

Brief Overview of the Union Buildings – Pretoria



1 Union Buildings:

1.1 Introduction:

- The Union Buildings houses the Offices of the President of South Africa and his cabinet together with other governmental functions. It was built with money from the ZAR (Paul Kruger) government in order that the English could not make use of the money for other purposes.
- It is built on the southern Slope of Meintjieskop. Named after the previous owner of the hill. Also a well known mason in Pretoria's early history.
- **1910** - Foundation Stone laid by the Duke of Connaught
- **1913** - Inauguration of the building as the seat of the Government of the Union of South Africa.
- **Architect** - Sir. Herbert Baker was a Free Mason
 - ✓ He was a well known English colonial architect and a good friend (and disciple) of Cecil John Rhodes and Lord Milner.
 - ✓ Baker was poetically inclined and given to hero-worship since boyhood, he was brought up in an age and class inspired by the ideals of Ruskin, of High Art, Romanticism and the glories of the Empire.

1.2 The Building:

- The Union Building symbolizes the **Unification of the 2 major white groups** within the country namely the Afrikaans and English speaking people (with the establishing of the Union of South Africa). These two symmetrical sides of the building is connected by means of a semi-circular colonnade overlooking an open amphitheatre.
- The Union Building is called the **South African Acropolis**.
- **Acropolis** = The high point of a city where a shrine to a city's most important god might be placed".
- Bakers original vision was to place a large low dome on the central axis of the design behind the symmetrical building at it stands today. This dome was to be a greater symbol of final union, a Hall of Fame or Heroön, a shrine of the Great of all races in South Africa. Besides the imagined domed Heroön another unrealized vision was a Via Sacra along the ridge of the Kopie to its apex overlooking the city... a broad stepped pathway with bastions and pedestals on either side for sculpture as it neared a little circular columned Temple of Peace, crowning the summit.
- The Union Buildings are characterized by the use of projecting porticoes, of Ionic columns.

- Baker described them as: “columned temples – they are hardly porticoes; loggias perhaps better describes them – leading out of the Ministers rooms”.
- Quote about the importance of a public building like the Union Building:
- “Building create love among its citizens for their country and out of that love **certain actions are born in the history of a nation.**”
- The Union Buildings are situated in the **suburb of Arcadia**:
- In Greek mythology this was the **entrance to the under world**.

1.3 Symbolism and Description (Starting from Church Street):

- **Louise Botha Statue on lawned area**
 - ✓ Was a Freemason, and the first Prime Minister of the Union of south Africa 1910.
 - ✓ Was involved with the Meeting in Versailles after 1 WW in France.
 - ✓ Committed suicide. He had a choice between a bullet and poison – FM related
- **War Memorial (1WW / Korean)**
 - ✓ Place of honouring the dead.
 - ✓ Monument commemorating bloodshed.
 - ✓ Ceremonies held here once a year to commemorate the people that died in the First World War.
 - ✓ 2 roofed structures designed in the form of the 1WW tin hats.
 - ✓ Structure similar to cenotaph in VT monument in front of the plaque with names. Place where flowers are laid every year.
- **Nelson Madela statue**
 - ✓ A nine-metre-tall bronze statue of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was unveiled at the Union Buildings in Pretoria on the Day of Reconciliation, bringing to a close the official 10-day mourning period for the much loved former state president, who died at his Johannesburg home on 5 December 2013.
 - ☞ President Jacob Zuma, who oversaw the proceedings of Monday 16 December 2013, said the Mandela statue would act as a constant reminder for the nation to maintain Madiba’s values of unity, reconciliation, compassion and ubuntu.
 - ☞ “The statue will forever remind us of Madiba’s towering vision and stature. It will remind us of his commitment, his leadership and his dedication to the struggle against apartheid. It will forever remind us of his commitment to an improved quality of life for all,” he said.
 - ☞ It is 9-metres high, the tallest figurative bronze sculpture of Mandela.
 - ☞ The “wingspan” of the statue – from fingertip to fingertip – is eight metres.
 - ☞ It was initially commissioned by the National Heritage Council, an agency of the Department of Arts and Culture, as part of the celebrations to mark the centenary of the Union Buildings, South Africa’s seat of government, in Pretoria.
 - ☞ The statue is situated at the Union Buildings, the same place where Mandela was inaugurated as South Africa’s first democratically elected president in 1994. Zuma has since declared the Union Buildings a national heritage site.
 - ☞ The statue shows a smiling Mandela, with his arms stretched out and his hands open, as if to embrace the nation.
 - ☞ Prinsloo told Brand South Africa that the artists considered his open arms not only as a gesture of reconciliation, but also one of bestowing a blessing. “Mandela is



looking down on the people in front of him, blessing them.” It is also in the spirit of the hymn, God bless Africa, he said.

- ☞ The Mandela statue stand where a figure of former prime minister James Barry Hertzog used to stand. Hertzog was prime minister from 1924-1939. “Following an exhaustive consultation process, and in the spirit of reconciliation that our country has become renowned for, the representatives of Hertzog agreed that his statue be relocated to another spot in the Union Buildings in order to make way for Madiba’s statue,” Zuma said.

- **Delville Wood Memorial Replica:**

- ✓ It is a war memorial. Containing in the foundation the names of those that died in the battle ad Delville Wood.
- ✓ Statue on top of structure: **Caster and Pollux** next to a horse.
 - ☞ They are Greek twins, sons of Zeus – Dioscorea.
 - ☞ Castor is the tamer of horses and Pollux (or Poludeuces) the fist fighter.
 - ☞ They served as protectors of seamen.
 - ☞ They alternatively spend one day in the underworld and one day at Olympus, since castor died in a battle and Zeus granted them the privilege of being together eternally.
 - ☞ They were very popular as helpers in emergencies.
 - ☞ They are usually depicted as riding on horses and let their horses drink at the Juturna Fountain on the Forum Romanum, where their temple, with three pillars and a crown, is still standing.
 - ☞ In the Hellenistic age, they were equaled with the astrological signs of Twins or Gemini.
 - ☞ They were the patrons of youth and resided over military exercises and sporting activities.
- ✓ For corners of memorial is **phoenix birds** rising from the ashes (Adaptive Deception).
 - ☞ **Definition:** Mythical bird of the Arabian desert, said to live for hundreds of years and then burn itself on a funeral pile, rising from its ashes young again to live for another cycle



- **Amphi Theatre at the top:**

- ✓ Domed structure at the top with a statue of **Hermes** on top.
 - ☞ Was sometimes depicted by the moon / phallic pillar.
 - ☞ The Greek god of travelers and roads, tradesmen and trade and the messenger of the gods.
 - ☞ His cult centers were Pheneos or Arcadia.
 - ☞ He was born in Arcadia as the son of Zeus and the nymph Maia.
 - ☞ He is the craftiest, slyest and trickiest of all gods and also loves people the most of all gods, using a rod to stupefy men and deceive them.
 - ☞ He was a god of boundaries, commerce and prosperity, guardian of graves and patron deity of shepherds, heralds and thieves and was a bringer of good fortune.
 - ☞ He wore winged sandals or a winged cap, and held a magical herald's staff consisting of intertwined serpents
 - ☞ Hermes was able to find his way to the underworld and back.
 - ☞ He was often represented in wayside shrines in the form of a phallic pillar of post which was regarded as a funeral monument.
 - ☞ He was the most significant consort of Aphrodite.
 - ☞ His Roman counterpart was Mercury.

- ☞ Some authors argue that Hermes was the son of Ham and as interpreter of the gods, also became the diviner of languages for men (from there the term hermeneutics). In this capacity he acted as the original prophet of idolatry.
- ☞ In Egypt Hermes was called the “numberer” and “Lord of the Moon”.
- **On the Twin towers of the Building:**
 - ✓ On each tower we find a statue of **Atlas**, bearing the globe on his shoulders.
 - ✓ Atlas is symbolized also by the sun. He was the king of Arcadia.
 - ☞ The bearer of the heavens on his shoulders in none other than Mithras supporting the vault of heaven.
 - ☞ Was absorbed into Mithras, who became the state cult of the Roman Empire.
 - ☞ Mithras was a deity of light, identified with the sun, and the focal point of a secret cult, exclusively male.
 - ☞ Mithras was the protector of treaties and in the Veda, his name means “treaty”.
 - ☞ He is associated with the sun god Helios and Sol.
 - ☞ He was the god of state structure and is associated with the supreme being.
 - ☞ He sometimes wore a red garment with a red pointed cap.
 - ☞ His main act was to slay a bull and eat it together with Sol in a ritual act of worship.
 - ☞ Some say he slew himself and gave his body to his devotees to eat. They ate it as bread and wine.
 - ☞ An altar in Rome carried the name Zeus-Helios-Mithras.
 - ☞ In his temple, the Mithraeum, a flame was always kept burning and there was always a water god residing nearby.
 - ☞ He was carried to heaven in a chariot with Hermes-Mercury pointing the way.

1.4 Other Structures:

- **General Jan Smuts Bust**
 - ✓ Not on the main northern axis, but placed on the western side of the Union Buildings.
- **Statue of Hertzog**
 - ✓ Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa twice (1920's).
 - ✓ Was a true Afrikaner Nationalist.
 - ✓ Free Mason
 - ✓ Instituted many segregation policies.
 - ✓ Was a judicial and law man.
- **Police Memorial**
 - ✓ East from the Union building gardens to commemorate those that died as policemen in the service of their country.
 - ✓ It's a concrete structure with name plaques and water surrounding the platform with circular pillar structure.
 - ✓ A yearly ceremony is held to commemorate the dead.
- **Women's Monument (2002)**
 - ✓ Right on the axis, under the walk through of the semi circular connection that joins the left and right flanks of the building.
 - ✓ Was inaugurated on 9 Aug 2000 (women's day) to commemorate the role woman played in the struggle. It commemorates the women's march of 1956 to the Union Buildings to protest against the pass laws of the time.
 - ✓ The monument is a grindstone with a small rock in its hollow, on top of a metal plate laid into the floor.
 - ✓ The following is declared through this monument: That we will crush you like a stone if you come in opposition against us.

1.5 Other Historical aspects:

- Some South African leaders funerals were held here from where the funeral processions

would travel westwards via church street to Hero's Acres Cemetery in Pretoria West.

- This route symbolically depicts the travel of the dead in mythology. Entering in Arcadia going westward, crossing the Styx river (Apies river in this case).
 - **Inauguration of Nelson Mandela**
 - ✓ Gathering of most world leaders up till that time in the history of the country.
 - ✓ First public interfaith messages of all religions, sharing a platform.
 - **Inauguration of Thabo Mbeki**
 - ✓ Presidents Office was in the western wing of the Union building. All indications are that a sangoma resides there as part of the president's office personnel.
 - ✓ The ANC government has made it one of their goals to establish the African Renaissance whereby the continent will return to its roots of ancestral worship. This is nothing else than the same demonic spirits consolidating their powers by means of adaptive deception.
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