefly, include deteriorating race relations between Bloemfontein's whites and people of colour mainly due to the white residents' racist attitudes²⁶ and, closely related to this phenomenon, Waaihoek's close proximity to the white town centre, and the white residents' growing unease with this social-spatial reality.²⁷ Another factor which reinforced and, to an extent, also "legitimised" the council's decision to demolish Waaihoek and relocate its residents to a new location, is the Spanish Influenza epidemic of October 1918.²⁸ This epidemic caused alarm among Bloemfontein's municipal officials and the white electorate because of the alleged "unhygienic" and "unsanitary" conditions in Waaihoek and the role such conditions supposedly played in the high mortality rate among the location's residents (read "sanitation syndrome").²⁹ Finally, the council's argument that the area of Waaihoek located closest to the town was needed for the erection of a new power station for Bloemfontein was another factor which played a role in its decision to demolish Waaihoek and to establish Batho as Bloemfontein's new main location for black and coloured people.³⁰

24 FSPA, MBL 3/1/7, Public Health Report for 1902, Bloemfontein, O.R.C., p. 41; K Schoeman, *Bloemfontein: Die ontstaan van 'n stad...*, p. 285.

25 FSPA, MBL 1/2/4/1/3, Letter from Superintendent of Locations to Town Clerk, 25 April 1919, p. 7; HJ van Aswegen, "Die verstedeliking van die Nie-Blanke in die Oranje-Vrystaat, 1854-1902", *South African Historical Journal*, 2, November 1970, pp. 19-37.

26 For more information on race relations in the Orange Free State, see HJ van Aswegen, *Die verhouding tussen Blank en Nie-Blank in die Oranje-Vrystaat, 1854-1902* (Archives Year Book for South African History, 34(1), Pretoria, The Government Printer, 1977); CJP le Roux, *Die verhouding tussen Blank en Nie-Blank in die Oranjerivierkolonie, 1900-1910* (Archives Year Book for South African History, 50(1), Pretoria, The Government Printer, 1986).

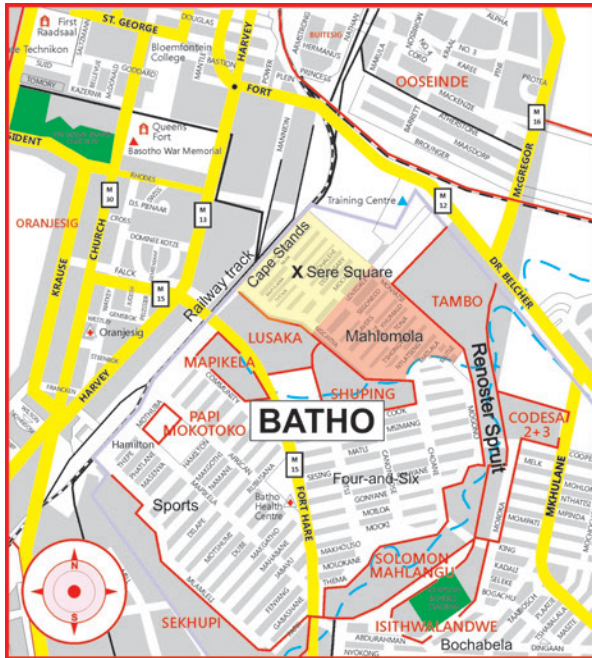
27 FSPA, MBL 3/1/19, Mayor's minute 1926-1927, p. 12.

28 *The Friend*, 11 January 1919; H Phillips, "The local state and public health reform in South Africa: Bloemfontein and the consequences of the Spanish 'Flu epidemic of 1918", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13(2), January 1987, pp. 210-233.

29 More than 900 black and coloured people out of a total of 16 000 had succumbed to the disease. *The Friend*, 5 October 1918; 9 October 1918; 23 December 1918; 13 January 1919; FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/3, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 1 November 1918, pp. 1-2; J Burman, *Disaster struck South Africa* (Cape Town, Struik, 1971), pp. 86-87, 94.

30 FSPA, MBL 1/2/4/1/6, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 7 April 1924, p. 2.

Image 1: A map of Batho as it is today, showing sections and streets



Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM Map Batho 7, 2019 (Designed in 2019 by Toni Pretorius of the National Museum's Art Department specifically for this article).

It is important to note that the council saw the laying out of a new location for Bloemfontein not only as an opportunity to apply the Union Government's already-mentioned general segregation principles to Bloemfontein's future town planning schemes but also to establish, develop and market Batho as a model location. This ideology, which is partly rooted in the notion of the Orange Free State as a model republic³¹ during the term of office of President JH Brand (1864-1888),³² became the mantra, so to speak, for the manner in which Batho was laid out and developed. Later, similar model locations and model native villages were laid out elsewhere in the Union, such as Langa (Cape Town),³³ Lamontville (Durban)³⁴ and McNamee Village (New Brighton, Port Elizabeth).³⁵ Some of these locations and villages, such

31 M Bidwell & CH Bidwell, *Pen pictures of the past* (edited by K Schoeman, Vrijstatia 5) (Human & Rousseau, Cape Town, 1986), p. 2; TB Barlow, *The life and times of President Brand* (Juta & Co., Cape Town, 1972), p. 193.
32 TB Barlow, *The life and times of President Brand*, pp. 180-195.
33 N Coetzer, "Langa Township in the 1920s...", *South African Journal of Art History*, 24(1), 2009, pp. 1-19.
34 L Torr, "Providing for the 'better-class native': The creation of Lamontville, 1923-1933", *South African Geographical Journal*, 69(1), 1987, pp. 31-46.
35 P Maylam, "Explaining the apartheid city: 20 years of South African urban historiography", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21(1), March 1995, pp. 19-38; M Epprecht, "The native village debate in Pietermaritzburg, 1848-1925: Revisiting the 'sanitation syndrome'", *Journal of African History*, 58(2), 2017, pp. 262, 275; G Baines, "The politics of welfare: The provision of housing and services in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, c. 1920-1944", *Kronos*, 22, November 1995, p. 105.

as McNamee Village, were envisaged as garden village(s)³⁶ or, as in the case of Langa, a Garden Suburb.³⁷ For the purpose of this article, a neologism, namely garden location, is used to describe what was essentially a hybrid, that is, a blend between a location and a garden suburb. In many cases, the lack of political commitment and a political will to provide adequate funding hampered the complete realisation of not only model location or model native village ideals but also garden location ideals.³⁸

For the purpose of this article, it is necessary to consider the fact that by the time Batho was established, Bloemfontein had been a predominantly English town. Most of Bloemfontein's municipal officials, including the senior officials, were English-speaking gentlemen, many of whom had been born in Britain. As a result, English cultural influence in Bloemfontein manifested on all levels of municipal administration, including town planning, parks administration and, importantly, location administration.³⁹ The British penchant for gardens and gardening was evident in the strong gardening culture which had developed in Bloemfontein since its founding in 1846. As a result, the development of a garden aesthetic and, in Batho's case, a "garden location aesthetic", became one of the council's ideals in its quest to develop Batho as a model location.⁴⁰ At the same time, it must also be kept in mind that gardening – considered a "noble" pastime by the British – was also seen as a useful moralising and civilising tool to pacify an increasingly restless and politically-conscious black urban populace. Gardening was considered one of the "arts of civilized life",⁴¹ to quote the Scottish missionary, Dr John Philip (1775-1851). As had been the case with sport and ballroom dancing, gardening was seen as a proper leisure activity into which black location residents' energies and frustrations could be channelled.⁴²

In order to develop a garden location aesthetic in Batho and, in the process, turn it into a garden location, certain practical measures were implemented, the most

36 P Maylam, "Explaining the apartheid...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21(1), March 1995, p. 30; K Sevenhuysen, "Swart stedelike behuisingsverskaffing in Suid-Afrika, ca. 1923-1948: 'Wanneer meer minder kos' – finansiële verliese versus welsyns- en gesondheidswinste", *New Contree*, 64, July 2012, pp. 122-124; A Schauder, "Generous housing for South Africa's natives", *Optima*, 3(4), December 1953, pp. 2-3.

37 N Coetzer, "Langa Township in the 1920s...", *South African Journal of Art History*, 24(1), 2009, p. 1.

38 P Maylam, "Explaining the apartheid...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21(1), March 1995, p. 30; N Coetzer, "Langa Township in the 1920s...", *South African Journal of Art History*, 24(1), 2009, p. 1.

39 K Schoeman, *Bloemfontein: Die ontstaan van 'n stad...*, pp. 158-160, 170, 183; SF Malan, "Die Britse besetting van Bloemfontein", *Historia*, 20(1), May 1975, pp. 40-43; D du Bruyn, "'Township Topiary': The history of the English-style gardens of Batho, Mangaung (1846-1948)", *Navorsing van die Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein*, 27(3), December 2011, pp. 49-50.

40 For a detailed discussion of the role of Bloemfontein's English-speaking residents in the development of a gardening culture during the town's colonial period, see D du Bruyn, "Gardens, gardening culture and the development of a semi-vernacular garden style in Batho, Mangaung, 1918-1939: A historical perspective" (Ph.D., University of the Free State, 2018), pp. 243-260; D du Bruyn, "'Township Topiary'...", *Navorsing van die Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein*, 27(3), December 2011, pp. 49-56.

41 J Philip, *Researches in South Africa: Illustrating the civil, moral, and religious condition of the native tribes II* (shortened title) (New York, Negro Universities Press, 1969), p. 33.

42 P Maylam, "Explaining the apartheid...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21(1), March 1995, p. 31.

important of which dealt with the size of Batho's plots. When Councillor Arthur Barlow announced that the municipality had "a scheme on hand for a new location", he promised that large grounds⁴³ had been provided for in the scheme. Accordingly, Batho's plots were made substantially bigger than Waaihoek's. While the average Waaihoek plot measured 50 x 50 feet,⁴⁴ Batho's plots were 50 x 75 feet⁴⁵ in order to allow space for "garden areas"⁴⁶ and "gardening facilities",⁴⁷ to use terminology that was similar to that used by the Garden City Movement. In practice, the garden areas and gardening facilities referred to plots made big enough to allow space for the laying out of front gardens and sizeable backyards to accommodate vegetable gardens. For the purpose of this discussion, it is argued that by allocating plots which compared well with the standard Garden City Movement size of 50 x 100 feet,⁴⁸ the municipality had both practically and symbolically set the stage, so to speak, for turning Batho into a garden location. The council's other initiatives and efforts to this effect, which will be discussed subsequently, must be viewed against this background and, of course, in the context of segregationist thinking and policies.

"To improve the wholesomeness of their home surroundings":⁴⁹ Water supply, communal taps and water tariffs

The single most important element on which Batho's gardeners depended for maintaining their gardens was the availability of a reliable and affordable water supply. Access to a reliable water supply was of critical importance in the harsh climate of the central Free State. Although Batho falls within a summer rainfall region, temperatures typically reach the high thirties during summer, that is, from November to February.⁵⁰ Such climatic conditions posed a challenge to Batho's gardeners, who were heavily dependent on municipal water for their gardens. During the 1920s and 1930s, Bloemfontein's locations, including Batho, received most of their water from the same main sources as the town's white suburbs, namely the waterworks at Mazelspoort and Mockes Dam.⁵¹ The most notable difference was that whereas water was conveniently laid on right up to the properties and into the homes of the white residents in town, Batho's residents had to use buckets to fetch their water from stand-alone taps on the pavements. Since Batho's establishment,

43 *The Friend*, 13 January 1919.

44 Approximately 16.5 x 16.5 metres. FSPA: A. 3(4/1)(9/2/2), Extracts: South African Races Committee: Land tenure (manuscript), p. 2.

45 Approximately 16.5 x 24.75 metres. FSPA: MBL 3/1/19, Mayor's minute 1921-1922, p. 13.

46 FSPA, MBL 3/1/19, Mayor's minute 1919-1920, p. 8.

47 Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (hereafter HP): AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1925-1926, p. 2.

48 Approximately 16.5 x 33 metres. N Coetzer, "Langa Township in the 1920s...", *South African Journal of Art History*, 24(1), 2009, p. 8.

49 HP, AD 1765, Annual report of the Native Administration Department 1931-1932, p. 3.

50 L Mucina & MC Rutherford (eds), *The vegetation of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland* (Pretoria, SANBI, 2006), p. 381.

51 FSPA, MBL 1/2/3/1/25, Report on the water supply of the City of Bloemfontein, 14 February 1927.

each new completed section⁵² of the location was furnished with running water in the form of outside taps on standpipes installed at intervals on the pavements. For example, in June 1924, the council approved an amount of £60 for the laying on of water to new plots in Batho and, in September that year, an additional £130 was allocated to meet new demands due to further extension of the location.⁵³

While the communal taps installed in Batho might have been adequate for basic domestic use, they were entirely insufficient in terms of meeting gardening needs. By the mid-1920s, a total of 85 such taps had been installed – a number which happened to be woefully inadequate. Since water for both household and gardening purposes had to be carried in buckets from the communal taps to the plots, the watering of gardens was physically demanding. One solution was to make use of the services offered by enterprising location residents who transported water in buckets, drums or barrels on wheelbarrows or in small carts for a fee. However, for most Batho gardeners, this service was not an affordable option. Needless to say, the negative effect of the inaccessibility of water on the newly-laid-out gardens became glaringly visible during the hot summer months. The sympathies of the pragmatic Superintendent of Locations,⁵⁴ Mr RJ Cooper,⁵⁵ lay with the gardeners and, in his annual report for 1925-1926, he expressed his frustration with the state of affairs: “I wish funds permitted the erection of windmills!”⁵⁶

The only feasible solution to the water problem was for the municipality to provide more standpipes with taps at convenient intervals. However, because of an unwillingness to make additional funds available for this purpose, it failed to do so. By the early 1930s, Batho’s gardeners voiced their frustration with the inadequate water supply and submitted a request for more taps to the municipality’s Native Administration Department. The main reason for their request: “... to improve the wholesomeness of their home surroundings”.⁵⁷ That the residents’ expressed such a desire indicated a high level of public interest in the municipality’s objective to encourage Batho’s residents to lay out gardens. Ironically, the municipality fell short in its actions to ensure an adequate and reliable water supply and, in the process, undermined its own efforts to turn Batho into a garden location.

52 Batho consists of a number of sections, namely Cape Stands (initially known as the Cape Boys’ Location), Four-and-Six (named after the minimum wage demand of four shillings and six pennies), Mahlomola (a Sesotho word meaning “sorrow” in memory of those who perished as a result of the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918), Marabastad, Newclare, Rantjies and Sports (named after the Ramblers/Masenkeng sports stadium). AH Sekete, “The history of the Mangaung (black) township” (MA mini-dissertation, University of the Free State, 2004), pp. 11-12; *The Friend*, 5 December 1938.

53 *The Friend*, 3 June 1924; 2 September 1924; 30 July 1927.

54 The Superintendent of Locations was the municipal officer responsible for managing the locations and the Department of Native Affairs (later the Department of Native Administration). C le Roux, “Openbare gesondheidsorg in die swart woonbuurte van Bloemfontein, 1900-1945”, *Acta Academica*, 29(2), August 1997, p. 67.

55 Cooper, who succeeded Mr GP Cook, served as Superintendent of Locations from 1923 to 1945.

56 HR, AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1925-1926, p. 2.

57 HR, AD 1765, Annual report of the Native Administration Department 1931-1932, p. 3.

Other than the long distances between the plots and the few available communal taps, another water-related issue which affected Batho's gardeners was the water tariff charged for location residents. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, this issue had become a controversy, particularly in light of the council's decision to introduce a special reduced water tariff for the town's white gardeners. Due to the fact that Bloemfontein's water situation had improved dramatically, the municipality decided to boldly encourage gardening⁵⁸ among whites by charging those consumers who used in excess of 5 000 gallons at a cheaper rate of one shilling per 1 000 gallons.⁵⁹ In view of this concession, as well as the high rate of unemployment and economic hardship experienced by many location residents, Batho's so-called blockmen (ward councillors) requested that the council consider a similar reduction in the water tariff for the locations as well. The municipality's Native Affairs Committee⁶⁰ also recommended that the council consider charging the Native Administration Department (on behalf of the locations) a lower rate than the current three shillings per 1 000 gallons.⁶¹ This tariff, which in effect, meant a direct charge to plotholders of one shilling per 1 000 gallons per month, included water consumed by gardening and tree-planting.⁶²

Since Bloemfontein's white consumers who used less than 5 000 gallons per month had to pay three shillings and 10½ pennies per 1 000 gallons, the Public Works Committee recommended that the water tariff for location residents be increased rather than reduced. The ultra-conservative mayor, Mr EM de Beer,⁶³ also vehemently opposed a reduction in the water tariff for location residents because, in his opinion, "the Council seemed to be favouring the Natives in every possible way and ignoring the prior claims of the Europeans".⁶⁴ Not only was De Beer's claim about the councils "favouring the Natives" seemingly unfounded, but he also failed to specify what the "prior claims of the Europeans" were. Nevertheless, De Beer, supported by Councillor T Connor, held a minority view on this matter. At a council meeting, it was pointed out that apart from the fact that Batho's residents and other location residents had to fetch their water over long distances from comparatively few taps, their economic circumstances negatively affected their ability to pay a higher water tariff. Thus, it seems as though the overwhelming majority of councillors were surprisingly "sympathetic" to the location residents' plight, at least as far as their dire economic circumstances are concerned. It was resolved that the water tariff for location residents had to remain at

58 *The Friend*, 30 May 1929.

59 *The Friend*, 24 September 1929; 26 September 1929.

60 The municipal decision-making body which dealt with the locations.

61 FSPA, MBL 1/2/3/1/36, Report of City Engineer: Re proposed water tariff for gardening purposes, 10 May 1929, p. 5; FSPA, MBL 1/2/3/1/47, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Public Works and Parks Committee, 15 May 1931, p. 6.

62 HP, AD 1765, Annual report of Native Administration Department 1929-1930, p. 3; HP, AD 1765, Annual report of Native Administration Department 1931-1932, p. 3.

63 De Beer was mayor of Bloemfontein from April 1930 to March 1932.

64 *The Friend*, 29 May 1931.

three shillings per 1 000 gallons because, as was explained by Councillor LW Deane,⁶⁵ “... the water comes from Mazelspoort in one set of pipes whether it is intended for the location or the town”.⁶⁶

The fact that the council failed to reduce the water tariff for Batho’s residents while generously subsidising Bloemfontein’s white gardeners, not only reveals a flaw in its commitment to turn Batho into a garden location but also exposes deep-rooted racial prejudice towards the location residents. While the city’s water came from “one set of pipes”, as Councillor Deane rightly stated, it did not mean that the council harboured a unified vision for all residents, at least not as far as water provisioning was concerned.

“Provision be made for small garden allotments”:⁶⁷ The laying out of market gardens

One of the resolutions of a national conference on so-called Native Affairs held in Johannesburg in November 1924 required that in terms of the already-mentioned Natives (Urban Areas) Act, garden allotments be provided in the Union’s locations. Garden allotments, allotment gardens or often just allotments are closely associated with 20th-century British vernacular gardening culture and refer to food gardens not attached to dwellings and primarily used for the growing of fruit and vegetables.⁶⁸ The resolution in question stated that:⁶⁹

... considering the moral and social as well as the economic value of Natives having garden plots in which to grow small produce, it is a recommendation of this Conference to those Municipalities which have land available, that, in addition to adequate building stands, provision be made for small garden allotments.

The mention of the moral and social value of allotments is significant since it ties in with the belief that gardening – in this case allotment gardening – could be employed by the council as a moralising and civilising tool. As had been the case with gardening in general, it is argued that allotment gardening became yet another instrument to ensure that location residents engaged in civilised and morally uplifting leisure activities.

Not only was adequate land available for the laying out of allotments on the outskirts of Batho, but Bloemfontein’s council apparently acknowledged by 1924, the moral

⁶⁵ Deane was mayor of Bloemfontein from April 1927 to March 1928.

⁶⁶ *The Friend*, 29 May 1931.

⁶⁷ *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 15 November 1924.

⁶⁸ For more information on the history and culture of allotments, see D Crouch & C Ward, *The allotment: Its landscape and culture* (Nottingham, Five Leaves, 2007).

⁶⁹ *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 15 November 1924.

and social as well as the economic value of allotments, to quote the segregationist language used in the aforementioned conference resolution. The council, which had already encouraged gardening in general, at this stage also encouraged allotment gardening and, specifically, market gardening by the "granting of allotments".⁷⁰ In fact, the allocation of allotments to qualifying ploholders had been a decision taken by the council some time before the conference recommended it. In the mayor's annual report for the year 1921-1922, it was reported that "during the past year 50 Allotment [sic] gardens have been laid out"⁷¹ by keen gardeners. All allotment gardens, including "mealie plot allotments",⁷² had to be fenced in and kept free from weeds by the responsible allotment gardeners. The council appointed a Garden Committee to supervise the allocation of, and report the misuse and neglect of allotments, among other things.⁷³

Initially, most allotments were allocated on the banks of the Kaffirfontein Spruit⁷⁴ (see Image 1), where access to a reliable water supply could be secured. However, these allotments were situated too far away for the residents of Cape Stands, Mahlomola and Sports (see Image 1). Therefore, additional allotments were allocated on the open piece of land between Cook Avenue and Hamilton Road. These allotments were watered with borehole water and water obtained from a nearby concrete tank. A long-standing Batho resident, Sarah Mahabane (born 1927), explained that her father maintained an allotment garden near Cook Avenue and Hamilton Road in Batho's Four-and-Six section (see Image 1). According to Mahabane, "he planted vegetables and mealies and pumpkins"⁷⁵ there. Another Batho resident, Maria Magengenene (born 1927), recalled that other than vegetables and maize, many allotment gardens laid out in Cook Avenue contained peach trees.⁷⁶ Mahabane remembered that due to the huge demand for allotments, the municipality also allowed Batho residents to lay out vegetable gardens in the open space between Batho and Dr Belcher Road, today known as Tambo Square (see Image 1). There "the people planted vegetables and mealies and *magapu* [watermelons]",⁷⁷ she explained.

Allotment gardening was extremely popular among Batho's gardeners not only because of their fondness for gardening but also because allotment gardens became a welcome source of cheaper local food, whether for commercial reasons or subsistence. Needless to say, a proper market place where Batho's growing corps of market gardeners could

70 HP, AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1925-1926, p. 2.

71 FSPA, MBL 3/1/19, Mayor's minute 1921-1922, p. 14.

72 FSPA, MBL 1/2/4/1/6, Minutes of adjourned meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 8 April 1924, p. 4.

73 FSPA, MBL 1/2/4/1/25, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 6 December 1934, p. 1.

74 Today known as the Renoster Spruit.

75 National Museum Oral History Collection (NMOH), interview, SM Mahabane (resident, Batho)/HJ du Bruyn (historian, National Museum, Bloemfontein), 7 & 20 November 2014.

76 National Museum Oral History Collection, interview, SM Magengenene (resident, Batho)/HJ du Bruyn (historian, National Museum, Bloemfontein), 23 September 2014.

77 NMOH, interview, SM Mahabane (resident, Batho)/HJ du Bruyn (historian, National Museum, Bloemfontein), 7 & 20 November 2014.

sell their fresh produce became the location's next urgent need. The apparent success with which the municipality had managed to establish a class of market gardeners in Batho during the 1920s significantly contributed to its efforts to turn the location into a garden location. The way in which previously-unused open tracts of land in Batho had been turned into allotment gardens enhanced the overall garden location aesthetic.

In 1927, the Superintendent of Locations reported that Batho's allotment gardens "have proved a great success"⁷⁸ not only in aesthetic terms but also in terms of producing fresh vegetables. According to him, the location residents were increasingly appreciative of the nutritional value of vegetables which, in turn, led to an increase in demand. Therefore, the need arose for market gardeners who not only could produce enough vegetables to satisfy the rising demand but who also were able to sell their produce directly to the location residents at affordable prices and, importantly, at a suitable venue.⁷⁹ Before the erection of a fresh-produce market is discussed, it is necessary to consider the superintendent's claim that Batho's allotment gardens was a great success in the context of segregationist thinking. While these gardens may, indeed, have been successful in aesthetic and production terms, success was also measured in terms of successfully keeping location residents occupied with the morally uplifting "arts of civilized life", to once again quote Dr Philip, instead of subversive political activities against the state.⁸⁰

"Maraka": A fresh-produce market for Batho

Since Batho's earliest years, Sere Square (also known as Marabastad Square), located in the heart of Batho's Cape Stands section (see Image 1), had been the venue of the location's first fresh-produce market. This market satisfied the location residents' need for affordable fresh produce. Batho's allotment and domestic gardeners, who produced more fresh vegetables than needed for their own consumption, sold their produce at Sere Square's market.⁸¹ Since this market had been informally organised by Batho's gardeners themselves and was not subject to any municipal regulations, the quality of the fresh produce was often not up to standard. Therefore, the council decided not only to subject Batho's fresh-produce market to formal control and supervision but also to move it to new premises.⁸² Early in 1929, a new fresh-

78 HP, AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1926-1927, p. 3.

79 HP, AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1926-1927, pp. 2-3.

80 J Philip, *Researches in South Africa: Illustrating the civil, moral, and religious condition of the native tribes II* (shortened title) (New York, Negro Universities Press, 1969), p. 33.

81 NMOH, interview, ML Machogo (resident, Batho)/KJ Pudumo (oral historian, National Museum, Bloemfontein), 26 April 2017; interview, TG Mampe (resident, Batho)/P Letsatsi (oral historian, National Museum, Bloemfontein), 3 March 2011; interview, AS Motleleng (resident, Batho)/P Letsatsi (oral historian, National Museum, Bloemfontein), 8 March 2012.

82 Bloemfontein Public Library (hereafter BPL): *Official Gazette of the Orange Free State*, 25, 10 May 1929, Administrator's Notice 60 of 1929, Municipality of Bloemfontein: Municipal notice, p. 504; H Haasbroek, "Die oprigting en groeipyne van die nuwe Bloemfonteinse Mark (1925) op Baumannplein", *South African Journal of Cultural History*, 29(2), December 2015, pp. 93-94.

produce market, which consisted of a market area with a market building, was erected by the municipality on the area bounded by African Road, Fort Hare Road and Rubusana Street.⁸³ In terms of the municipality's Location Market Regulations, the new market, officially known as the Location Market, was purposed for "the sale or disposal of fruit, vegetables, or any other produce, fish, meat or livestock".⁸⁴ The regulations stipulated that sellers of any produce had to lease a table or ground space (so-called stalls) within the enclosed market area from the council at a fee. Funds raised in this way were used to pay the market master, who was a municipal employee.⁸⁵

The new market received the fervent support of Batho's market gardeners and gardening residents alike because mere months after it had come into use, Cooper reported that "many people had rented stalls and were now trying to earn an honest livelihood by the sale of their produce, which, in the great majority of cases, was excellent in quality".⁸⁶ It is argued that the combined efforts of Batho's market gardeners to grow fresh produce on the allotments and in their own domestic gardens contributed significantly to Batho's becoming a garden location. The fact that "many people", to quote Cooper, had been involved in market gardening supports the argument that this type of gardening was rather widespread in Batho. During the 1930s, the location residents' demand for fresh fruit and vegetables exceeded local supply, despite the adverse effect of the Great Depression of 1929-1934 on the economic position of Bloemfontein's black and coloured people. As a result, left-over produce, which could not be sold at Bloemfontein's main fresh-produce market, was sold at the Location Market at discount prices.⁸⁷

According to Mahabane who, as a child, often visited the market with her mother during the 1930s, Batho's residents called the market "maraka", a corruption of the Afrikaans word *mark*, meaning market. Apart from cheaper meat cuts, vegetables (such as cabbages, pumpkins, tomatoes, onions, green beans, and butternuts) and flowers (such as roses, chrysanthemums, and hollyhocks) were also sold there.⁸⁸ Thus, it is argued that towards the end of the 1920s, the growing of fresh produce must have been extensive in Batho, most notably on the location's allotments. Furthermore, Cooper's observation indicates that a class of successful market gardeners had been established and that they successfully utilised both the allotments and their own domestic gardens for the growing of fruit and vegetables during a time of economic hardship.

83 FSPA, MBL 1/2/4/1/15, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 9 January 1929, p. 4.

84 FSPA, MBL 1/2/4/1/16, Municipality of Bloemfontein: Location Market Regulations 1929, p. 1.

85 JD Rheinallt Jones & AL Saffery, "Social and economic conditions of native life in the Union of South Africa", *Bantu Studies*, VII(4), December 1933, p. 338.

86 FSPA, MBL 1/2/4/1/16, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 24 July 1929, p. 4.

87 *The Friend*, 20 July 1939.

88 NMOH, interview, SM Mahabane (resident, Batho)/HJ du Bruyn (historian, National Museum, Bloemfontein), 7 & 20 November 2014.

“Effort should be made to encourage the natives to plant trees”:⁸⁹ The municipality’s tree-planting initiatives

One of the most important aspects of the municipality’s beautification efforts in Batho was its tree-planting projects. The importance of these efforts not only lies in the fact that they contributed significantly to the greening of Batho and, thus, enhancing a garden location aesthetic there, but they also set an example to the residents by demonstrating what could be achieved with the extensive planting of trees. Bloemfontein’s municipality had become widely known for its tree-planting initiatives in the white part of the town long before Batho was founded.⁹⁰ Since Batho’s founding, though, the municipality’s tree-planting efforts in the model location intensified notably, arguably to boost its attempts to turn it into a garden location. The first tree-planting project commenced in 1918 and involved the planting of “a belt of trees 3000 feet by 100 feet along the Railway line” which extended “from the [Kaffirfontein] Spruit to the Hamilton Crossing”.⁹¹ Ironically, this dense belt of trees, which had been planted along the Johannesburg-Cape Town railway track, was not only meant for beautification purposes but also served an ulterior motive, namely to conceal Batho from the sight of white train passengers. The trees consisted mostly of exotic but hardy eucalyptus species, including *Eucalyptus melliodora* and *Eucalyptus sideroxylon*,⁹² some of which have survived to this day as a silent reminder of the municipality’s segregationist town planning schemes.

Image 2: The Cape Town-Johannesburg railway track, c. 2013. Note the eucalyptus trees



Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM Photo Batho 549.

⁸⁹ *The Friend*, 31 August 1936.

⁹⁰ For more information, see FSPA, MBL 3/1/3, Mayor’s minute 1892, pp. 4-5; AF Baker, “Beauty of Bloemfontein’s public parks and gardens”, *The Friend*, 1 December 1935, p. 29; *The Friend*, 10 December 1918; 13 October 1921; 26 July 1922; 29 January 1938.

⁹¹ FSPA, MBL 1/2/5/1/2, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Parks, Treeplanting and Cemeteries Committee, 8 October 1918, p. 1.

⁹² FSPA, MBL 1/2/5/1/4, Report of Superintendent of Parks and City Lands, 2 February 1922, p. 1.

The tree buffer must be compared with the rows of trees planted along the same railway track (see Image 2) in 1909 and 1910 to obscure Waaihoek, which was situated on the other side of the track, from white passengers' view.⁹³ While the municipality hailed the belt of trees as an attractive feature in a neglected environment that was essentially a buffer zone and no-man's land,⁹⁴ it must also be viewed on a symbolic level. The buffer zone or building-free zone was an important element of segregationist town planning schemes in South Africa and other British colonies.⁹⁵ It was also applicable to garden locations, such as Batho, in which case it is argued that the belt of trees emphasised the mentioned railway as an important symbol of the territorial division between white and black Bloemfontein. This division had, of course, been in place since Bloemfontein's founding and it was tangibly reinforced by the railway's completion in 1890. Importantly, the railway also became a point of reference as far as the future town planning of Bloemfontein is concerned. From the location residents' perspective, the railway track and the adjacent belt of trees symbolised a stark anomaly: On the one hand, the railway brought economic prosperity in the form of low-skilled job opportunities created by the railway workshops while, on the other, the railway and the nearby belt of trees became a symbol of racial division. Thus, this symbolic and, at the same time, tangible racial divide was entrenched when the municipality utilised its tree-planting projects not only to beautify but also to segregate and conceal.⁹⁶

Since the tree buffer had been planted, the municipality executed its tree-planting efforts in Batho with greater determination: trees were planted *en masse* on the model location's sidewalks, around the cemetery, as windbreaks, and in open spaces so as to create "healthy attractions"⁹⁷ for the residents, to quote the segregationist language of the time so were: "Ornamental trees and shrubs"⁹⁸ planted in front of Batho's many new churches and public buildings, including the police station and the Batho Community Hall.⁹⁹

Barely five years after Batho's founding it was reported that no less than 10 000 trees had been planted in the new location.¹⁰⁰ Generally, trees were planted "as the opportunity arises"¹⁰¹ which, in practice, meant that trees were planted as often as they were made available by the municipal nursery in King's Park.

93 FSPA, MBL 3/1/14, Report of Superintendent of Parks and Forestry 1910, p. 106; MBL 3/1/15, Report of Superintendent of Parks and Forestry 1912, p. 105.

94 FSPA, MBL 3/1/13, The Native Locations and the Native Public Health 1909 (report), p. 58.

95 RK Home, "Town planning and garden cities...", *Planning Perspectives*, 5(1), 1990, p. 33.

96 FSPA, MBL 3/1/18, Report of Superintendent of Parks and Forestry 1915, p. 87.

97 FSPA, MBL 3/1/19, Mayor's minute 1928-1929, p. 15.

98 FSPA, MBL 1/2/5/1/4, Report of Superintendent of Parks and Forestry, 26 October 1921, p. 7.

99 FSPA, MBL 1/2/5/1/2, Report of Superintendent of Parks and Forestry, 3 April 1919, p. 1; FSPA, MBL 1/2/4/1/6, Minutes of meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 4 July 1923, pp. 4-5.

100 FSPA, MBL 1/2/5/1/3, Minutes of meeting of Parks and Lands Committee, 5 October 1921, p. 1; FSPA, MBL 3/1/19, Mayor's minute 1923-1924, p. 5.

101 HR, AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1925-1926, p. 2.

Image 3: The Batho Community Hall with trees and shrubs in the front garden, ca. 1930



Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM Photo 01/3108.

Image 4: An aerial photograph of Bloemfontein showing the municipal nursery in King's Park. The nursery is situated below the circular pond



Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM Photo Garden 290.

During the early 1930s, tree-planting endeavours were extended to Batho's boundaries, including the banks of the Kaffirfontein (Renoster) Spruit, which formed the boundary between Batho and its immediate neighbour, Bochabela (see Image 1). Apparently Willows and other suitable trees¹⁰² were planted near the spruit and also in the vicinity of the Kaffirfontein Dam.¹⁰³

¹⁰² *The Friend*, 3 October 1934.

¹⁰³ HP, AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1925-1926, p. 2; *The Friend*, 3 October 1934.

Image 5: The Kaffirfontein (Renoster) Spruit, c. 2012. Note the willow trees



Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM Photo Batho 460.1.

For the purpose of this discussion, it is important to stress that senior municipal officials, notably superintendent Cooper and his predecessor, Mr GP Cook, saw a direct link between gardening and tree-planting. As a result, tree-planting became a key aspect of the process of turning Batho into a garden location. Some municipal officials, specifically Cooper, believed that a human being's desire to plant trees automatically triggered a desire to garden. In the mid-1920s, when tree-planting efforts in Batho were in full swing, he reported that "gardening and tree planting are encouraged",¹⁰⁴ a clear indication that both tree-planting and gardening were encouraged at the same time and also in tandem with each other. Cooper enjoyed the enthusiastic support of other senior officials, such as the Assistant Superintendent of Parks, Mr AF Baker. Baker, who was later appointed Superintendent of Parks, promised Cooper "every assistance" in the furthering of tree-planting and beautification efforts in Batho. Apart from setting an example with the planting of trees in an organised manner, Cooper argued that the most effective way to encourage tree-planting among location residents was to supply them with trees free of charge.¹⁰⁵

During the 1920s and 1930s, thousands of trees were distributed among Batho's residents who, in turn, keenly planted them. This hands-on approach seemed to have worked: In January 1923, it was reported that "2,673 Ornamental [sic] and shelter trees"¹⁰⁶ were issued, which brought the total number of trees planted in

104 HP, AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1925-1926, p. 2.

105 FSPA, MBL 1/2/3/1/16, Report of Assistant Superintendent of Parks, 11 February 1924, p. 4.

106 FSPA, MBL 1/2/5/1/4, Agenda for meeting of Parks and Lands Committee, 19 January 1912, p. 3.

Batho during 1923 to 30 141.¹⁰⁷ Batho's residents seemingly responded positively to the municipality's tree-planting initiatives. While the provisioning of trees free of charge may have served as an incentive for such behaviour, it is possible that Batho's residents could have planted the trees simply because they had been instructed to do so. However, the prospect of having trees which would provide privacy and much needed shade during the hot summer months should not be ruled out as potential motivations.

Among the mentioned ornamental trees distributed among Batho's residents were copious amounts of privet species (mostly hardy *Ligustrum ovalifolium* and *Ligustrum japonicum*)¹⁰⁸ which, in due course, became staples of Batho's ornamental gardens, whether in the form of clipped hedges and edges or as stand-alone topiary features. The fact that recipients of the complimentary trees and plants were instructed by the municipality to plant them in their gardens once again emphasises the direct link between tree-planting and gardening. Many of the saplings that had been planted, most notably the privets, were never allowed to grow into mature trees but were shaped into topiary by Batho's gardeners. As a result, the boundary between the functional, namely trees that had been meant for shade, and the decorative, namely trees that had been turned into ornamental features, became blurred. In fact, the popularity of the practice of clipping and pruning trees and plants into hedges and other shapes led to the creation of topiary gardens, that is, gardens defined by the art of topiary. These topiary gardens, which initially mimicked the English-style topiary gardens of the white residents and which later became "indigenised" in order to suit the black gardeners' needs and tastes, added a new, seemingly sophisticated, dimension to Batho's garden location aesthetic.¹⁰⁹

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Bloemfontein's senior municipal officials were the torchbearers of Batho's tree-planting and gardening initiatives. Towards the late 1930s, when the municipality's tree-planting efforts had petered out somewhat, councillor and former mayor, Mr GH Smit,¹¹⁰ made a plea for re-implementing a system of tree planting¹¹¹ in Batho. Smit, one of Bloemfontein's well-known garden personalities and a passionate gardener himself, was determined that every "effort should be made to encourage the natives to plant trees in front of their homes".¹¹² He championed the idea that residents should take ownership of their gardens and was convinced that "the natives would take pride in the trees which they would look

107 FSPA, MBL 1/2/3/1/16, Report of Assistant Superintendent of Parks, 11 February 1924, p. 4; FSPA, MBL 1/2/5/1/4, Agenda for meeting of Parks and Lands Committee, 19 January 1923, p. 3.

108 FSPA, MBL 1/2/3/1/15, Report of Superintendent of Parks and Lands, 13 April 1923 (Addendum: King's Park Nursery: Stock return of trees & shrubs year ending 31/3/1923), p. 1.

109 For more information on the history and characteristics of Batho's topiary gardens, see D du Bruyn, "'Township Topiary'...", *Navorsing van die Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein*, 27(3), December 2011, pp. 63-75.

110 Smit was mayor of Bloemfontein from April 1939 to March 1940.

111 FSPA, MBL 1/1/1/34, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Town Council, 28 August 1936, p. 453.

112 *The Friend*, 31 August 1936.

upon as their own".¹¹³ Ironically, the type of ownership Smit encouraged was not ownership in the true sense of the word because Batho's gardeners, as had been the case with all other black gardeners in the Union's locations, were not allowed to own the plots on which their gardens were laid out.¹¹⁴

Judging from an aerial photograph of Batho taken during the late 1930s, it seems as though the municipality's tree-planting efforts had paid off.

Image 6: A rare glimpse of the garden location: A south-eastern view of Bloemfontein with Hilton in the foreground and Batho's houses and trees clearly visible in the background, ca. late 1930s



Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM Photo 01/7233.

Although considered successful, these efforts had also met with various challenges. Apart from the fact that the tree-planting had lost steam towards the end of the 1930s, many trees were lost due to neglect, drought, and "theft", that is, trees probably cut down for firewood. For example, in 1936 and 1937, a total of 6 000 trees were planted in Batho and neighbouring Bochabela. However, due to the "absence of facilities for their attention",¹¹⁵ that is, taps with running water and hosepipes, many of the trees perished.¹¹⁶ In addition, trees were also vandalised, such as the "wanton destruction of young trees"¹¹⁷ by children. For this reason, Smit suggested that "the idea of beautifying the surroundings,"¹¹⁸ should also be inculcated in school learners.¹¹⁹ It was, in fact, the idea of beautifying the surroundings, to use Smit's prose, which epitomised the municipality's garden location philosophy. This

113 FSPA, MBL 1/1/1/34, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Town Council, 28 August 1936, p. 453.

114 The plots were leased on a monthly tenancy basis. E Hellman (ed.), *Handbook on race relations in South Africa* (Cape Town, Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 253.

115 *The Friend*, 3 April 1937.

116 FSPA, MBL 3/1/28, Mayor's minute 1937, p. 17.

117 *Umeteli wa Bantu*, 12 June 1937.

118 FSPA, MBL 1/1/1/34, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Town Council, 28 August 1936, p. 453.

119 *The Friend*, 3 April 1937; FSPA, MBL 1/1/1/34, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Town Council, 28 August 1936, p. 453.

idea or rather ideology, which was, of course, linked directly to the segregationist ideology, meant different things to different people. However, for the purpose of this discussion, it entailed the beautification of Batho and, ultimately, turning Batho into a garden location.

“Provide the natives with a park for their exclusive use”:¹²⁰ The politics of Batho’s new public park

The original blueprint for Batho’s layout, namely the Location Plan,¹²¹ made provision for a number of open spaces earmarked for the potential development into public parks, gardens and squares. Ironically, the development of a public park in Batho did not happen in response to demands made by Batho’s residents; it came about because of pressure from Bloemfontein’s white residents. By the early 1920s, the use of Bloemfontein’s public parks, gardens and squares became a political issue when white residents began to complain by means of letters written to local newspapers, most notably *The Friend* and *Die Volksblad*, about the presence of black people in the town’s public outdoor spaces. At that time, black and coloured residents were not prohibited by law from using such spaces but were also not encouraged to do so. It started with a letter written by a reader who complained that Warden Square was being used as “a Native football ground”,¹²² and which had been published in *The Friend* in May 1922.

Although condescending and patronising, the white residents’ complaints were initially discreet. Later, however, the letters displayed undiluted racist undertones. For example, readers complained about black childminders and their behaviour in the parks, such as their use of foul language, loud talking, and occupying play apparatus meant for white children.¹²³ In its response, the council authorised the then Assistant Superintendent of Parks (Baker) to hand over to the police “any Natives who misbehave themselves in the Parks”.¹²⁴ By the mid-1920s, the issue of black and coloured people using Bloemfontein’s public parks and gardens took the form of a heated debate among white residents, especially after the Pretoria Town Council had issued a resolution which prohibited black people from using Pretoria’s public parks and gardens. Needless to say, this development caused much indignation among the Union’s black population.¹²⁵ At the same time, the Pretoria Council’s decision seemed to have emboldened Bloemfontein’s whites. One of Bloemfontein’s civic associations, namely the Willows Citizens’ Association, convened a much-publicised meeting to discuss “the running of the parks by Natives of all conditions” and complained that

120 BPL, Official Gazette of the Orange Free State 63, 13 December 1929, Administrator’s Notice 191 of 1929, Municipality of Bloemfontein: Additional location regulation, p. 1663.

121 FSPA, MBL 1/2/4/1/2, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 18 March 1918, p. 2.

122 *The Friend*, 1 May 1922.

123 *The Friend*, 12 September 1922.

124 FSPA, MBL 1/2/3/1/15, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Public Works and Parks Committee, 5 December 1923, p. 16.

125 *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 25 July 1925.

Bloemfontein's parks had become "anything but pleasure resorts for White people".¹²⁶

In November 1925, in response to the association's complaint, the council resolved that black people may enter the town's public parks only when they were accompanied by whites and that a parks policeman be appointed to enforce this new arrangement.¹²⁷ Since there were legal hurdles preventing the exclusion of black people from the town's parks on the basis of race, it was agreed that the only way out of the difficulty was to provide them with a park for their exclusive use.¹²⁸ This suggestion is significant since it indicates an urge on the part of some whites to prohibit black people from using the town's public parks on the basis of race, namely, providing them with a blacks-only park in the location, which happened to be Batho. Importantly, the municipality sympathised with these sentiments. Thus, it was clear from the beginning that the municipality's desire to provide location residents with a park of their own was not so much rooted in the garden location idea but rather in racism and the ideology of racially-segregated amenities.

Towards the late 1920s, Bloemfontein's white residents turned their focus to the town's zoo and neighbouring King's Park, which had become popular recreation spots not only for whites but also for black location dwellers, specifically on Sunday afternoons. A reader of *The Friend* complained that too many blacks were allowed in the zoo, which prevented whites from getting close to the animal cages.¹²⁹ This issue prompted a heated reaction from readers of *Die Volksblad*, including one who complained about "baanskopperige Kaffers [sic]"¹³⁰ in the zoo. While the council could no longer ignore these and other racist complaints, it did not know the best way in which to handle the parks politics. The council's first reaction was to increase the zoo's entrance fee as a means to address what was referred to as the "native nuisance".¹³¹ However, this measure led to complaints that a raised fee made it unaffordable for Bloemfontein's poor whites and apartment dwellers who, in the absence of gardens of their own, often frequented King's Park and the zoo.¹³² The council then requested that the municipality's Native Affairs Department grant it legal authority to exclude black people from the zoo and other public parks but was informed that it could not do so until it provided a park in Batho for the location residents' use.¹³³

126 *The Friend*, 3 October 1925.

127 FSPA, MBL 1/2/3/1/19, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Public Works and Parks Committee, 12 November 1925, p. 15.

128 *The Friend*, 3 October 1925.

129 *The Friend*, 7 March 1928.

130 *Die Volksblad*, 20 July 1928. "Rowdy Kaffirs [sic]". (Free translation)

131 FSPA, MBL 1/2/3/1/33, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Public Works and Parks Committee, 13 September 1928, p. 5.

132 *Die Volksblad*, 31 January 1929.

133 FSPA, MBL 1/2/3/1/32, Agenda for ordinary meeting of Public Works and Parks Committee, 9 June 1928, p. 14; FSPA, MBL 1/2/4/1/16, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 14 February 1929, no page.

In the mid-1920s, the idea of a park for Batho was not entirely new since the municipality's Native Affairs Committee had already suggested "the laying out of a large piece of ground near the Community Hall as a Park [sic] to afford facilities for the various sporting bodies which should also prove an attraction to residents during their hours of leisure".¹³⁴ In his annual report for 1926-1927, the mayor, Dr HJ Steyn,¹³⁵ referred to Batho's "squares and parks"¹³⁶ but did not specify where they were located. In 1927, the council agreed to a "much-needed park"¹³⁷ and authorised an amount of £60 "for laying out a park in Bantu [sic] Location".¹³⁸ Noteworthy is the fact that the amount had to be charged "against native revenue".¹³⁹ In other words, the expense of laying out the park had to be paid from taxes paid by the location residents. In due course, the municipality's Parks Department commenced with the beautifying of "an open space as a park and recreation ground in the location for the Natives".¹⁴⁰ Mayor JS Franklin¹⁴¹ justified this decision by arguing that the council was not doing any injustice to black people because "he [black person] had his park into which the European could not come and surely the White man was entitled to a similar privilege".¹⁴² In June 1928, the Native Affairs Committee reported that Batho's new park was still in a completely undeveloped state.¹⁴³

In December 1929, Batho's new park was officially declared in terms of the addition of Article 34A to the existing Location Regulations: "The area known as the Native Park is hereby set apart for the exclusive use of Natives".¹⁴⁴ At the same time, new regulations were added to the existing Regulations for the Control of the Lake, Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces which prohibited black people from using parks reserved for the exclusive use of white people, namely King's Park, Hamilton Park, Victoria Park and President Hoffman Square. These new regulations, framed under Section 23(3) of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act, stipulated that the mentioned parks were "for the exclusive use of non-natives" and that "any native who shall enter or be in any of the places mentioned in the said schedule shall be deemed to be guilty of an offence".¹⁴⁵ This regulation excluded blacks accompanied by white employers, black nurse maids in charge of white children and black garden labourers working in the parks. The behaviour of black people allowed in the parks was also subjected to

134 HP, AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1925-1926, p. 4.

135 Steyn was mayor of Bloemfontein from August 1925 to March 1927.

136 FSPA, MBL 3/1/19, Mayor's minute 1926-1927, p. 11.

137 FSPA, MBL 3/1/19, Mayor's minute 1927-1928, p. 9.

138 FSPA, MBL 1/2/3/1/27, Agenda for ordinary meeting of Public Works and Parks Committee, 14 June 1927, p. 14.

139 FSPA, MBL 1/2/3/1/27, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Public Works and Parks Committee, 16 June 1927, p. 14.

140 *The Friend*, 31 January 1929.

141 Franklin was mayor of Bloemfontein from April 1928 to March 1929.

142 *The Friend*, 31 January 1929.

143 FSPA, MBL 1/2/3/1/32, Agenda for ordinary meeting of Public Works and Parks Committee, 9 June 1928, p. 14.

144 BPL, Official Gazette of the Orange Free State 63, 13 December 1929, Administrator's Notice 191 of 1929, Municipality of Bloemfontein: Additional location regulation, p. 1663.

145 BPL: Official Gazette of the Orange Free State 63, 13 December 1929, Administrator's Notice 192 of 1929, Municipality of Bloemfontein: Additional location regulation, p. 1664.

strict control. In September 1929, the Curator of Parks (Baker) reported that he was "having 'Europeans only' painted on the seats"¹⁴⁶ in President Hoffman Square – a notorious practice that became increasingly common in Bloemfontein's parks and other public spaces. Concerning the zoo, it was decided that black people would be allowed to enter the zoo enclosure of King's Park on two days each week, namely Tuesdays and Fridays.¹⁴⁷

Needless to say, the mentioned regulations were met with indignation by the location residents, who insisted that immediate action be taken against such racial discrimination. During a meeting between council members and the Native Advisory Board (NAB)¹⁴⁸ held in June 1929, the blockmen argued that these regulations were unfair and would cause "great hardship"¹⁴⁹ for black people. Head blockman, Mr TM Mapikela,¹⁵⁰ who was known for his love of gardening and plants, argued that the parks were an important source of knowledge on plants and animals for black school learners, who included not only those from Bloemfontein but also those from other Orange Free State towns which had no parks. He cautioned that if the regulations were approved "then these students would be cut off from the one place where they could study the various animals and flowers".¹⁵¹

It is unclear as to whether Batho's new park was a park in the true sense of the word and whether it was, in any way, comparable to the whites-only parks in town. Concerning the progress in terms of the laying out of the park, in May 1929, Cooper reported to the council that the recreation grounds¹⁵² had been laid out and fenced in and that more than two thousand trees had been planted. Cooper's reference to recreation grounds confirmed the impression that the park, which had been laid out on the corner of Hamilton Road and Lovedale Road, also doubled as a sports ground.¹⁵³ Not all were impressed with the park, though, including an associate of the St Patrick's Mission,¹⁵⁴ Ms I Chaloner, who questioned the ridiculous pretence that the location residents have a park of their own. Chaloner was convinced that, in

146 FSPA: MBL 1/2/3/1/37, Report of Curator of Parks, 6 September 1929, p. 1.

147 FSPA: MBL 1/2/3/1/34, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Public Works and Parks Committee, 22 January 1929, p. 11; MBL 1/2/3/1/37, Report of Curator of Parks, 6 September 1929, p. 1; *The Friend*, 31 August 1929; 31 January 1930; *Die Volksblad*, 8 February 1930. For more details on urban segregation, see B Freund, "South Africa: The Union years, 1910-1948 – political and economic foundations", R Ross, A Kelk Mager & B Nasson (eds), *The Cambridge History of South Africa 2, 1885-1994* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 233-242.

148 This board offered location residents a limited voice in the management of their "own affairs" and advised the Superintendent of Locations on location matters.

149 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/16, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 25 June 1929, p. 2.

150 Mapikela was one of the founding members of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in 1912, later renamed the African National Congress (ANC).

151 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/16, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 25 June 1929, p. 3.

152 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/16, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 17 May 1929, p. 4.

153 HP, AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1925-1926, p. 4. Initially known as Ramblers, the park or recreation grounds became known as Masenkeng in later years. The word "masenkeng" referred to the corrugated iron (zinc) fence erected around the grounds.

154 A Christian mission for Bloemfontein's black people founded by the Anglican Church in 1867. K Schoeman, *Bloemfontein: Die ontstaan van 'n stad...*, p. 45.

no ordinary sense of the word, could an unattractive piece of land which had been fenced off in the location be called a park. The associate argued that “we are justly proud of our Location [Batho]” but it was “not a Garden City [yet]”.¹⁵⁵

Image 7: The Masenkeng sports ground where Batho’s public “park” was laid out during the late 1920s and early 1930s, ca. 2019



Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM Photo Batho 1133.

From a garden location perspective, Chaloner’s statement is rather profound because, on the one hand, it emphasises the municipality’s aspiration for Batho while, on the other, it also exposes the municipality’s shortcomings insofar as the practical realisation of its aspiration for the location was concerned. According to architect, Nicholas Coetzer, it was exactly the lack of political will to fully implement garden suburb ideals, and the gradual whittling-away of garden suburb standards, which led to the eventual abandonment of the idea of Langa as a garden suburb or, for the purpose of this discussion, a garden location. This demise is reflected in “the way in which Langa eventually changed its official and colloquial designation from Township or Village to Location over the years”,¹⁵⁶ to quote Coetzer. It is argued that, to a limited degree, Batho fell victim to the same phenomenon. Nevertheless, it still managed to come as close as possible to a garden suburb in the segregationist context. Therefore, the term “garden location” seems to be more descriptive of the type of garden suburb that Batho was during its “golden age”.

¹⁵⁵ *The Friend*, 3 September 1929.

¹⁵⁶ N Coetzer, “Langa Township in the 1920s...”, *South African Journal of Art History*, 24(1), 2009, p. 15.

Conclusion

It is necessary to consider whether the municipality's initiatives and efforts to turn Batho into a garden location were indeed successful as a seemingly segregationist project. Judging these initiatives and efforts as successful or not should not in any way detract from the predominant reality that Batho was primarily a segregationist construct meant to serve the interests of Bloemfontein's white minority. Notwithstanding the fact that Batho had been planned, laid out and promoted as a garden location, it still served the segregationist agenda and, importantly, its residents were subjected to the same discriminatory regulations as those in other locations in the Union. This is another reason why Batho is considered a garden location rather than a garden suburb. The garden suburb idea as it was originally envisaged by Ebenezer Howard never materialised in the South African location context. Therefore, the term successful is used with all due respect and should be understood within the segregationist context.

In order to judge the municipality's achievements as successful or not, its initiatives and efforts, that is, those which relate to water provisioning, water tariffs, allocation of allotment gardens, the provision of a fresh-produce market, tree-planting and distribution, and the provision of a public park, need to be scrutinised. What were the municipality's successes and failures? Firstly, it is argued that despite the municipality's apparent sympathetic attitude to the Batho gardeners' plight, its attempts to provide them with an adequate, reliable and affordable water supply were woefully inadequate. These efforts, which might, at best, be described as half-hearted, were severely hampered by limited funding allocated to the provisioning of enough communal taps in the new location. Whereas the taps installed might have been adequate for basic domestic needs, they were entirely insufficient for gardening needs.

In addition, the municipality also failed to ensure that the water tariffs charged for location residents were affordable for those who consumed more than what was needed for domestic purposes, namely the gardeners. While the municipality reduced the water tariff for the town's white gardeners, political pressure from a minority of councillors not to allow such a concession for black gardeners as well, prevented a reduction in the water tariffs for location residents. Needless to say, such a concession would have greatly boosted the municipality's efforts to turn Batho into a garden location. As was the case with Langa, Lamontville and McNamee Village, the requirements for a successful garden location were often in conflict with the racist, segregationist and cost-saving agendas of municipalities. In other words, garden location ideals often fell victim to segregationist principles and political pressures applied by councillors serving the narrow interests of their electorate.

Secondly, it is reasoned that the other initiatives taken, and efforts made by the municipality to turn Batho into a garden location, were more successful. The

establishment of allotment gardens and a fresh-produce market in Batho greatly enhanced what may be termed a garden location aesthetic and, thus, contributed to Batho's becoming a garden location. It is argued that the beautification of Batho by means of tree-planting and the distribution of trees were also fairly successful. This claim is not only based on the archival evidence consulted but also on visual evidence, namely an aerial photograph of Bloemfontein's locations taken towards the end of the 1930s. To an extent, this photograph substantiates this claim because it clearly shows a green and verdant Batho. However, the municipality's use of trees as a means to conceal Batho from the sight of white people supports the argument that the council's beautification efforts were often underpinned by segregationist motives. In other words, despite the fact that Batho was supposed to be an aesthetically pleasing construct, it still had to be hidden away, thereby stressing the argument that a garden location was not only meant to be aesthetically pleasing but, importantly, also sanitary.

Thirdly, it is argued that the municipality's decision to establish a public park in Batho was not primarily motivated by the noble garden location idea but rather by segregationist principles which, in effect, underpinned white people's demand for racially-segregated public amenities. Well-documented white political sentiments and arguments which triggered the municipality's decision substantiate this claim. At the same time, the Anglican mission associate's observation that Batho was not a Garden City yet also needs to be considered in the sense that Batho was in the process of becoming a garden location despite the problems which hampered this process. Although better than nothing, Batho's new park was, indeed, no substitute for the three parks which had become the exclusive domain of Bloemfontein's whites. Sadly, the new municipal parks regulations not only deprived Batho's school learners and students from an important source of botanical and zoological knowledge but also deprived Batho's adult residents, specifically the gardeners among them, from a source of horticultural knowledge and gardening inspiration.

Based on the above arguments and the available records, it is maintained that the municipality's attempts and initiatives to turn the model location into a garden location were successful in some respects, notwithstanding the fact that it happened in a segregationist context. It is also important that this statement be viewed within the context of the haphazard manner in which most of the Union's locations had originated at the time of Batho's founding and early years, namely the 1920s and 1930s. Compared to most other locations in the Union, Batho's establishment, layout and subsequent development were widely considered to be exemplary. During the 1920s and 1930s few locations could claim to be a model location, and even fewer could claim to be both a model location and a garden location.