

# *The Oldest Houses in Pietermaritzburg Reconsidered*

## INTRODUCTION

Pietermaritzburg, the intended capital of the Republic of Natalia, is known more for its Victorian architecture than its Voortrekker heritage. This is largely because of the dearth of information related to the earlier period, and the fact that most historians who have concerned themselves with the evolution of Pietermaritzburg have had scant knowledge of the Dutch language. The result has been poor documentation of a most significant period in the development of the city. Rising to this challenge, Brann and Haswell (1983 and 1984) have attempted to identify the remnants of a part of this heritage, namely, the oldest houses. Their contribution graphically illustrates the problems involved in researching this early period.

## THE DOMESTIC VERNACULAR

Before examining the evidence, it is necessary to establish exactly what we are looking for. In this regard we can draw on the seminal work of Walton who has greatly contributed to our understanding of Voortrekker houses.<sup>1</sup> According to him, they evolved from wagons and tents, through the *skerm*, *rondavel* and *kapstelhuis* stage, to the *hardbieshuise*, which de Klerk has described as *nie meer als 'n langwerpige vierkant van sooi-mure, met 'n riet-of grasdak daarop* (Preller 1920 p 236). It is believed that the latter were erected in Pietermaritzburg (Hattersley 1951; Hillebrand 1973/74). A number of writers have left detailed descriptions of their construction (Spoelstra 1915; Cachet 1883; Preller 1917; Walton 1952) and Backhouse (1844) made rough sketches of them. Backhouse traced the origin of the name to the 'imaginary similarity to a species of buffalo called the Hartebeest', but the Voortrekkers themselves said that it was derived from the hard reeds or *harde biesies* which were used in construction. This wattle and daub (dab)<sup>2</sup> method is probably one of the oldest systems of construction.<sup>3</sup> As late as 1884 the Natal farmers were still using it as it provided 'a maximum of comfort at a minimum of cost' (Peace 1884 p. 69).

According to Mann (1859) the houses built by the Boers were at once recognised by the long raised platform (stoep) which ranged in front of them, and by the stiff formality of the regular rows of tall windows equally balanced on either side of the central door. They had generally lofty rooms

with ceilings of planked wood (cf. Greig 1971). Soon after the Boers made their exit, the British started erecting cottages to their liking. By 1849 most of the houses standing were considered to be built more or less in the style of English rural architecture.<sup>4</sup> The walls were either of brick (burnt or unburnt), or else of stone which was found in the immediate neighbourhood. With few exceptions they were whitened externally, and the roofs were either thatched or tiled.<sup>5</sup> In fact, in 1848 one building was described as follows:<sup>6</sup>

. . . the best stone-built double storied House, the lower storey walls of which are two and a half feet thick under a double Tiled Roof . . .

Colonial houses were generally of brick or wood, but there were two other modes of building which, if skilfully constructed, were considered equal to either for economy, durability and appearance.<sup>7</sup> These were cob building and *pisé* building. The former consisted of a wall formed of unburnt clay mixed with chopped straw, gravel, and occasionally with layers of long straw, in which the straw acted as a bond (Harris 1977; Fleming *et al* 1974). One visitor to Natal found it difficult to comprehend how a strong, substantial house could be formed out of such soft material, and 'imagined that the verandah was designed as much to protect the house from the rain as to shelter it from the sun (Shooter 1868). According to Harris (1977) *pisé* building can refer to a building whose walls are made of compressed earth (usually stiff clay formed and rammed in a movable frame or formwork), to the building material itself (stiff earth or clay rammed until it becomes firm) used to form walls or floors, or to cob used as a wall material.<sup>8</sup> While the method of construction was still largely primitive by the early 1850s, we must guard against oversimplification, for in some cases, estimates and specifications indicate more sophisticated houses.<sup>9</sup> Some structures were even imported, for example, an iron house 'of superior construction' which had come from Britain on the *Henrietta*.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, by 1846 dwellings of the 'Indian style' of 'bungalow building' with a 'commodious Veranda' all round were being erected in Pietermaritzburg.<sup>11</sup>

### EARLY DEVELOPMENT

Soon after the establishment of Pietermaritzburg, rules were made to control the occupancy and management of property.<sup>12</sup> In particular, every proprietor of an erf was bound to sow and plant his erf and surround it with a turf (sod) wall or with a palisade within two months. Also, dwellings were to be built at the front of the erf and in a straight line as would be regulated and pointed out by a qualified person appointed for the purpose. In March 1839 Andries Pretorius wrote that three hundred erven had been given out, surveyed and partly planted.<sup>13</sup> Another writer says that by March two hundred houses had been erected (Preller 1940). In contrast, the Frenchman Delegorgue (1847), who had lived for some time among the Boers, described Pietermaritzburg in 1839 as 'a rough stockade camp, a mere cluster of crude shanties made of wood and reeds, and plastered with dung' (p. 194).<sup>14</sup> Carl Behrens, a German who later married a daughter of Gerrit Maritz, described the settlement in July 1840 as an established *laager bestaande uit 100-150 Strooihutte* (Krynauw 1946), with the properties occupied by *goeie, soliede* houses.

The British defeated the Boers in a battle at Port Natal and as part of the takeover of Natal set about examining title deeds and registering properties. A proclamation was issued on 12 May 1843 under the hand of Sir George Napier and signed by Secretary John Montagu (Bird 1888). Landholders were to be protected if they had legitimate claims, that is, if they had been 'bona fide occupiers' for a period of twelve months before the arrival of Commissioner Henry Cloete in June 1843.<sup>15</sup> In a letter to Montagu, Cloete expressed concern as the original grants appeared to be quite generous.<sup>16</sup> The original titles were considered 'perfectly worthless'.<sup>17</sup> In Pietermaritzburg two hundred and fifty allotments had been occupied in terms of the proclamation.<sup>18</sup>

The instructions given to the Surveyor General of Natal included the remeasurement of the boundaries of the existing towns.<sup>19</sup> Except in special cases, no sale of any allotments was to be made until a regular survey of the town had been effected. Those reverting to the Government were put up for sale at the upset price of £50 per acre.<sup>20</sup> The situation was considered to be quite serious and it was felt that the British authorities were almost compelling the trekkers to move north (Christopher 1850; Theal 1887).<sup>21</sup> Many were simply 'abandoning the District'.<sup>22</sup> However, a few (e.g. Fick, Greybe and Rudolph) stood their ground and still flew the Dutch flag from their homes (Bird 1888).

The Boers were strongly urged by their own people to stay as many foresaw misery in the wake of a mass exodus. An analysis of the Cloete report clearly indicates that many of the Boers were dissatisfied and had already left. In Pietermaritzburg 30% of the erven were not occupied, 12% not claimed and only 16% of those who had received original grants in 1839 claimed their properties in 1843. Sixty-one per cent of claimants claimed one erf, 15% two erven and 24% more than two erven. Twenty-four per cent of the claimants claimed 56% of all the erven claimed. Brookes and Webb (1965) correctly state that the colony was in a 'curious state of transition'. There had been no official communications.<sup>23</sup> Many of the erven were actually granted to British settlers in 1846. In fact, 23% of the erven claimed in 1843 were, in 1846, granted to people other than the original claimants.

## THE EVIDENCE

### *Introduction*

Having established the type of building that most probably represents the first decade of development in Pietermaritzburg and having glanced at the early history of land ownership in the settlement, we now turn to the evidence supporting the contention by Brann and Haswell (1983, 1984) that certain houses can be traced back to 1843. They compared the Cloete report and an article in *De Natalier* and noted a significant correlation between the houses mentioned. They further argued that the majority of the houses would have been permanent structures, since Pistorius had established a brick and tile factory that produced roof tiles and burnt brick, from about 1840. On the basis of this research they designated a number of buildings as the oldest houses in town. In my view this argument is incomplete as it fails to consider all the factors.

In the first place, they infer that the Cloete report speaks categorically on structures that stood on the particular erven mentioned. It must be

remembered that Cloete's brief was specifically to grant erven 'bona fide occupied' during the previous twelve months. He was not primarily concerned with buildings but with occupation. In a letter to the Secretary of State (4 July 1843) he indicated a distinction between three modes of occupation: built upon, cultivated, and other (Bird 1888). The concept 'bona fide occupied' was at first '*dat niemand destyds begrypen kon*'.<sup>24</sup> It was contended that, because of this misunderstanding, many of the Dutch farmers were unlucky to have left their erven with no buildings or form of occupation thereon thus deserving the judgement not 'bona fide occupied' or '*niet ter goeder trouw in bezit genomen*'. The implications of these statements are twofold. First, 'bona fide occupied' introduces the concept of 'beboud' erven. But many of the erven that Cloete described as 'bona fide occupied' he does not state had buildings erected on them. Secondly, they suggest that there must have been a wave of building when it was discovered what would be considered 'bona fide occupied'. Thus, in some cases Cloete mentions that the erf was built upon and there appears to be no building on the erf soon after.<sup>25</sup> Cloete clearly uses a variety of designations in addition to 'built upon' (Fig. 3). It is unreasonable to suppose that he was sufficiently aware of structures, although this would have helped him in his survey of erven occupied. It is not surprising, therefore, that in some instances later evidence confirms some of his recording.<sup>26</sup> Yet it is unwise to use the report as the sole basis for a whole argument. His was not a survey of buildings but rather a study of occupation through any form of presence, whether, cultivation, fenced in, built upon, foundation laid, permanent structures, temporary structures and so on. Thus in some cases the property was enclosed with a foundation laid and yet considered 'bona fide occupied'.

The *Natalier* article must also be treated cautiously in the light of the fact that it was written by an editor obviously in sympathy with Boer feelings and keen to emphasise their contribution to the settlement. A cursory survey of this and other newspapers of the nineteenth century will confirm this. Journalists of this period, perhaps characteristically in Pietermaritzburg or the colonies (as Anthony Trollope would have it), were quick to exaggerate their cause through verbal barrages and statistical means. One cannot simply dismiss the criticism of the statement that buildings were springing up like mushrooms and withering away almost as quickly due to their temporary nature.<sup>27</sup> While the analysis by its editor, Boniface, in *De Natalier* could possibly be used as supportive evidence, it must be treated with care.

In my view the most reliable evidence must be the government survey conducted in 1845, and the 1872 and 1906 maps. Firstly, Dr William Stanger was in charge of the 1845 survey. Although he was a medical doctor by profession, he had worked as a surveyor in the Cape Colony and was obviously well educated and thorough. In general, his work in Natal was of great significance, and quite remarkable when one considers his primitive instruments and the difficult conditions under which he worked. This newly appointed Surveyor General, apparently set a high standard for his team.<sup>28</sup> Secondly, the very nature of elementary surveying brings one close to reality as one has actually to measure it. It is likely that buildings of any permanence or substance would have been recorded by these surveyors, particularly if they were right on the street or boundary line. Thirdly, Bergtheil says that in 1843 there were only a few buildings and the only

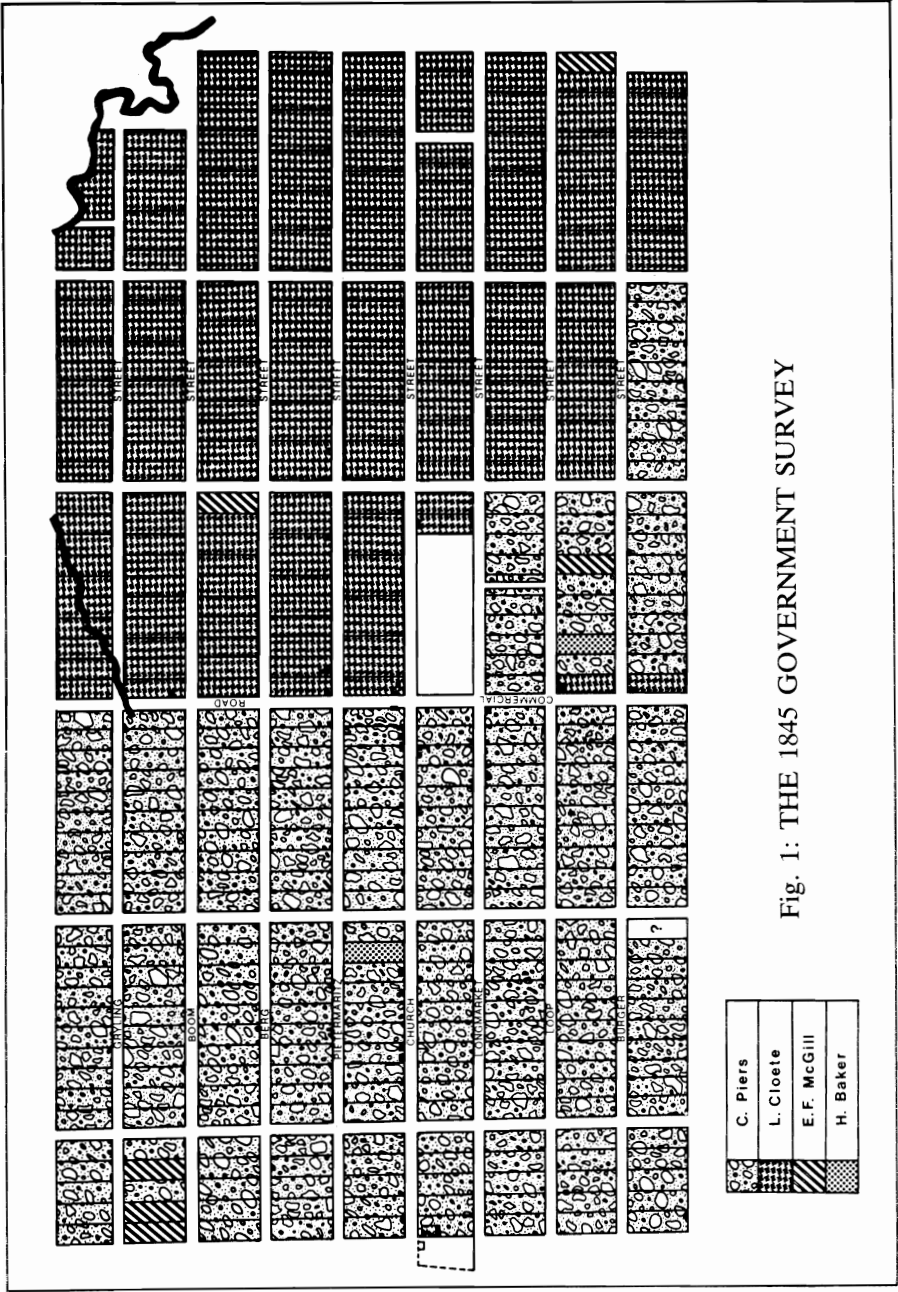
inhabitants he remembers are Commandant Pretorius, the two Boshoffs, Zietsman, Ripking, Repsold and Landsberg.<sup>29</sup> Fourthly, John Bird, another old inhabitant says that there were not more than 70 or 80 cottages in 1846.<sup>30</sup> This accords well with the 1845 survey. Lastly, the survey was to form the basis of the land claims and the issuing of deeds. That it was seen in a very serious light is proved by the Colonial Secretary's comments to Stanger (dated 17 February 1845):

You will give the surveyors clearly to understand that they will be held liable to rectify any errors detected in their work after they shall have delivered it to you, or to bear the expense of such rectification if it shall be found necessary to employ others (Bird 1888, p. 456).

Under him Stanger had Charles Piers and Lawrence Cloete (son of Henry Cloete). These two surveyors have left us with buildings clearly marked on some of the erven. Piers was responsible for surveying most of the erven (52,5%) (Fig. 1). Cloete surveyed 45,5% of the erven. A few of them are indicated as having been surveyed by Hughbert Baker, another surveyor, and E.F. McGill, a draughtsman. An important point is that whenever McGill surveyed an erf, Stanger's stamp of approval was attached thereto. Also, Baker and McGill did their surveys at a later date. It seems as though the original surveys for these properties were missing and they had to be resurveyed. Surveying was commenced in July and completed by October. The general plan is dated November 1845.

A comparison of the general plan and the individual surveys indicates a general consistency and reliability. The general plan shows the position of 51 buildings. Fifty-five per cent (28) of these are repeated in the individual surveys, the majority (21) of which were on the street line and were most probably used to check for accuracy. Two buildings occurred on the individual plans but were omitted from the general plan. A comparison of the documents gives one a fairly reliable indication of the more substantial structures in the settlement at the time. When one compares this with the Cloete report and the *Natalier* article, differences become clear. The most reasonable explanation must lie in the nature of the buildings. The problem is to decide what each source regarded as a building worthy of inclusion. Apparently Cloete and Boniface were looking for the bare minimum, but Stanger demanded something more permanent. It also appears that the general plan incorporates structures that were not particularly relevant to the surveying process.

It is important to note that in some cases, there were problems with the measurement of erven due to the imposition of the British system of measurement on the Dutch (Labuschagne 1983). The problem of physically defining properties reinforces three important facts. Firstly, for the most part the boundary infringements were subsequent to the initial survey of 1845. Proprietors were simply failing to get the exact delineation of their erven before erecting buildings, which meant that in some cases they were building on someone else's property. This was especially the case when the erf stood in a more remote part of town. Secondly, most of the encroachments were small (e.g. 11ft. 6in., 2ft. 6in., 6 in.) in terms of the location of buildings, but extremely important when measured against a surveyor's set of criteria. It must also be noted that the encroachments were mostly on the street and not between properties. Thirdly, the surveyors were



highly critical in their delineation and subdivision of properties. It is surprising that there were so few complaints. In sum, we can say that if we are talking about the miniscule details with which surveyors are concerned, then there were many inaccuracies, but if we are looking at the general

pattern of the erven and the position of the buildings, then there is no doubt that these early surveys were accurate. Judging from the evidence, Commissioner Cloete would have been far more susceptible to incorrect recording than later surveyors as he did not actually measure the town and nor did he have the time to spend on detail — the whole colony was his brief. Besides, his examining and drawing up of lists was to be by 'accurate returns' from all the verified landowners.<sup>31</sup> While he claims to have verified 259 lots personally, it must be remembered that, because of insecurity, many people had come into town and more erven had been built upon than expected.<sup>32</sup> Many farmers were occupying their erven in town, which explains why there were so many 'built upons' mentioned in 1843 in contrast to the actual survey of 1845.<sup>33</sup> Many of the buildings were clearly not substantial enough to be included in a survey of the proportions undertaken in 1845.

### INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

#### *Erf 33 Boom Street (333 Boom Street)*

The double-storeyed house standing in Boom Street (11/4/2133) has long been accepted as the oldest house in Pietermaritzburg, despite the fact that it does not even remotely resemble the structures the Voortrekkers are reputed to have erected (Fig. 2). The erf was originally granted to Widow Gert Nel and claimed by Petrus Gerhardus Pretorius in 1843 to whom it was granted (Grant No 472, 8 April 1846). In 1843 Commissioner Cloete described it as enclosed, cultivated and '*bona fide* occupied'. It does not appear on surveyor Cloete's survey of the property on 24 October 1845, but

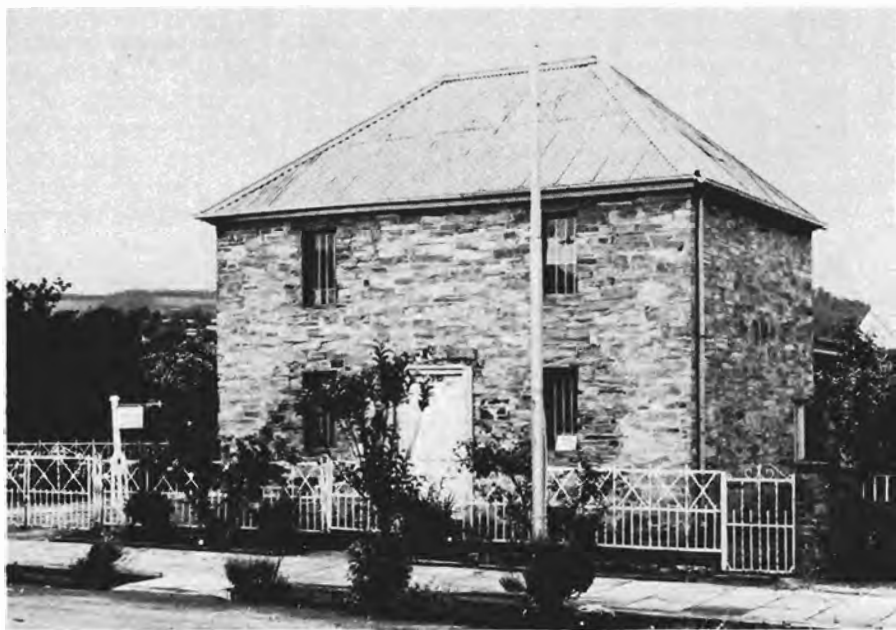
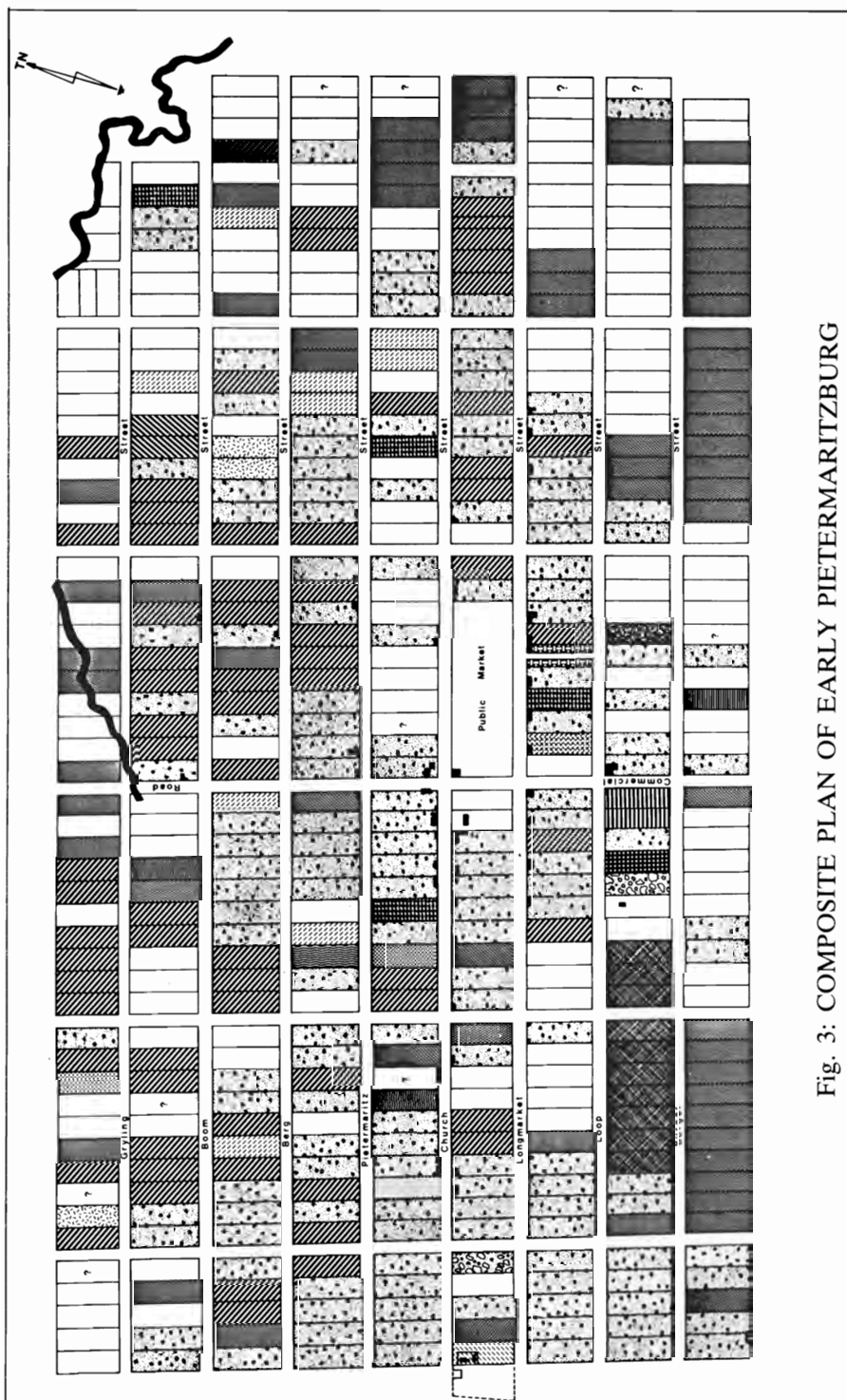





























Fig. 2: 333 Boom Street

(Photograph: Author's collection)





	KEY FOR FIGURE 3
	Enclosed, cultivated and bona fide occupied during the last 12 months.
	Previously cultivated but not occupied in terms of His Excellency's Proclamation of 12 May 1843.
	Built upon, enclosed, cultivated and bona fide occupied during the last 12 months.
	Built upon and bona fide occupied during the last 12 months.
	Not occupied.
	Not claimed.
	Not occupied in terms of His Excellency's Proclamation but formerly occupied.
	Subdivided. The lot facing Church Street was enclosed and cultivated. The lot facing Pietermaritz Street was built upon and bona fide occupied during the last 12 months.
	Partially enclosed, cultivated and bona fide occupied during the last 12 months.
	Cultivated and bona fide occupied during the last 12 months.
	Subdivided. The lot facing Longmarket Street was not occupied. The lot facing Church Street was bona fide occupied during the last 12 months.
	Subdivided but not occupied.
	Foundation for a building laid upon it and bona fide occupied for the last 12 months.
	Missing.
	Not claimed but granted later.
	Enclosed and bona fide occupied during the last 12 months.
	Used as a brick field and bona fide occupied during the last 12 months.
	Not claimed but reserved for a market or public purpose.
	Enclosed and foundation laid for building and bona fide occupied during the last 12 months.
	Enclosed, cultivated and bona fide occupied during the last 12 months.
	Not occupied in the terms of His Excellency's Proclamation of 12 May 1843. A building existed upon it which fell down in 1843.
	Built upon, cultivated and bona fide occupied for the last 12 months.
	Not occupied in terms of His Excellency's Proclamation of 12 May 1843.
	Fenced in, cultivated and bona fide occupied during the last 12 months.
	Not claimed by authority.
	Bona fide occupied during the last 12 months.
	Cultivated but not occupied in terms of His Excellency's Proclamation of 23 May 1843.

Source: SGO II/5 Map 1845, 1872 and 1906 (Natal Archives).

is clearly marked on the general plan of that year (Fig.3). The building again appears on the 1872 and 1906 maps. The property was first subdivided in 1899 and in that period it was only sold three times. If the general plan is accurate, then this house was standing in 1845.

### *Erf 1 Burger Street (10 Loop Street)*

Erf 1 of Burger Street was originally granted to Servaas van Breda on 14 October 1839. Cloete says that it was claimed and granted to Pieter Hendrik Kritzing, but the grant (No. 329) dated 25 March 1846 declares E.F. Boys to be the successful claimant.<sup>34</sup> This accords with other evidence that he occupied a house on this erf (Hattersley 1949). A building is not recorded on this property on the general plan or Piers's survey of 1845.



Fig. 4: 10 Loop Street

(Photograph: Author's collection)

Cloete had described it as built upon and '*bona fide* occupied'. The erf remained intact until 1872. Even though we cannot say with much confidence that the building dates back to 1843, it (Fig. 4) was certainly in existence by 1872. It has numerous historical attachments. Firstly, Colonel E.F. Boys lived here. Then, Prince Alfred has been said to have stayed here on his visit in 1860. After this it was used as a school called Bishop's College when it was described as 'lofty, well-lighted and well-ventilated' although the classrooms adjoining were considered 'quite unsuitable' and the dormitories seemed rather confined.<sup>35</sup> When Bishop's College closed down in 1880, a Miss Usherwood bought the property for £2 500 and gave it to the Diocese of Maritzburg (Jex 1977; Vietzen 1979). In August 1881 St Anne's school reassembled there.

#### *Erf 56 Burger Street (10 Burger Street)*

Originally granted to Johan Hendrik Smit on 15 February 1839, this property raises an interesting morphological question. It was also claimed by Smit and granted (No. 384) to him on 16 September 1846.<sup>36</sup> According to Cloete it was built upon and '*bona fide* occupied' in 1843. The problem lies in the fact that part of the building (Fig. 5) standing on the erf today conforms to Volksraad regulation though the building is not indicated on either the general plan of 1845 or Piers's survey of March 1846. However, Piers does indicate another building positioned on the other side of the erf.<sup>37</sup> It stood where the Parkview flats stand today.

When Captain F. Campbell of the Cape Mounted Rifles expected to leave the Colony, he offered a cottage for sale that stood on this erf.<sup>38</sup> It consisted of six rooms 'under the same roof', a four-stalled stable with two outrooms attached, a detached kitchen, and a small garden well enclosed with a brick



Fig. 5: 10 Burger Street

(Photograph: Author's collection)

wall and planted with a choice selection of fruit trees. In 1848 it was subdivided and a portion (cdef) was sold. The property was further subdivided in 1868 and 1872 by Alex Mair and this group of buildings is clearly indicated in the exact position of the house presently numbered 10 Burger Street. According to Hattersley (1960) it was occupied by Henry Cope, Solicitor in Chancery in early Victorian times. It later became the home of Walter Thrash, a barrister of the Inner Temple and a member of the Union Senate.

*Erf 81 Burger Street (241 Commercial Road)*

The house standing on subdivision 4 of 274 Burger Street (A of Erf 81) and known as Oxenham's Bakery, is beyond any reasonable doubt one of the oldest houses in Pietermaritzburg (Fig. 6). Claimed by Schalk Willem van



Fig. 6: 241 Commercial Road

(Photograph: Author's collection)

der Merwe and described by Cloete as built upon and '*bona fide* occupied' in 1843, the erf was first granted to Widow P.A. Venter on 18 April 1839. The building is shown on Cloete's survey (undated but probably 1845) as a 'Dwelling House' and appears on the general plan of 1845.<sup>39</sup> Needless to say, it is on the 1872 plan and the 1906 plans. It is understandable that building developed first along the main through routes of the small town. Another building situated on this entrance was on Erf 26 Burger Street (Henry Cloete's house demolished in 1954). Most of the traffic came in from Durban on this road. In fact one individual complained about the state of the cemeteries because wagons occasionally drove over the graves.<sup>40</sup> This house was actually known to everyone in the area as the residence of Mr van der Merwe.<sup>41</sup> Also, the house that Boniface referred to is most probably this one, as none of the other van der Merwes mentioned claimed properties that showed buildings on them in the 1845 survey. Similarly, none of them claimed erven that were said to be built upon in 1843. Everything points to this house dating back to 1843. Unless other evidence is forthcoming, this we are compelled to accept. The gable was not part of the original building but added in 1929 to form part of the main entrance to Commercial Road. The old bakery itself was commenced in 1926 and completed the following year.

#### *Erf 5 Loop Street (54 Longmarket Street)*

There is little reason to believe that the house on Erf 5 Loop Street, numbered 54 Longmarket Street (J/5), dates back to 1843 (Fig. 7). On the contrary, there is every reason to believe that it was built in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The original grant of 14 August 1839 was made to



Fig. 7: 54 Longmarket Street

(Photograph: Author's collection)

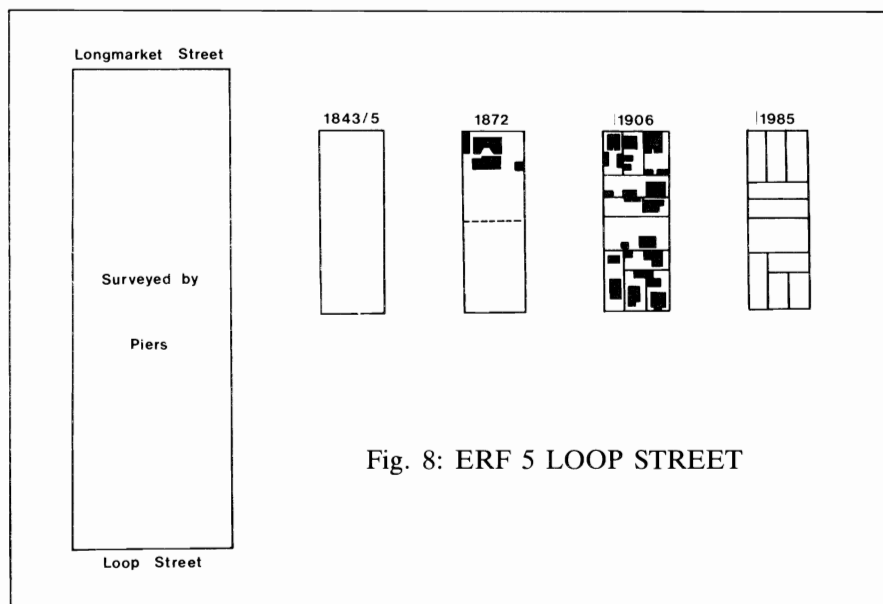


Fig. 8: ERF 5 LOOP STREET

Coenraad Scheepers and claimed by Jacobus Viljoen. However, it was granted to Daniel Hollington on 13 November 1846.<sup>42</sup> Cloete described the property as built upon and '*bona fide* occupied'. Neither the survey by C. Piers (October 1845) or the general plan of 1845 has a building shown on the site (Figs. 3 and 8). In 1847 there was a slaughter house on Erf 5 Loop Street.<sup>43</sup> In particular, there were various substantial stone and brick dwellings occupied by Ogle and McCabe, government contractors, butchers, but also carrying on 'a roaring private trade'.<sup>44</sup> Only one building is mentioned in 1850 and the stand was described as in a 'most excellent' position for business, both for the 'military and native trade'.<sup>45</sup> The speculative value of the property is partly corroborated by the number of times it changed hands. Hollington sold it to Charles McDonald the day after receiving the grant, and he sold it to J.W. and J.P. Archbell the same day. Hypolite Jargal bought the erf in 1847 and the following year sold it to James O'Brien, who in turn sold it to C.W. Mayne in 1852.

The building referred to in 1850 was apparently used for commercial purposes. It was probably larger than a normal house, having been used as a slaughter house. The 1872 plan confirms this view indicating a relatively large building and the property divided in half. The erf was properly surveyed and subdivided in March 1880 by government surveyor J.H. Spence, who clearly indicates the subdivision J upon which 54 Longmarket Street is presently standing. The 1906 plan shows this house together with two others on Erf 5 Loop Street. There is little doubt that all three were built some time between 1880 and 1906 and more than likely soon after the subdivision in 1880.

#### *Erf 42 Loop Street (428 Longmarket Street)*

The building standing on the remainder of Erf 42 Loop Street and numbered 428 Longmarket Street is, with 333 Boom Street and Government



Fig. 9: 428 Longmarket Street

(Photograph: Author's collection)

House, the oldest double-storeyed house in Pietermaritzburg (Fig. 9). The Volksraad had granted this erf to Carel Ohrtmann on 14 October 1839. Heinrich Anton Ripking claimed the erf in 1843 when Cloete described it as built upon and '*bona fide* occupied'. In 1844 Boniface mentioned Ripking's house, which he considered substantial. It appears that Ripking was not living on this erf in 1843. We know that in 1846 he was living on Erf 28 Loop

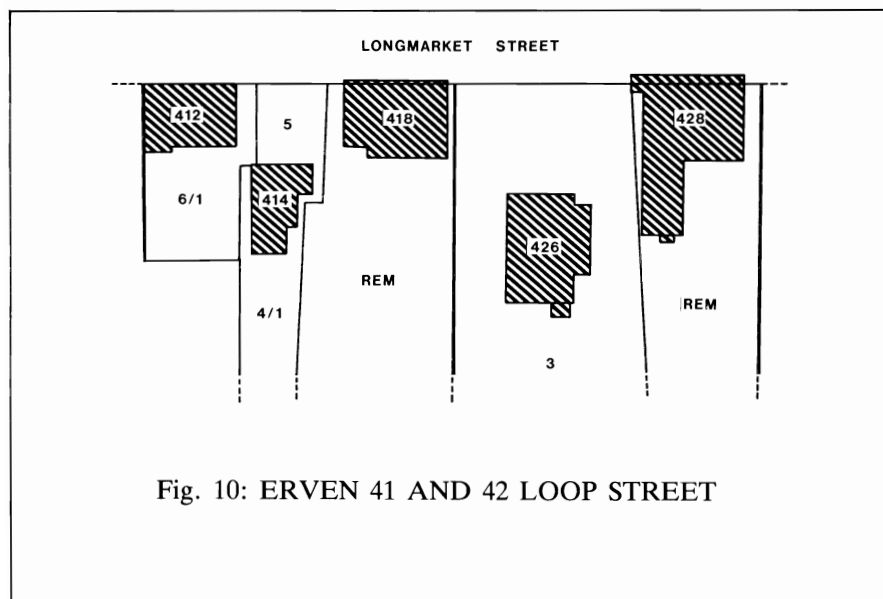


Fig. 10: ERVEN 41 AND 42 LOOP STREET

Street.<sup>46</sup> He was granted Erf 42 Loop Street on 23 March 1846 (Grant No. 314). Erf 28 Loop Street, which he was occupying, was granted to Johanna Olivier (widow of Petrus Naude) on the same day. Ripking bought this from her on 18 September 1846 and continued to occupy the erf up to December of that year when he was reported to be selling his 'home' opposite the market or 'in front of' the market.<sup>47</sup> The general plan of 1845 shows a building on this erf and Cloete had considered it built upon and '*bona fide* occupied' (Fig. 3).

Ripking may have erected a building on Erf 42 Loop and then claimed it, but the building indicated on the general plan is in a different position to that of the house referred to by Brann and Haswell as Ripking's house (Figs. 3 and 10). Sureyor Cloete does not show a building on this erf in his survey on 11 October 1845 (Fig. 11). It is unreasonable to assume that the general

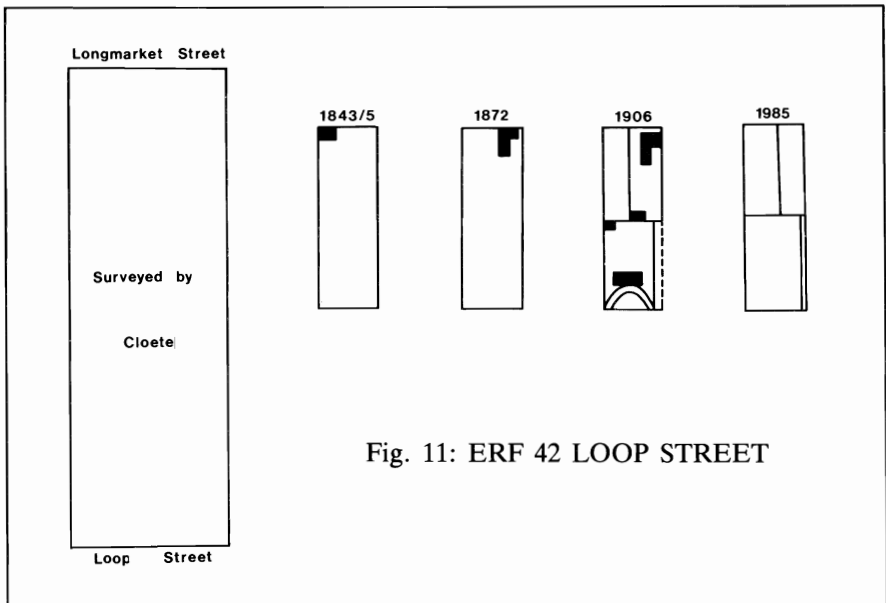


Fig. 11: ERF 42 LOOP STREET

plan of 1845 has the building in the wrong position; as in all other instances where an individual survey shows buildings, the general plan has the correct erf. If it is supposed that the general plan has the building on the wrong erf, then the house numbered 412 Loop Street was intended, which is clearly shown by three different surveyors in exactly the same position. Further support is supplied by the fact that no buildings are shown between 418 and 428 Longmarket Street in 1872 and 1906. The building on that portion (3 of 42) was erected between 1920, when the property was subdivided, and 1926, when the building appears on a drainage diagram.

It seems that Ripking waited for certainty before commencing with the building which we know as 428 Longmarket Street. When Boniface used his house as an example, he was living on Erf 28 Loop Street. When he was granted Erf 42 in March of 1846, he probably commenced building and moved at the end of that year. In the meantime he had bought Erf 28 in September 1846, before he left for his new house at 428 Longmarket Street.<sup>48</sup>

If it be argued that the house on Erf 42 was Ohrtmann's house that Boniface mentions, as he had been originally granted this erf, a number of factors are left unexplained. In the first place, Ohrtmann claimed some 34 erven in 1843, four of which were described by Cloete as built upon and 'bona fide occupied' and two of these, namely 26 Church Street and 26 Boom Street, had buildings shown by surveyor Cloete on his diagrams of 22 October 1845 and 29 October 1845 respectively, and the general plan of that year. If there was a substantial house on this erf in 1843, it is highly unlikely that Ohrtmann's speculative mind would let that fact go unnoticed. He would most probably have claimed on the basis of the original grant. Secondly, according to the available records, Ripking was not the recipient of an original grant from the Volksraad in 1839. He would have been occupying someone else's erf anyway, unless there had been a transaction between himself and the actual owner prior to, or on, Cloete's arrival.

In conclusion we can safely say that 428 Longmarket Street was erected somewhere between 1846 and 1850. If a building stood on this erf in 1843, it was in all probability in the position indicated on the general plan and was removed before 1872 when there was no building in that position.

#### *Erf 6 Loop Street (64 and 66 Longmarket Street)*

The buildings numbered 64 and 66 Longmarket Street are unique in that they are the only surviving couplet that dates back to the earliest period (Fig. 12). S.W. Hatting was the original grantee awarded on 14 October 1839. Johannes Janse van Vuuren claimed it in 1843 but it was granted to W. Thomas on 23 April 1846.<sup>49</sup> Cloete described it as built upon and 'bona fide occupied' in 1843, but the buildings do not appear on the general plan of 1845 and were not recorded by surveyor Piers in October of that year. On 16 April 1851 the erf was subdivided by government surveyor Hughbert



Fig. 12: 64 and 66 Longmarket Street (1984)

(Photograph: Author's collection)





Fig. 13: 205 Berg Street

(Photograph: Author's collection)

Baker and an advertisement in the *Natal Witness* two days later shows the subdivisions and two houses.<sup>50</sup> So according to the title deeds the erf remained intact until 1852 when the trustees of the insolvent estate of Richard Donoghue took transfer from William Thomas and immediately sold the subdivisions. The houses are shown on the 1872 and 1906 plans.

#### *Erf 20 Berg Street (205 Berg Street)*

The building on Erf 20 Berg Street and numbered 205 (Rem/2/2220) has also been included in the oldest house list of Brann and Haswell (1983) (Fig. 13). The erf was originally granted to H.N. Schoeman on 25 April 1839 and claimed by Pieter Gerhardus Pretorius in 1843 when Cloete described it as built upon and '*bona fide* occupied'. The property was granted to A. Williams on 10 January 1849 (Grant No. 71). In his survey of the property in September 1845 Piers does not indicate any building. The general plan also shows an erf devoid of any substantial structure (Fig. 3). Furthermore, the 1872 plan is silent on the matter. Subdivision of the property commenced in June 1853 but the portion that the building stands on was only surveyed in November 1869 by government surveyor G. Holgate. It was sold to H.E. Harvey on 2 May 1870 who presumably bought it with the intention of erecting a building thereon. It would seem that the building was completed somewhere between 1872 and 1906 when it is clearly shown.

#### *Erf 22 Berg Street (219 Berg Street)*

The inclusion of the building number 219 Berg Street (1/2221) as one of the oldest houses in Pietermaritzburg raises a number of problems (Fig. 14). Originally granted to H.H. Schoeman, Erf 21 Berg Street was claimed by Jacob de Klerk and granted to him on 8 April 1864. Cloete had



Fig. 14: 219 Berg Street  
(Photograph: Author's collection)

described it as built upon and '*bona fide* occupied'. Brann and Haswell (1983) erroneously state that the building numbered 219 Berg Street stands on Erf 22 Berg Street. It is, in fact, on Erf 21 Berg Street. Piers does not show a building on Erf 21 Berg Street in his survey in September 1845 (Fig. 15). The general plan is in agreement and the 1872 plan similarly leaves this

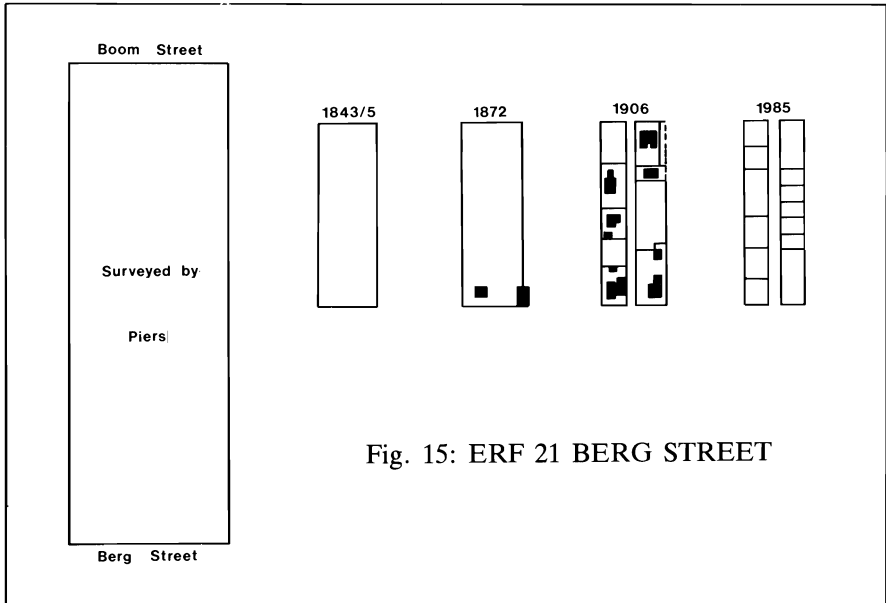


Fig. 15: ERF 21 BERG STREET

part of the erf vacant (Fig. 3). It is only in 1906 that the building is shown. The 1872 plan shows a building right on the boundary line between erven 21 and 22, half being on one erf and the other half on the other erf. This is not in the same position as 219 Berg Street. Note that a house was standing on this erf in 1846 and is probably the house indicated in the 1872 plan and standing near the boundary between Erf 20 and Erf 21.<sup>51</sup> This building was demolished before 1906 when a more substantial building is indicated. The erf was divided and a street laid off. The properties off the new thoroughfare, Stranack Street, were surveyed in February 1904 by borough surveyor W.A. Anderson. The present building in this position (7/12), 211 Berg Street, is of that period and is one of the better examples of the late Victorian domestic vernacular in Pietermaritzburg.

If it is argued that Brann and Haswell were actually referring to the semi-detached cottages on Erf 22 numbered 223 and 225 Berg Street (A/7 and Rem/7), the problem is not solved. This erf was originally granted to Marais Johannes Fourie. It was claimed by M.J. Schoeman in 1843 but was granted to M.J. Fourie on 25 March 1847. Cloete described it as built upon and 'bona fide occupied' but both Piers's survey of September 1845 and the general plan of that year do not show a building on this erf (Figs. 3 and 16).

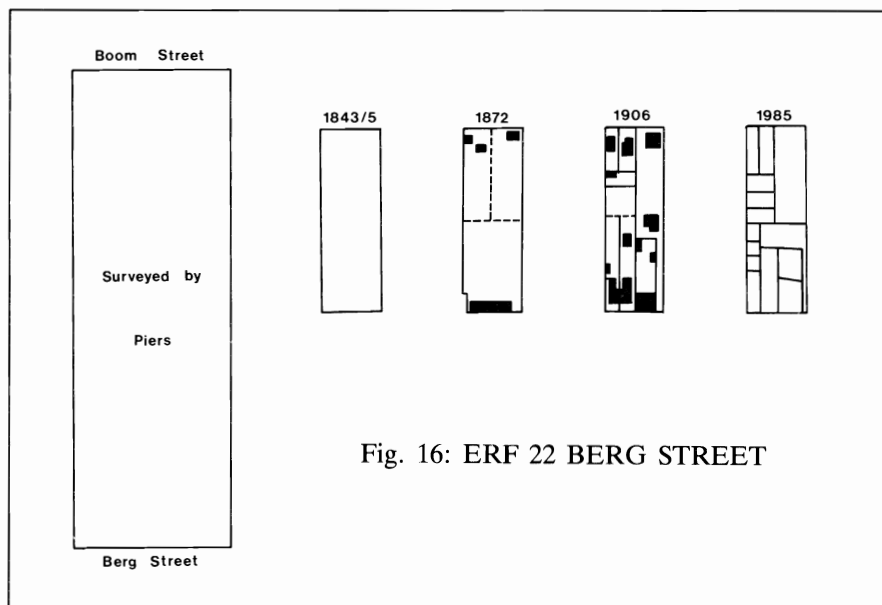


Fig. 16: ERF 22 BERG STREET

However, when Fourie advertised his erf for sale in May 1844 there was a house standing on it.<sup>52</sup> The 1872 plan shows a fairly substantial building. The property was subdivided after this and the 1906 plan shows two separate buildings on this frontage. This suggests that the house mentioned in 1844 was removed before 1906, maybe even before 1872 or the 1845 survey which shows no building on this site. It is unlikely that the semi-detached buildings numbered 221/223 and 227/229 date back to 1844, although they may have been built sometime around 1872. On the strength of the evidence presently available it is unlikely that any of these buildings should be on the list of oldest houses in Pietermaritzburg.

*Erf 42 Berg Street (417 Berg Street)*

The last property mentioned by Brann and Haswell is Erf 42 Berg Street. This had been first granted to Hermanus Engelbrecht on 1 March 1839. It was claimed by Frans Ignatius Maritz and granted (Grant No. 94) to him on 8 April 1846. Cloete described it as built upon and '*bona fide* occupied'. Surveyor Cloete did not indicate a building on this erf in his survey of 4 October 1845, but it is shown on the general plan of that year (Fig. 3). The erf remained intact until March 1896 when it was subdivided by government surveyor F. Upton. Again, it is not clear which building Brann and Haswell are referring to. The building number 417 Berg Street, which they mention, and standing on 3/2242 of Erf 42 Berg Street, dates back to the 1950s. The plan had been received in 1933, approved that same year and again in 1948 and 1952. It was erected soon after this for it was added to in 1953 and 1955. In 1976 business premises plans were submitted for another building. These were approved in that year, but for some reason it was decided to alter the original building instead. The work was put in hand and completed in 1982. The only building on this frontage that dates back to somewhere between 1845 and 1872 is that numbered 413/415 (although some documents simply refer to it as 415) Berg Street and standing on 4/2242 of Erf 42 Berg Street. It appears on the 1872 and 1906 plans and is still standing today, albeit substantially altered (Fig. 17). There were additions in 1959 and extensive alterations in 1983.



Fig. 17: 413/415 Berg Street

(Photograph: Author's collection)

*Erf 41 Loop Street (412 Longmarket Street)*

Together with Oxenham's Bakery, Government House and the Voortrekker parsonage, 412 Longmarket Street (6/1/2641) is the other 'oldest house' in Pietermaritzburg (Figs. 10 and 18). The property was originally granted to Theunis de Klerk on 14 October 1839. The claimant



Fig. 18: 412 Longmarket Street  
(Photograph: Author's collection)

was C.F. Botha. The property was granted to him on 23 March 1846. Cloete had described it as built upon and '*bona fide* occupied' and clearly marked it on his survey on 11 October 1845 (Fig. 19) but it does not appear on the general plan (Fig. 3). Instead, a building in the same position on the erf was indicated on the adjacent Erf 42 Loop Street. It is highly likely that, in the

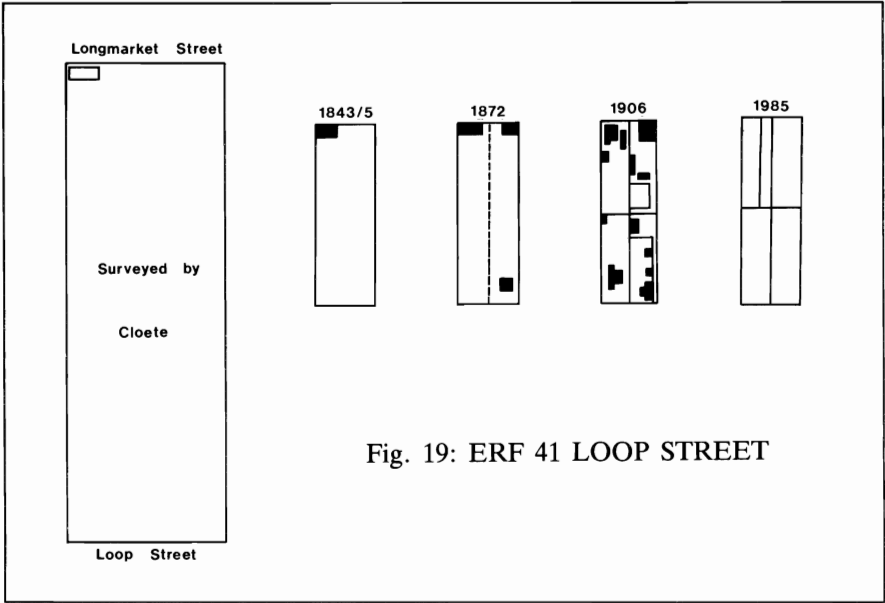


Fig. 19: ERF 41 LOOP STREET

light of the discussion on Erf 42 Loop Street, the general plan is incorrect, and that there was no building of any lasting substance on Erf 42. The building is shown again in 1850, 1851 and on the separate plan with the grant. Thus, three different surveyors separated by as much as six years testify to the existence of the building. It also appears on the 1872 and 1906 plans.

The property was first subdivided in 1850 when the building on the remainder of Erf 41 and numbered 418 Longmarket Street was most probably built. It remains possible for the building to have been erected between 1860 and 1872, for J. Moreland procured this portion soon after he had bought Erf 42, suggesting that it was vacant at the time, since he was evidently living in the double-storeyed house on Erf 41. Perhaps it was merely a property investment. It certainly was not shown as standing in 1845 but it is indicated on the 1872 and 1906 maps. H. Repsold bought the whole erf from P.J. de Waal in 1849. When it was subdivided H.A. Repsold bought the 412 Longmarket Street section and F.S. Berning the 418 Longmarket Street section. The building between these two, 414 Longmarket Street (4/1/2641 and 5/2641) was erected in 1959. The original shell of the house numbered 412 Longmarket Street fits the basic floor plan of the Voortrekker house.

*Erf 1 Longmarket Street (2 Church Street)*

This historic erf was originally granted to Willem H. Neethling on 14 October 1839. It was claimed by Jacobus Johannes Burger and Johan Bernard Rudolph. The former had purchased half of the lot facing Longmarket Street and the latter the other half facing Church Street in 1842. While Burger had not occupied his subdivision, Rudolph's half had



Fig. 20: 2 Church Street (c. 1867)

(Photograph: Author's collection)

been 'bona fide occupied'. First Kritzinger and then Visagie had been granted a piece of land 60ft<sup>2</sup> at the top of Church Street on condition that they should maintain thereon a mill for grinding wheat for a fixed fee. Although Burger and Rudolph claimed the erf, A.J. Fick was granted it on 16 September 1846.<sup>53</sup> He sold it to Rudolph the following month.

Surveyor General William Stanger purchased Sub ABCD of Erf 1 Longmarket Street in 1847. Surveyor Piers had clearly shown a substantial set of buildings on the erf by 1845. The general plan of that year also indicates these buildings. The house was single-storeyed, thatch-roofed and consisted of about five rooms. As the Governor's residence it has architectural as well as historical importance (Frost 1979; Labuschagne 1983). In the words of Oberholster (1972):

It reflects the style of its period and is one of the few surviving examples of early Natal architecture. Besides this, it is an example of the effective use that was made of the materials available at the time. (p. 245).

This building (Fig. 20) is definitely one of the oldest houses in town. It can be traced back to 1845 with certainty.

#### *Erf 34 Longmarket Street (338 Church Street)*

This is the erf on which the first Voortrekker parsonage to be built in Pietermaritzburg stood (Fig. 21). Known today as the Voortrekker Museum, it was originally built as a house. When in 1947 this fact was established, a national controversy developed. The acceptance of the building as the Church of the Vow can be attributed to the fact that the existence of the Republic of Natalia was short-lived. Had the Voortrekker Republic



**Fig. 21: 338 Church Street**

(Photograph: Author's collection)

developed further, the real church would undoubtedly have been built on Erf 33 Longmarket Street. Thom (1949) and Engelbrecht (1948) were commissioned to research this question independently. They concluded that the building was indeed the Church of the Vow. I have elsewhere endeavoured to demonstrate that their view is not supported by the evidence (Labuschagne 1983). From a cultural geographic perspective, the essence of its importance does not lie in the fact that it was once used as a church, but rather that it expresses an essential ingredient of the early Voortrekker dorp, a concept which was firmly entrenched in the Boer immigrant cultural baggage, namely, the position of the building on the front of the erf. The early church documents clearly state that the building would first be used as a church and then be converted into a parsonage when '*een behoorlijke kerk*' had been erected.<sup>54</sup> It was built on what had always been known as the 'pastorie grond'.<sup>55</sup> Cloete described this erf as claimed by the Consistory of the Dutch Reformed Church for the erection of a parsonage. Soon after the consecration of this temporary church, the Volksraad resolved that a new church be built, but this only took place in 1860.<sup>56</sup>

The building was sold in 1873 from which date it was apparently used as a wagonmaker's shop, mineral water factory, tearoom, chemist, blacksmith's shop and a wool shed.<sup>57</sup> A movement to preserve it for the descendants of the Voortrekkers was started in 1908 and a commission was appointed by the Church Council for this purpose. A nation-wide collection of funds for the purchasing of the building was undertaken. This was concluded in 1910 and the building was restored at a cost of £505. The specifications were drawn up by J. Collingwood Tully. The building was opened on 16 December 1912 by General Schalk Burger and in 1938 it was declared a national monument. In sum we can agree with Haswell that this building was only intended as a temporary home for the church. It is the oldest house in town.

## CONCLUSION

The interpretation of the earliest period of Pietermaritzburg's evolution is fraught with innumerable difficulties. This has allowed for varying approaches some of which have led to questionable conclusions. This is especially the case when we attempt to establish what national urban culture is left. The problem has been well illustrated in the research undertaken by Brann and Haswell. The cultural geographical approach is marked by a healthy scepticism. It is not satisfied with the popular interpretation of events. A study of the oldest houses in Pietermaritzburg, when viewed from this perspective, leads one to the following tentative conclusions. Firstly, our understanding as to what houses are the oldest can at best be based on the evidence we have up to date. Further research may unearth other evidence leading to different conclusions. Secondly, it is unlikely that there are any genuine Voortrekker houses left in Pietermaritzburg, that is, if there were any of the sort described by Walton. As we have seen, very early on there was a brick and tile yard supplying these building materials, somewhat different to that used for the hartbeesthuis. Lastly, the materials used are not always a reliable indication of the date of erection. In some cases very primitive structures were built rather late into the nineteenth century because a number of the more humble inhabitants did not have the financial



means to procure or have more substantial structures erected. In sum, we can say that there is serious doubt about the validity of some of the oldest houses in the list supplied by Brann and Haswell. Taking all the available evidence into consideration, in my view the following houses form a legitimate part of the oldest house collection in Pietermaritzburg, namely the Church of the Vow, old Government House, Oxenham's Bakery and 412 Longmarket Street. Of these, 412 Longmarket Street is the most unaltered and representative of early domestic vernacular in Pietermaritzburg.

NOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> Detailed descriptions of these structures may be found in Walton (1951, 1952, 1956, 1961 and 1981) and Van Rooyen (1940).
- <sup>2</sup> 'A very common form of primitive construction, consisting of a sort of coarse basketwork of twigs woven between upright poles, then plastered with mud; a substitute for brick nogging in partitions' (Harris 1977, p. 569); 'A method of wall construction consisting of branches of thin laths (wattles) roughly plastered over with mud or clay (daub), sometimes used as a filling between the vertical members of timber-framed houses' (Fleming *et al* 1971, p. 305).
- <sup>3</sup> 'Wattle and Daub', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 23, p. 438 (1984).
- <sup>4</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 22 June 1849; see also Methley (1850).
- <sup>5</sup> Many writers mention the white-washed buildings (e.g. Colenso 1855; Mason 1855; Barter 1852; Methley 1850).
- <sup>6</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 27 October 1848. It is tempting to suggest that this refers to 333 Boom Street, but there are problems attached to this interpretation. Firstly, the use of the word 'best' suggests that there were other stone-built double-storeyed houses or at least that there were other houses built of stone or that were double-storeyed. Secondly, even if the word 'best' had been excluded, we are not told where the house was situated.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 6 December 1850.
- <sup>8</sup> *Pisedo terre* actually means rammed earth (Markus 1964).
- <sup>9</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 28 June 1850.
- <sup>10</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 19 July 1850.
- <sup>11</sup> *De Natalier*, 13 March 1846.
- <sup>12</sup> *South African Archival Records*, Natal No. 1, p. 295; see also Bird (1888).
- <sup>13</sup> *Het Nederduitsch Zuid-Afrikaan Tydschrift*, Deel 16, 1839, p. 239 (Richert, Pike and Co., Printers, Cape Town); Nathan (1937) feels that he was being too idealistic; he looked through 'rose-coloured spectacles' (p. 266).
- <sup>14</sup> My translation is by A. Gordijn (private correspondence); see also Bird (1888). A number of scholars have criticised Deleorgue's judgement (e.g. Nathan 1937; Cory 1926).
- <sup>15</sup> Despatch from Lord Stanley to Sir George T. Napier dated 13 December 1842; Minute of the Governor to the Legislative Council dated 4 May 1843 (Bird 1888). Cloete sailed for Port Natal at the end of May 1843 and reached Pietermaritzburg on 8 June.
- <sup>16</sup> The Volksraad had decided that every man married and of age who had arrived in Natal before 1839 was entitled to a grant of two farms and one erf. Young men doing burger duty and aged 15 to 21 were entitled to one farm and one erf and all those who arrived after 1839 to one farm only (*De Natalier*, 3 May 1845; see also Du Plessis (1942), Bird (1888 p. 191f, 334f, 404-413, 436-439, 450-457), *South African Archival Records*, Natal No. 1, p. 372-374).
- <sup>17</sup> Sir G.T. Napier to Captain Smith dated 23 December 1842 (Bird 1888).
- <sup>18</sup> Letter from the Colonial Secretary (Cape) to W. Stanger dated February 1845 (Bird 1888). For some amendments and clarification of Cloete's report see letter Cloete to Stanger 27 May 1846 (SGO III/1/2); letter Cloete 20 July 1846 (SGO III/1/2); letter C. Scheepers 22 April 1847 (SGO III/1/2); and page 158 and 159 of the report (SGO II/5).
- <sup>19</sup> *De Natalier*, 4 April 1844.
- <sup>20</sup> *De Natalier*, 18 April 1844.
- <sup>21</sup> *The Patriot*, 1 January, 2 April and 27 August 1847.
- <sup>22</sup> *The Patriot*, 20 August 1847.
- <sup>23</sup> *De Natalier*, 4 April 1845.
- <sup>24</sup> *De Natalier*, 26 April 1844.
- <sup>25</sup> *De Natalier*, 4 December 1844, 8 August 1845, 13 December 1846; *The Natal Witness*, 16 October 1846, 18 December 1846, 16 April and 1 October 1847, 7 April 1848; *The Natal Witness Supplement*, 11 December 1846; Title Deed 275 of 1846.

- <sup>26</sup> Title Deed No. 108 and 165 of 1846; *De Natalier*, 3 and 10 May 1844, 4 October 1844, 5 May 1846, 16 June 1846, 21 July 1846, 11 August 1846; *The Natal Witness*, 10 April 1846, 26 March 1847, 11 August 1848, 22 October 1848; *The Natal Witness Supplement*, 11 December 1846.
- <sup>27</sup> *De Natalier*, 7 June 1844.
- <sup>28</sup> On Stanger see also Merrett (1979), Leverton (1972), *The Natal Witness*, 15 March 1854, *The Natal Mercury*, 15 March 1854, *The Natal Independent*, 23 March 1854.
- <sup>29</sup> *Bird Papers*, Vol. 4. Letter to C. Bird dated 1897.
- <sup>30</sup> *Natal: 1846-1851*, a charter in supplement of historical record, by an old inhabitant, P. Davis and Sons, Pietermaritzburg.
- <sup>31</sup> Proclamation by Sir G.T. Napier dated 12 May 1843 (Bird 1888).
- <sup>32</sup> Cloete to Montagu, Secretary to the Government, dated 26 December 1843 (Bird 1888).
- <sup>33</sup> *De Natalier*, 3 May 1845.
- <sup>34</sup> SGO III/1/4. Letter to Surveyor General dated 30 March 1846.
- <sup>35</sup> *Natal Parliamentary Papers*, Document No. 17, Presented 1875, Fourth Session, Seventh Council.
- <sup>36</sup> SGO III/1/2. Page 95. SGO III/1/40. Letter to Surveyor General dated 20 December 1872.
- <sup>37</sup> See also Title Deed 293 of 1846 and SGO III/1/3.
- <sup>38</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 22 October 1847.
- <sup>39</sup> SGO III/1/4. Letter to the Surveyor General dated 7 March 1846; SGO/1/40. Letter to the Surveyor General dated 20 December 1872.
- <sup>40</sup> *The Patriot*, 4 December 1846.
- <sup>41</sup> *De Natalier*, 7 February 1845.
- <sup>42</sup> SGO III/1/3. Letter from C. Piers to the Surveyor General dated November 1845; SGO III/1/4. Letter to the Surveyor General dated 14 November 1846.
- <sup>43</sup> *The Patriot*, 8 and 15 January 1847.
- <sup>44</sup> *The Patriot*, 23 July 1847.
- <sup>45</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 5 April 1850.
- <sup>46</sup> *De Natalier*, 21 July 1846.
- <sup>47</sup> *The Patriot*, 25 December 1846; SGO III/1/4. Letter to the Surveyor General dated 18 September 1846.
- <sup>48</sup> Note that Ripking was registered as a trader from at least 1855 to 1865 (*The Natal Witness*, 1 June 1855, 12 August 1864, 8 August 1865).
- <sup>49</sup> SGO III/1/4. Letter to the Surveyor General dated 23 April 1846.
- <sup>50</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 18 April 1851.
- <sup>51</sup> *The Natal Witness*, 6 March 1846; *The Natal Witness Supplement*, 11 December 1846.
- <sup>52</sup> *De Natalier*, 10 May 1844.
- <sup>53</sup> SGO III/1/4. Letter to the Surveyor General dated 15 September 1846.
- <sup>54</sup> Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerk, Pietermaritzburg: File No. 3, List 3, 1840 (dated 15 April 1840); *Ware Afrikaan*, 24 November 1840.
- <sup>55</sup> Eg. Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerk, Pietermaritzburg: File No. 1, Lists 1 and 4.
- <sup>56</sup> Notes of the Volksraad, 7 January 1842 (*South African Archival Records*, Natal No. 1, p. 130).
- <sup>57</sup> See for example Strydom (1955), van Riet Lowe and Malan (1949), Lugg (1949), Buchanan (1934), Meintjies (1973), *Supplement to the Natal Witness*, 21 November 1966, and *The Voortrekker's Museum, 1940*, Die Natalse Pers Beperk, Pietermaritzburg.

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