



Ferdinand Postma Library: Stone Laying, 17 March 1951

1 The Library prior to 1951

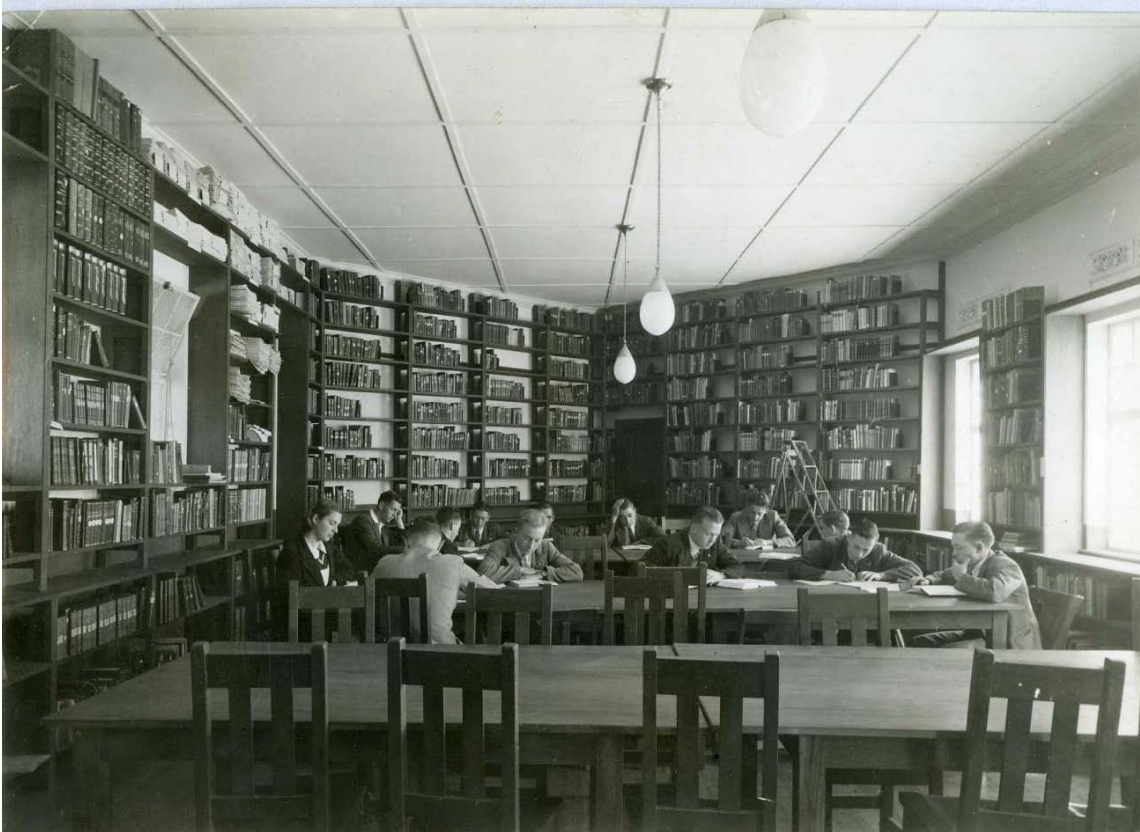
The School of Theology of the Reformed Church in South Africa was inaugurated in Burgersdorp on 29 November 1869 and in 1876 the Literary Department was established. In 1904 the School of Theology and its Literary Department were transferred to Potchefstroom. That was also the year in which Ferdinand Postma was appointed as a Professor in Arts at the Literary Department. He would cover much ground as an academic and later in organising the establishment of the University College (the PUK) in 1919. In 1919 he was nominated as the Rector and continued in that office until his death in 1950, just before the independence of the University in March 1951, in which he played a key role.

The Library that was built up by the Literary Department of the School of Theology already existed in 1919, but was still attached to the School of Theology. In 1921 the library hours were: Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 16:00 to 17:00 and was intended only for issuing books. No space for study was available. By 1922 there were about 2 300 books, fully catalogued by "Lecturer" LJ du Plessis who was then the librarian. This allowed much better control of the books.

In 1923 the Library was moved from the School of Theology to the main campus and accommodated in one of the corrugated iron buildings that had been erected. In 1931 it was moved to two rooms in the north-eastern wing of the Main Building (now the Faculty of Law).



The Main Building just after completion in 1931



The Library in the Main Building, around 1948

The book shelves were in one room and the other was used as a study space. It was later extended to three rooms. It was accommodated there until the Library fire on 23 February 1949, when, according to the newly appointed librarian, Mr HC (Harry) van Rooy, approximately 30 000 books and 4 000 journals were destroyed.



Journal shelves



The Library fire 23 February 1949

Public response after the fire was overwhelming and book donations and financial contributions were received from all over the country, neighbouring states and even from abroad. A large donation was received from the Netherlands. Minister NC Havenga donated his entire book collection to the PUK.

In 1946 the Carnegie Corporation awarded a bursary of £500 per annum for training a person with at least an MA degree as a librarian, on condition that that person would then be appointed as a librarian at the PUK. Mr HC (Harry) van Rooy was designated to accept the Carnegie offer and to become qualified as a librarian in America. On 1 June 1947 he was appointed as the first full-time librarian. In the meantime, he graduated with a Master's degree in Library Science at the University of Columbia (America) and therefore returned as a trained librarian from America in August 1948. With the appointment of Mr Van Rooy, the almost twenty year association with Prof Gerrit Dekker of the Department of Netherlands-Afrikaans came to an end. Along with all his commitments as a lecturer, he was the part-time librarian at a nominal remuneration for all those years.



Mr (later Professor) HC van Rooy with a facsimile edition of the *Biblia Sacra* (1961 Facsimile edition of the Gutenberg Bible) – currently still part of the Rare Books Collection stored in our Africana Section.

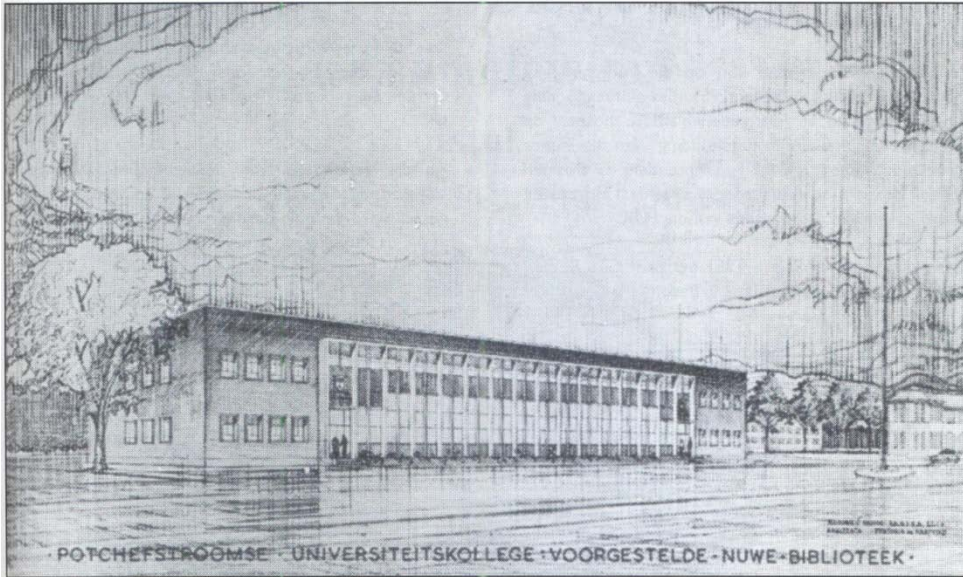


Professor Gerrit Dekker and HC (Harry) van Rooy.



The Library staff in 1950: Prof HC van Rooy (centre front), "Miss" Martha van Rooy who later worked at the Music Library (front, second from right) and Mrs Jane van Rooy (far right), later lecturer in Cataloguing and Classification in the Department of Library Science.

From 1946 the Council felt that the Library was no longer adequate and plans for a new building were started. After the fire it was estimated that, to replace the books, about £30 000 was needed and for the erection of a new "effective and fireproof building", about £50 000. With the intercession of Advocate Eric Louw, then Minister of Economic Affairs, who had visited the scene of the fire disaster and support from Dr Jan Steyn, Member of Parliament for Potchefstroom, an amount of £40 000 for a new building was eventually approved by the Department of Education. The PUK thus had to try to contribute the further £10 000 itself.



Prof AL Meiring was appointed as the architect and the plans were drawn up. The sketch plans were submitted in September 1949 and a tender to the amount of £43 437 was accepted from the firm Van Heerden and Johnson at the end of September. According to the contract, the building had to be handed over by October 1951. Building was started and, on 17 March 1951 during the celebrations of the P{UK's independence, the cornerstone was laid. The building was eventually completed in 1952 and became operative on 29 November 1952. It was proudly named after the person who had been connected to the University for 46 years and for 29 of those years as the Rector, namely Prof Ferdinand Postma.



Prof Ferdinand Postma (1879 – 1950). Founder of the PU for CHE.

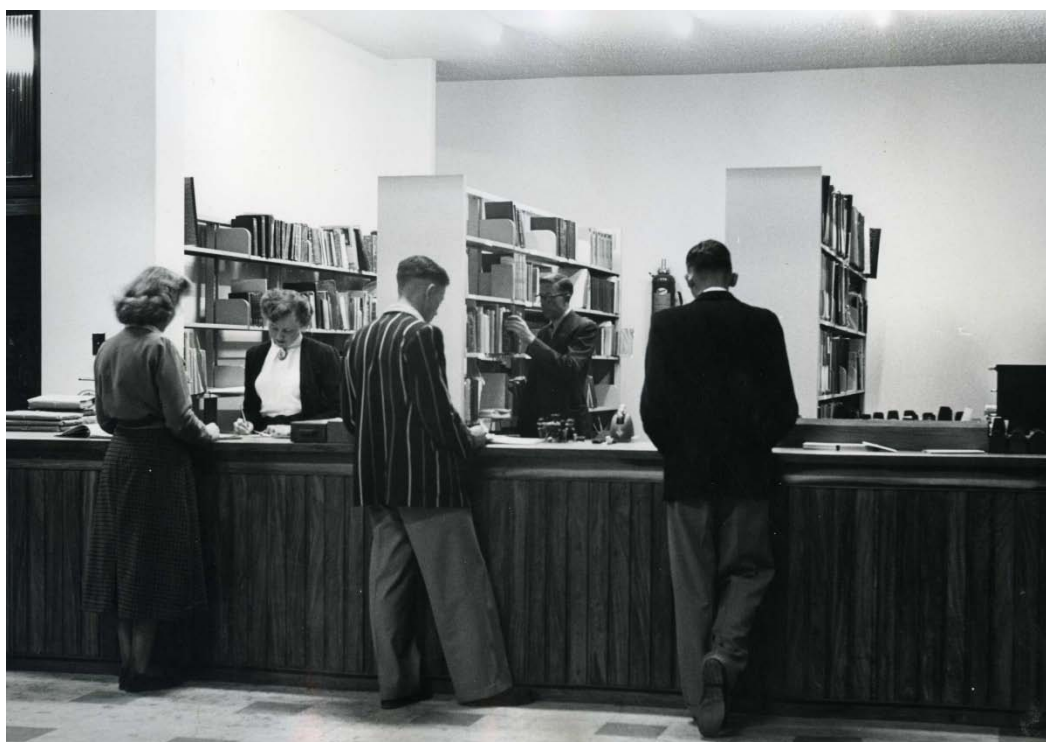
In an article in *Die Veteraan*, (1952, dl XVII) the building was summarised as follows, “Besides storage space for 100 000 to 120 000 books in its warehouse, the building offers space for peaceful, undisturbed study for 160 students in its spacious and pleasant study hall. For advanced and research students 12 small study rooms are being planned. Ample provision has been made for office and work space for the Library staff, for the well equipped bookbinding works, a photographic section and for some seminar rooms”.



Interesting financial information, as noted in minutes of the Committee on Finances and Properties, between 1951 and 1952:



For the reading-room furniture (tables and chairs) the lowest tender, namely £1 005, was approved. The furniture was manufactured of oak by "Messrs De Beer of Randfontein". The same furniture is still being partially used in the new group study space on the second floor! (Minutes: 28 November 1951). This first "reading-room" or study hall of the 1952 Library has now been converted to the Gallery.



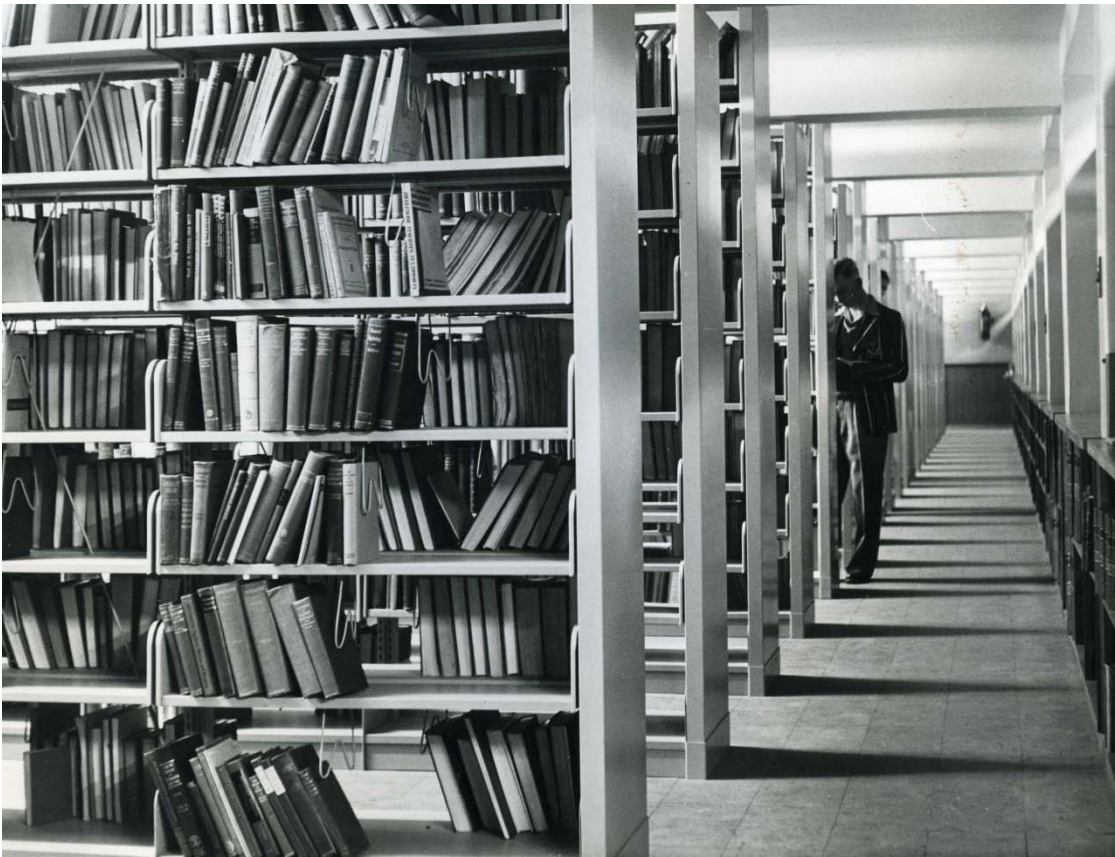
The loan counter



The “well-equipped book binding works”. Mr S Buys was appointed as the responsible binder and he had one assistant.



“The cost of the cornerstone that will be laid on Saturday afternoon 17 March amounts to about £50”.
(Minutes: 14 March 1951)



A tender for the provision of steel shelves from a firm in England was approved at an estimated cost of about £6 000. (Minutes: 14 March 1951). "The steel shelves ordered from abroad have arrived and they will be installed during the summer holidays. The Commission for Supervision recommends that help of students be used to install the shelves at remuneration of 15/- per day per student. The Librarian and Bookbinder will supervise." (Minutes: 28 November 1951)



Willem de Sanderes Hendrikz was the sculptor of the relief statue of Professor Ferdinand Postma. It cost 1 000 guineas (about £1 050).



Unveiling of the relief sculpture.



Inauguration of the Ferdinand Postma Library, 1952. It was presided over by Dr Jan Steyn, MP.



The main entrance to the 1952 building, immediately to the right of the cornerstone.



The completed Library building from the western aspect.

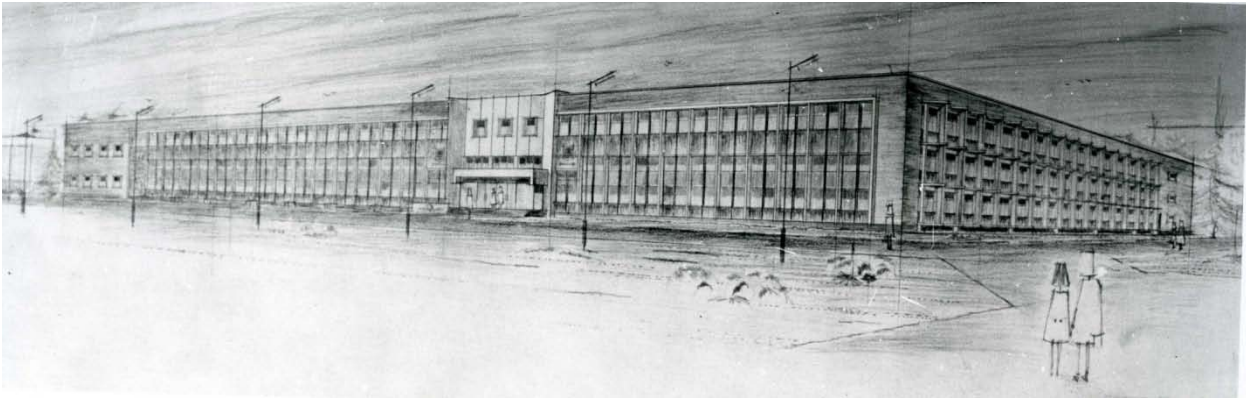


The central campus site in 1950, before the erection of the Library building (Yearbook 1950)



The central campus site around 1956-57

In *Die PU-Kaner* of 2 July 1968 a report appeared on the space crisis the Library was experiencing at that stage. It led to the planning of the extension of the 1952 Library building. By 1971 the plans for considerably enlarging the Library were ready. Student seating in the study spaces alone would be increased from 150 to 1 500 seats. The extensions were completed by 1974. This is basically the building still being used today. In a next issue more details about these extensions will be related.



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