

**William Fehr (1892-1968) and his contribution  
to the study of South African history and culture**



**Dissertation presented for the Degree of  
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*Declaration*

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to establish which determining influences in the evolution of the valuable Africana collection in Castle Good Hope and *Rust-en-Vreugd* motivated the German Cape-born merchant William Fehr to build up his best-known achievement. The finding of this study is that Fehr was not lead by theories of art or Africana, but that his Collection carries a far more individual and personal character. The study is therefore basically biographical and shows the close relationship between Fehr's personal experience and views, and the values he tries to depict. This is traced, for example, in the life of William Fehr as a child and young man in Burgersdorp, Germany and London. It was found that contact with and appreciation of South African artwork, as with that of Europe, fascinated him. He was interested in all aspects of South Africa's peoples and cultures, developing thus a particular expertise. The Collection is a mirror of South African culture and history, offering a cultural meeting-place to all the land's inhabitants.

Fehr wished thereby to improve the quality of life by focussing on the shared heritage, presenting a view of culture which embraced the complexities and rewards of commerce, social endeavour and the family. He did not build up the Collection through motives of financial gain, personal fame or political favour. For him, rather, it was a matter of personal contact with the land and its people. Also included are wildlife and the whole environment, not merely as static facts but as bridges between the past and the present. The William Fehr Collection was recently proclaimed a National Treasure.

This view of culture and history is also to be found in Fehr's numerous activities in support of heritage conservation. He had been a moving force behind the preservation of the Old Malay Quarter in Cape Town. Fehr also translated from the German Ludwig Alberti's description of the Xhosa around 1800. William Fehr was given awards by academic bodies and historical organizations in recognition of his far-sighted appreciation of conservation.

This study also demonstrates how Fehr's personal ideals came to be reflected in his Collection, which is in essence autobiographical.

## OPSOMMING

Die doel met hierdie studie is om vas te stel wat die bepalende invloed in die ontwikkeling van die kosbare Africana-versameling in die Casteel de Goede Hoop and *Rust-en-Vreugd* was wat die Duitse Kaapgebore handelaar William Fehr gemotiveer het om so 'n unieke versameling op te bou. Die bevinding van die studie is dat Fehr hom nie deur teorie oor die kunste en oor Africana laat lei het nie, maar dat die versameling 'n veel meer unieke en persoonlike stempel dra. Daarom is die studie basis biografies en word die noue verband tussen Fehr se persoonlike ervaring en beskouing en die waardes wat hy in die versameling probeer uitbeeld het, aangetoon. So byvoorbeeld word die lewe van William Fehr as kind and jongman in Burgersdorp, Duitsland en Londen nagegaan en word vasgestel dat die kulturele kontak met en verwondering oor die kultuurprodukte van Suid-Afrika, in vergelyking met dié van Europa, hom aangespreek het. Al die mense en al die aspekte van die Suid-Afrikaanse historiese erfenis het hom geïnteresseer en hieroor het hy 'n besondere kundigheid opgebou. Die versameling weerspieël daarom al die mense en kulture van Suid-Afrika se bydrae tot die land se historiese erfenis.

Die Fehr-versameling verteenwoordig 'n visuele uitbeelding van Suid-Afrika as die ontmoetingsplek van baie mense en verskillende kulture. Daardeur wou hy die kwaliteit van lewe vir al die mense verbeter deur die aandag op hulle historiese erfenis te vestig. Dit het by Fehr om die kuns terwille van die geskiedenis gegaan, nie om die kuns terwille van die kuns nie. Daarom bied die versameling sy siening van kulture as die komplekse verweefdheid van ekonomiese aktiwiteite, sosiale bedrywighede en die gesinslewe tot 'n eenheid. Fehr het in die opbou van die versameling nie finansiële bevoordeling, persoonlike roem of politieke gunste nagestreef nie. Die versameling was vir hom 'n persoonlike betrokkenheid by die land en sy mense, nie 'n poging om een of ander standpunt te bevoordeel of te verkondig nie. Daarom verteenwoordig die versameling 'n omsigtig berekende koherensie wat uitdrukking gee aan 'n persoonlike beeld en waardering van die Suid-Afrikaanse verlede wat inklusief en omvattend is. Dit sluit menslike aktiwiteite, die natuurlewe en die omgewing in as besit wat nie tot 'n statiese erfenis behoort nie, maar brê is wat oor tyd en ruimte kommunikasie met die verlede moontlik maak. Daarom is die Fehr-versameling onlangs tot 'n nasionale skat verklaar.

Hierdie siening van kulture en geskiedenis word ook in Fehr se vele ander aktiwiteite in belang van erfenisbewaring weerspieël, wat in hierdie studie belig word. Hy was o.a. een van die bewegende kragte agter die bewaring van die Maleierbuurt en het die vertaling uit die Duits van Ludwig Alberti se beskrywing van die Xhosa uit 1800 moontlik gemaak. Sy vërsiendheid ten opsigte van bewaring het aan hom 'n hele aantal vererings van akademiese instellings en historiese organisasies besorg.

Hierdie studie toon in besonderhede aan hoe William Fehr se persoonlike ideale in sy unieke versameling, wat in wese outobiografies is, ten onder gebring is.

"When the eye or the imagination is struck with any uncommon work, the next transition of an active mind is to the means by which it was performed. Here begins the true use of such contemplation; we enlarge our comprehension by new ideas, and perhaps recover some art lost to mankind, or learn what is less perfectly known in our own country. At least we compare our own with former times, and either rejoice at our improvements, or, what is the first motion toward good, discover our defects."\*

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"I take delight in history, even its most prosaic details, because they become poetical as they recede into the past. The poetry of history lies in the quasi-miraculous fact that once, on this earth, once, on this familiar spot of ground, walked other men and women, as actual as we are to-day, thinking their own thoughts, swayed by their own passions, but now all gone, one generation vanishing after another, gone as we ourselves shall shortly be gone like ghost at cock-crow. This is the most familiar and certain fact about life, but it is also the most poetical[...]\*\*"

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\*Johnson, S., [Imlac in] *The History of Rasselas, King of Abyssinia*, pp. 131-32.

\*\*Trevelyan, G. M., "An Autobiography of an Historian," *An Autobiography and Other Essays*, p. 13.

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Burgersdorp, Cambridge, MA, Cape Town,	Museum. Harvard University Archive. Cape Institute of Architects; Cape Tercentenary Foundation; Dutch Reformed Church Archives; Generalkonsul der Bundesrepublik Deutschland; Jacob Gitlin Library; Southern Flagship Institution (Michaelis Collection; S. A. National Gallery); National Monuments Council; S. A. Association of Arts; National Library [ex South African Library]; Archives Repository; University Libraries.
Düsseldorf, Grahamstown, Hannover, Johannesburg,	Nordrhein-Westfälisches Hauptstaatsarchiv. Cory Library for Historical Research. Niedersächsisches Hauptstaatsarchiv. MuseumAfrica [ex Africana Museum]; Standard Bank of South Africa Archive.
London, Peine, Port Elizabeth, Pretoria,	Southwark Local Studies Library; Tate Gallery. Stadtarchiv. Municipal Library; Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry. National Archives Repository; Northern Flagship Institution (National Cultural History Museum); S. A. National Defence Force, Directorate Documentation Service.
Stellenbosch, Sydney, Tongaat, Wiesbaden,	University Libraries. State Library of New South Wales. The Tongaat-Hulett Group, Ltd., Archive. Evangelische Gesamtgemeinde; Hessisches Hauptstaatsarchiv; Stadtarchiv.

Mr. E. Badenhorst; Mr. S. Bolland; Mr. A. Bothner\*; Dr. F. Bradlow\*; Dr. J. Branford\*; the late Mr. T. V. Bulpin\*; Mr. P. Cheifitz; Mrs. N. Classen\*; Mrs. M. Dix\*; Miss E. Esmonde-White\*; Dr. H. Fransen\*; Mr. L. Gadezweni; Mrs. E. Greshoff; Mrs. N. Haddow; the late Mrs. V. Hiller\*, Miss A. Joubert; Mrs. N. Kingsley\*; Mrs. B. Lindhorst\*; Mr. A. Marais du Toit; Mrs. J. Millar\*; Mr. J. Morris; Mr. O. Purcell\*; Miss M. Rall; Mr. B. Robinson\*; Mr. D. Varley\*; Mr. D. Visser\*.

## b. Abbreviations

ANN/AAN	<i>Africana Notes and News / Africana Aantekeninge en Nuus</i>
AT	<i>Albert Times</i>
BG	<i>Burghersdorp Gazette</i>
CAR	Cape Town Archives Repository
DDS	Defence Documentation Service
DSAB	<i>Dictionary of South African Biography</i>
HMC	Historical Monuments Commission
HUA	Harvard University Archive
Inv.	<i>Inventory of WFCCGH and WFCRV, 1977.</i>
MC	Michaelis Art Collection
NAR	National Archives Repository
NLSA	National Library of South Africa [ex South African Library]
NMCCT	National Monuments Council Cape Town
OP	Oliver Purcell
PWD	Public Works Department
SAAA	South African Association of Arts
SANS	South African National Society
UDF	Union Defence Force
UCTMS	University of Cape Town, Rare Books and Manuscripts
VE	Vivienne Elzinga
VOC	<i>Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie</i> [United Netherlands East-India Co.]
VRF	Van Riebeeck Festival, 1952
VRFHE	<i>Van Riebeeck Festival Historical Exhibition Catalogue</i>
WFCCGH	William Fehr Collection at Castle Good Hope
WFCRV	William Fehr Collection at "Rust-en-Vreugd"
WFLG	William Fehr Library Gift

### c. Foreword

William Fehr was born on 17 April 1892 at Burgersdorp<sup>1</sup> on the rugged north-east frontier of the Cape Colony. At the time of his death seventy-six years later, his name, if little else, was known across the land, and beyond, due largely to his historic Collection of artwork housed in two national monuments at Cape Town. Though there have been institutions displaying Africana, in addition to private collections, none but Fehr's Collection presented so extensive, coherent and engaging an artistic panorama of the South African past. Indeed, the Collection continues to offer important insights for both public and specialist appreciation as a mirror of this region's earlier centuries. This has recently been acknowledged when the Collection was proclaimed a National Treasure.

This investigation originated in the belief that The William Fehr Collection had been the work of a cultivated and sympathetic mind well informed of history and art. Since Fehr himself had remained a distant and little-known figure, save for a few bare facts, close study of original material was required. In December 1947, Fehr had drafted a letter (Appendix B.) containing basic biographical material which remained nearly the sole source of the public's knowledge of him for over half-a-century. During evolution of this research an empirical method was followed, one more attuned to the subject's own world view. Deeper understanding of Fehr through the written record was related to oral recollections by those who had known him. Thus grew a network of evidence upon which

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<sup>1</sup>The old form Burghersdorp is used below where appropriate.

Fehr's cultural contributions could be assessed in terms of his own life, a process not undertaken before.

Concerning the present text, abbreviations preceding references to sources indicate the institutional or individual owners or custodians of the pertinent documents. Particular objects may bear numerical references to the *Van Riebeeck Festival Historical Exhibition Catalogue* [VRFHE] of 1952, and / or to the *Inventory (Inv.)* of 1977, and other sources specified in the text. Free translations from the German were made by the author.

## I. Patrimony.

At about the time of William Fehr's birth at Burgersdorp, there had been published at the Cape a few valuable articles on the town, written by a medical practitioner and well-known chronicler there. The name of Dr. Daniel Rossouw Kannemeyer figured large in the history, growth and success of Burgersdorp, his ancestral roots having taken hold there in about 1850. The town's newspapers contained an indelible record of the Kannemeyer family's highly sociable talents in music, drama, literature, the law, natural science and a humanistic outlook. His point of departure was an old almond tree, planted years before, growing on the austere heights of the Karroo. The scene was typical of the inner Colony in that nothing could be drawn from it without great effort and perseverance. The almond came from afar, planted with many others with a hopeful eye to the future. One tree had survived and became part of the town. Those with a humanist's education, like Dr. Kannemeyer, might recall Phyllis of Greek myth, changed into an almond tree in the heart-break of her lover's absence. Many tears were shed at Burgersdorp too, and like the almond, it was early to blossom in that arid region. The almond and the town offered a promise of comfort in a harsh land. That tree was, in fact,

"...the sole surviving local organic link which connects the rapidly fading past with the present, -- a past rapidly fading into oblivion and with it many facts worth remembering."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>NLSA. Kannemeyer, D., "The Old Almond Tree," [pt. 1] *The Cape Illustrated Magazine*, September 1893, Vol. IV, No. 1, p. 1. Vide Kannemeyer's "A walk around Burghersdorp," *The Cape Illustrated Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. 4, pp. 97-105; also *DSAB*, Vol. II, pp. 356-58; also *ANN / AAN [WFLG]*, Vol. 3, No. 2, March 1946, pp. 64-65.

Dr. Kannemeyer's own studies and travels abroad confirmed that only by comparing the past with the present can a valuable picture be built up, and thereby "realize the gap separating then and now."<sup>2</sup> Such a view would in the future also inform all of William Fehr's many associations with cultural and historical matters.

As a frontier town it was probably only the inhabitants who could love it. Kannemeyer found Burgersdorp uninspiring in that it had "...the ugliest and most insignificant houses of any colonial village I know."<sup>3</sup> Honesty and good humour were neighbours on the frontier, with a wealth of knowledge and experience residing behind plain façades built by those who had gone before.

The initiator of the village, or rather the site, was one Gert Buitendag. His homestead stood in the southern part of the small valley. The rude mud structure had become in turn the Dutch Reformed church, a school, then a smithy, before disappearing. It was probably old Gert himself who had planted those almond trees. Among the seven remaining inhabitants of that time, the oldest was Hans Buitendag, whom Kannemeyer recorded as being 86, and who had resided there since 1822. Gert was one of five *voortrekkers* who had settled in the area, while constantly on the watch for:

"...numerous hordes of Bushmen, waging implacable and unceasing warfare against the hated white encroachers."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup>*ibid.* p. 2.

Game of all sorts, a common resource, had flourished on that eastern edge of the vast and inhospitable Karroo. Life was primitive and severe, though lightened with simple pleasures. The nearest centre of government was Graaff-Reinet, and beyond that to the West the almost legendary Cape Town. *Trekboeren* would ordinarily make an annual expedition to such a distant centre for purposes of barter, marriage, baptism or confirmation. A life back then, or in the later Burgersdorp of the 1890's, was measured out in the dusty tread of oxen or one's own walking pace. Kannemeyer believed that:

"...in the life of Hans Buitendag is to be found, in a smaller compass, still a perfect epitome of the country's whole progress....<sup>5</sup>

It was recorded that several well-informed inhabitants of Burgersdorp in the 1890's had experienced and encouraged a better educated and more fruitful way of life. Hans Buitendag had witnessed the early portion of that development. Yet he had also been an active participant. His father Gert had remembered the apparently miserly regulations of the VOC, and had reacted by emigrating into the wilderness with his family and their unshakable Calvinist faith. The population of the area included Fingoes and Tembus, speaking Xhosa and variants, while acquiring some Dutch through contact with the *trekkers*. Gert's son Hans fought the Fetcani with the British and Xhosas, and subsequently the Xhosas themselves in the Eighth Frontier War (1851-1852).<sup>6</sup> Hans had seen the Bushmen [San] and Hottentots [Khoi] of the region cross the line into near extinction, while

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<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

the "...more robust Kaffir<sup>7</sup> labourer turns his hand to any occupation that offers...",<sup>8</sup> that having been an optimistic notion of co-operation which denoted growth and mutual benefit, "...solving our great difficulty, the native question,"<sup>9</sup> wrote Dr. Kannemeyer.

By 1891 the population of Burgersdorp and District had increased to 8,247 souls since the census taken in 1875. The total population, including coloured, was 16,671.<sup>10</sup> Burgersdorp grew, a plain but world-wise town, full of her own historical presence, in that year of her Monument to the Dutch Language, 1893, unveiled on 18 January in the presence of Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr. The town had been an important centre of the Afrikaner Bond.

"'Our Language' was precious to us. We had struggled for it; we had won victories for it. We had assembled to do it honour."<sup>11</sup>

Those words reflected cherished abstract values, rather than what was considered to be the overt materialism of the British. Burgersdorp was proud of her current importance. From humble and earnest beginnings, she looked to a brighter future, and always for her citizens "a deep religious sense underlay and

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<sup>7</sup>"Kaffir." A word of Arabic origin *kafir* meaning 'infidel,' i.e. non-Muslim; of inhabitants of Eastern Africa, ultimately of the Nguni-speaking or Bantu peoples of Southern Africa, as applied, for example, in George French Angas' *The Kaffirs Illustrated* (1849) to the Nation of the AmaZulu, the AmaMpondo and the AmaXhosa.

<sup>8</sup>*ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>9</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>10</sup>NLSA. BG 21 May 1891, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup>Hofmeyr, J. H., & F. W. Reitz, *The Life of Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr*, p. 447.

determined their motives and actions."<sup>12</sup>

As to a better standard of living, Kannemeyer remembered that "forty years ago, and for some time after, Burgersdorp was a shop-keeper's Paradise."<sup>13</sup> An ideal seemed to have been achieved, "since there was no haggling about prices -- or watching the scales...." It was life that revolved around "....the simple wants of a primitive arcadian household...."<sup>14</sup>

Such had been the birthplace of William Fehr, embracing the memory of a rural Paradise, yet to be lost in the smoke of war. Burgersdorp and the Colony would change substantially, allowing old inhabitants to feel a deep nostalgia. It was upon such scenes as experienced by Kannemeyer, Froude and many others of earlier generations that William Fehr would build his collection, drawing on traditions of Europe, Asia and Africa, while involving himself wholeheartedly in gathering and conserving an artistic image of historic South Africa.

Burgersdorp had been founded in 1846. The stream of the Stormberg Spruit lay in a fertile valley, some 4,500 feet above sea-level, bound on the east and west by craggy hills. The area bore the name of a local inhabitant and brigand one Jan Storm. There too could be found vagabonds and renegades living outside the law's reach, as well as ex-soldiers, traders, and cattle farmers. Bold *trekkers* had been moving up from the South for decades. Since the time of Shaka's wars,

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<sup>12</sup>NLSA. Kannemeyer, D., "The Old Almond Tree" [pt. 2], *The Cape Illustrated Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. 2, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>14</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*



numbers of displaced inhabitants also sought refuge, moving away from Natal and Basutoland toward that same, rugged north-east edge of the Cape. Game in the area was rich, but there also persisted the dangers of predatory animals. Such great movements of man and nature formed a major theme of William Fehr's understanding of history.

The Eastern Cape borderlands had been vexatious in turn for the VOC in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, briefly as well for the succeeding Batavian Republic and, most tellingly, for the British. Natural expansion of the Cape along its northern and eastern frontiers demanded close attention and even intervention on the part of successive governments.

As the population of the north-east region grew, its conscientious Christian inhabitants felt a need to establish their own church. They set about the process in a business-like manner, collecting an ample sum both for the purchase of land from Gert Buitendag and construction of the building. The good *burghers* had originally wished to name the place after the current Governor of Cape Colony, Sir Peregrine Maitland, who declined since the site was yet beyond the frontier of the Colony and intruded into treaty areas. The *burghers* of the infant town then, in family spirit, named it after themselves. Soon the landscape and village of Burgersdorp would be sketched and painted in oils by the young itinerant English artist Thomas Baines. (*Vide opposite, The new village of Burgher's Dorp on the Storm Berg Spruits River [sic], signed and dated Graham's Town, 7 August 1848, oil on paper laid down on canvas, 46 cm. X 65 cm. Reproduced with kind permission of Mr. R. Levitt, England.*) Artwork such as Baines's painting would provide William Fehr with eye-witness pictorial accounts of people, places

and things which had shaped his own life as well as the land and people of which he would be such an active part. His life's quest would be for art for history's sake.

Like some other frontier towns, that one had piquant historic tales for its *burghers* to relate to their successors. A few bordered on the legendary, yet the common message was one of tenacity, uncomplicated justice and fundamental religious faith. Those sturdy Calvinists, who read their Bible literally, found dissent in their midst and within a short time another group, *De Nederduitsche Hervormde Kerk*, under Rev. Dirk Postma, had established themselves at Burgersdorp, in rivalry with an already substantial following of the Dutch Reformed Church. A theological school was established at the town for the purpose of training new clergymen. Anglicans, Wesleyans, Catholics and numbers of Jews eventually made their appearance there. Unfortunately, a disastrous fire in 1952 consumed Burgersdorp's town hall and most civic records. The town's cemetery remained a useful demographic and social record, especially of its relatively substantial commercial middle-class. Not only did William Fehr become a merchant with international connections, but he also would grasp commerce as the key to his view of culture and history through generations of family involvement.

Burgersdorp's expanding business concerns had secured it as the centre of the Albert District, an increasingly significant pastoral and agricultural region. It attracted travellers and settlers, while the surrounding areas to the east and the north were increasingly in flux. Trekkers and a few traders had already established themselves in Natal, though proclaimed a British Crown Colony in 1843. That step had been taken the better to prevent a rival *Boer* state being

established, not disregarding the potential of a serviceable seaport for commercial speculation. The danger from cattle raids by Basuto tribesmen over the Cape and Orange Free State frontiers worsened, and an increasing number of farmers were murdered. The land between the Orange and Vaal Rivers had been annexed both to pacify the *Boer* population, and to satisfy British philanthropists and Missionary Societies that some measure of protection would be provided for the local Black African population. The Home Government had tried to limit heavy expenses incurred during the Frontier Wars. Such a step had been the Sand River Convention of 1852, which allowed *Boers* across the Vaal to look after their own destiny, so long as they did not re-establish slavery, prohibited throughout the Empire some fifteen years before. Nearer to Cape Colony, the area between the Vaal and Orange Rivers was given over to self-government by the Bloemfontein Convention of 1854. The settlers in the area were released from British sovereignty, though the problematic Basutoland border remained unresolved. The Home Government made plain its position, when it referred to the beleaguered Cape frontier, in that Britain had no interest in Southern Africa but for its strategic Indian Ocean naval station at the Cape.<sup>15</sup>

From 1865 the Orange Free State and the Basutos were again in conflict and, at King Moshoeshoe's request, Britain intervened. To promote a tenuous peace between parties, the Treaty of 1852 was renewed by Britain in 1869 at Aliwal North, just south-west of which lay prospering Burgersdorp. The *Boers* were resentful of the British, but they acquiesced. In a short time the older ways of Briton and *Boer* would be contemplated with some nostalgia and heartache,

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<sup>15</sup>Despatch from Lord Grey to the Hon. G. Cathcart, 2 February 1852, in Bell, K. N. & Morrell, W. P., *Selected Documents on British Colonial Policy, 1830-1860*, p. 529.

while Froude, who had visited the region in 1874, described the cause of problems as being diamonds and diggers.

"There was a genuine fear that the Boers would be unable to control the flock of vultures [...] also that the finest diamond mine in the world ought not to be lost to the British Empire."<sup>16</sup>

Aggression toward the local Griquas followed, Lord Kimberley's name was given to the new settlement, the Boers yielded and:

"...from that day no Boer in South Africa has been able to trust English promises."<sup>17</sup>

The divisions between Boer and Briton had deepened there, in an atmosphere of commerce inhibited and turned sour. What would become Fehr's largely optimistic view of history recalled the bitter divisions entrenched during the Anglo-Boer War, a time at which he accompanied his family to Germany. The British contribution to history and culture at the Cape and beyond would provide Fehr with a broader basis for his later gathering of pictorial Africana highlighting the English portion of his heritage acquired through his mother.

Various amenities had appeared at Burgersdorp along with the establishment of the Albert Academy (1865), a primary and later high school for those who wished their children to have a good educational foundation. A man born at the town, who would later write about it, had left in 1876 to continue technical studies in Germany. The Burgersdorp he came to describe was still in its formative years. The Albert Academy had been lifted beyond the standard curriculum by its

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<sup>16</sup>Froude, A. J., *Oceana, or England and her Colonies*, p. 45.

<sup>17</sup>*ibid.*

patrons. The natural sciences were well represented, as were the humanities, all in the hands of staff trained in the Classics.<sup>18</sup> Educational and cultural benefits like those might suggest general enlightenment at Burgersdorp, but such was not the case.

“The rotation of the earth and other astronomical facts and theories were regarded by the Boers as rank heresy.”<sup>19</sup>

The principal newspapers of the region were *The Burghersdorp Gazette* in English and Dutch, dating from 1860 and, from 1894, re-established as the *Albert Times*, whose Dutch counterpart was *De Albert Gazette*. Those papers regularly reported in both languages on the commercial and agricultural status of the region. They carried advertisements of farmers and local merchants along with some important news from the capital of the Cape Colony, as well as abroad. Thus local and regional information was regularly supplemented with notices of the Empire, Europe, Asia and even the United States of America, limited only by the speed of communication over land and sea.

Communication was of growing concern since the population of Burgersdorp had embraced numbers of businessmen not only from Britain, but also continental Europe. The Albert Bank at the town had been established in 1861, and was absorbed by the Standard Bank as its Burgersdorp branch at the beginning of 1874. With greater investment, productivity and banking in the region, it became increasingly desirable to join a coastal shipping centre to several new inland

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<sup>18</sup>WFLG. Goldmann, R., *A South African Remembers*, Cape Town, n.d. [ca. 1955].

<sup>19</sup>Tennant, F. R., *Burghersdorp 50 Years Ago*, p. 13.

depots and markets. East London, via Queenstown, was well-placed with facilities along the Buffalo River. Port Elizabeth, further west, was a major competitor, even against Cape Town with its new harbour. The two independent Boer Republics intended to establish essential maritime connections at the Bay of Natal and Delagoa Bay in Mozambique. As coal supplies for steam power in the Albert District became imperative, they were sought, found and developed within the north-eastern Cape. Though the mineral was sometimes of low quality, it still answered the need for fuel. The Stormberg region in the south of the Albert District, near the new town of Molteno, was a good source of coal until better quality seams were later opened in Natal and the Transvaal. By 1880 a seam was being worked on a farm, some four miles south of Molteno, called Cyfergat (also Cyphergat), a reference to a bubbling stream there. Professional men of Burgersdorp were keen to invest, since competition in the District for a proposed railway branch was being actively pursued by a rival community at Dordrecht.<sup>20</sup> In 1881 the prospectus of the new Cyfergat Coal Mining Co., Ltd., was published in the *Burghersdorp Gazette*. Under the pretext of being short-staffed at the paper, an entire page and more was given over to advertising the prospectus, for, in fact, several weekly editions. All news items were put aside, in the light of that boost for commerce, claiming that Cyfergat coal improved in quality as the seam was opened further. The high cost of transporting coal by ox-wagon was balanced by the almost immediate sale of the mineral. Cyfergat coal was already proven suitable for blacksmiths, while it was also being promoted for steam power, domestic use and even suggested for the production of gas.<sup>21</sup> It

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<sup>20</sup>NLSA. BG, 2 January 1880, p.2.

<sup>21</sup>NLSA. BG, 16 December 1881, p.2.

was implied that such tremendous development could free the Colony from English imports of the mineral.<sup>22</sup> In many ways the promise of a bright future lay open for Burgersdorp. After much debate and delay, the railway through the town from the south was opened in 1885, running along the east-side of the valley. Thus an essential link was established between the sea and the interior.

A growing sense of importance was being felt by the people of Burgersdorp, though the times were not without their troubles. British interference in the Diamond Fields, the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, the far off spectre of a united Germany and the rush to the Transvaal gold mines in 1886 were all part of the weight on Governor Sir Hercules Robinson's shoulders when, in 1887, he signed British naturalization papers for one Carl Adolf Fehr of Wiesbaden and who was already a Burgersdorp resident. Carl Fehr had applied for naturalisation to the Colonial Secretary of the Cape of Good Hope, 18 October 1887 at Burgersdorp. He had been described as a merchant, resident in the Colony for the previous 3½ years, and that he intended to reside in the Cape. The naturalisation was approved on 10 November 1887.<sup>23</sup>

With regard to the Cape Colony, its economic potential had been well known in Britain. Near the close of the 18th century, John Barrow published an extensive report on the inhabitants, status and general value of the Cape as an imperial depot for worldwide communication and commerce.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>23</sup>VE. Naturalization document.

<sup>24</sup>WFLG. Barrow, J., *An Account of Travels into the Interior of Southern Africa in the Years 1797 and 1798...*, vol. 2, p. 242.

During and after the Napoleonic wars, when Britain came to occupy the Cape for a second time (from 1815 as a Colony), many Britons had sailed abroad to emigrate from a severely depressed economy. Around 1820 waves of those surplus British subjects had swelled the population along the Cape's eastern frontier, and they often faced uncertainties with fortitude. Those settlers in turn moved apace with many *trekkers*, who had chosen to leave the British Cape far behind. Relations between English and Dutch speakers remained intact, at least until the unearthing, further north, of diamonds and gold. Those fortuitous discoveries helped an impoverished agrarian and pastoral society to develop a more commercial and industrial economy, while the rush to capitalise mineral resources drew the region into world prominence.

As a direct result of the Crimean War, many Germans had been awarded land grants at the Cape in acknowledgment of assistance to Britain during that conflict with Russia. Thus another fruitful bond was forged between Southern Africa and the German lands, a relationship which extended back into the early Company Period. Increased and fruitful commerce was a natural outcome, and it was not exceptional that a young man like Carl Fehr, descended of a merchant family, should begin to seek his destiny at the Cape.

Carl Adolf Fehr had been born at Wiesbaden on 18 January 1859. His parents were the merchant Philipp Fehr (b. 1814), of Peine near Hannover, then residing at Wiesbaden, and Bertha (*née* Pollitz) (b. 1819) of Düsseldorf. They were married on 23 November 1843 at Geisenheim, near Wiesbaden, where Bertha had been living. They had applied to the regional authorities in that year so as

to take up residence at Wiesbaden.<sup>25</sup> Both he and his wife were Jewish, as had been their parents. Carl Fehr was the last of six children born to Philipp and Bertha. They were 1. Emma (b. 1844), 2. Helene (b. 1846, d. 1847), 3. Auguste (b. 1848), 4. Alfred Lambert (b. 1851, d. 1856) and 5. Georg (b. 1856, d. 1863). Those persons of Jewish ancestry were recorded in the residents' register kept by the Lutheran Church at Wiesbaden between 1813-1874. Dates outside that period were no longer available.<sup>26</sup> Philipp's father had been the merchant Lemmel Fehr, married to Edel *née* Wallberg. They had resided at Peine near Hannover. Records reflected a waning use of Yiddish names among more prosperous members of the Jewish community. Bertha's mother and father, residents of Düsseldorf, were the merchant Heinrich Pollitz and Johannette (*née* Schlesinger).<sup>27</sup> The surviving documents consulted recorded those persons as *Schutzjuden* ["Court Jews"], having been descended of affluent circumstances and socially had been well regarded. Such valued traits could and did promote greater privileges being granted by civic authority. At Wiesbaden Philipp Fehr had been a successful merchant of fashionable clothing. He was also a member of important municipal councils in Wiesbaden, as the inclusion of Jews was felt to have been an integral part of the current "Geist des Fortschritts" [spirit of progress]. Though Philipp Fehr, haberdasher, and other Jews had been nominated for the town council election of 1858, they were unsuccessful. The

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<sup>25</sup>Zivilstandsregistern Eintrag Nr. 105/1843, Evangelische Gesamtgemeinde Wiesbaden.

<sup>26</sup>Evangelische Gesamtgemeinde Wiesbaden, Eintrag Nr. 395/1844; 195/1846; 122/1848; 220/1851; 358/1856; 18/1859. "Es handelt sich hier um Personen jüdischer Abstammung, die nur in der Zeit als die Kirchen Standesamtsfunktion hatten (1813-1874) in unseren Zivilstandsregistern eingetragen wurden. Alle Daten über diesen Zeitpunkt hinaus sind hier nicht mehr verfügbar." Letter from Evangelische Gesamtgemeinde Wiesbaden to author, 23 February 1999.

<sup>27</sup>*ibid.*

new members of the Freemason's Lodge *Plato*, between 1858 and 1866 and residing in Wiesbaden, had included Philipp Fehr since 1858,<sup>28</sup> and he was recorded among the *Wiesbadener Gemeinderat* in 1871. While being among the Jews he was not entered into the citizens' register, but in order to become a councillor it was necessary to be registered. Philipp Fehr had also been a citizen member of the *Casino-Gesellschaft* in the lists of 1867 and 1872.

The Napoleonic wars had left some German states, particularly along the Rhine, in economic depression. Only from the 1830's did prosperity begin to return along with the establishment of smaller industries. With greater mobility within the working and middle classes, compliance with authority was increasingly tempered by a sense of greater individuality. The 1834 *Zollverein* [Customs Union] did much to stimulate commerce among German lands, though industrialization increasingly threatened the livelihoods of traditional craftsmen. The politicized *bourgeoisie* also played their part in the establishment of constitutional government in reaction to princely autocracy. That involved to an extent numbers of those who were among the *Schutzjuden*.

Such attempts at reform had largely coincided with the *Biedermeier* era, a cultural epoch inseparable from realism in art and considered to be an aspect of

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<sup>28</sup>Weichel, T., *Die Bürger von Wiesbaden, von der Landstadt zur "Weltkurstadt" 1780-1914*, München, 1997. "Bei der Gemeinderatswahl 1858 waren die zur Wahl aufgestellten Juden, der Modewarenhändler Philipp Fehr, der Weinhändler Rosenstein and der Rauchwarenhändler Bär, aber gescheitert." n. 29, p.247; Philipp Fehr: "Status F[remde]/B[ürger]/J[ude] Beruf Kaufmann Steuer 1864 2.500." p. 252; "für den Juden Fehr findet sich kein Eintrag im Bürgerbuch, er muß aber als Gemeinderat im Bürgerrecht stehen." n. 1, p. 293. Philipp Fehr and the *Casino-Gesellschaft* in the lists of 1867 and 1872: pp. 311 & 313.

Romanticism. In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the culture of *Biedermeier* would come to be derided as being drab and gauche. The name itself was used to disparage the artistic style apparent in German lands during the period which followed the Napoleonic wars. In essence *Biedermeier* had been a later flowering of Neo-Classicism, shifted from aristocratic idealism to what was seen as a more domestic art of simplicity, truth and objectivity. Unlike its predecessors it appeared neither grand nor heroic, but became more associated with post-war economic depression. The call for German union and the emphasis placed on home, family and the countryside grew as a guiding ethos. It would remain for those entering the 20<sup>th</sup> century, like William Fehr, to review the Romantic legacy of *Biedermeier* and its parallels in their own contemporary disillusion.

The *Biedermeier* and Romanticism at large came to be viewed as a Golden Age by those of a later generation who were left full of doubt by oppressive industrialization and the vain promise of science. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, advances in technology had enhanced the human condition, yet insecurity grew for the Heirs of Progress.

“ It is only a question of time till the ruin which has overtaken them will have become a commonplace in Western knowledge.”<sup>29</sup>

Often the educated *bourgeois* found little comfort through formal religion. Humanity might yet be moral and good, while for some individuals art and even beauty were being supplanted by unfeeling science. Others could, in the face of orthodoxy, derive strength from cultural aspirations.

“It is in the growth of the doctrine and theory of culture in the modern world rather than in any mere signs of reviving activity in religious bodies

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<sup>29</sup>Kidd, B., *Principles of Western Civilisation*, p. 12.

that we see the true revival of religion and the true antidote of secularity."<sup>30</sup>

From 1880, Carl Fehr had been away from Germany during its era of unification, economic growth, the Hohenzollern Monarchy, and the unresolved "Jewish question." His son William Fehr was one of a succeeding generation who reflected rather on their grandparents' era as still possessed of values worth preserving, seemingly less marred by the worldliness of his father's generation. William Fehr's almost religious fidelity to cultural matters would become evident in his maturity.

In the earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century, the realistic visual art of *Biedermeier* had benefited practically from the growth of science and industry. Steam power enabled book publishers to produce more and better quality work, often displaying copious wood-engravings, lithography and experimental forms of illustration. Artists and craftsmen of very high standard were employed in embellishing the printed word. Steam also helped to propel some of those artists to the ends of the earth in pursuit of new and exotic people, places and things. Their encounters and resulting works maintained a well-established class of readers who had been romantic and encyclopædic in their curiosity, yet were bound by family or fate to their own houses. Like those who had gone before them, 19th-century travellers and naturalists recorded what they saw realistically, presenting what they had encountered as witnesses or participants. As with artists to be prized by William Fehr like William Hodges and the Daniells, other travellers also gathered stocks of sketches, to be worked up, as the need required, in water-colour, oil

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<sup>30</sup>VE. Seeley, J. R., *Natural Religion*, p. 168, quoted in Cowell, F. R., *Culture in Private and Public Life*, p. 253.

and other media. Some of that artwork would be destined for reproduction in printers' shops, to await colour tinting by many hands. In time further mechanised techniques of colour printing would spread artistic achievement and historical records further afield.

As a guiding principle for artist-travellers, and subsequently Fehr's appreciation of art for history's sake, the notion of *art pour l'art* had little place. It would be of secondary value to Fehr if even a few of those wandering and often gifted amateur practitioners had acquired the more polished style of contemporary professional *salonistes*.

With the growth of middle-class commerce, which filled a gap left by the great feudal and monopolistic trading companies, like the VOC and the East India Company, the artist could set off as an individual. The time had arrived when such craftsmen neither needed nor, at times, were able to find princely or mercantile patronage. Artists with superior skills like Hodges had blended topographical accuracy with an elegant vision of actuality in the service of commercial expansion. Similarly the Daniells' images of India and Africa would be acquired later by a growing body of connoisseurs. Yet for Fehr it was the artist of lesser achievement, absorbed by the craft, who captured so well the fleeting moment of what seemed to be an earthly paradise secured by art for the first and perhaps last time. That simple, nostalgic and sometimes naïve grasp of life was a distinction of the era, whether applied abroad or at home, in the spirit of romance and adventure, given particular character and individuality through what would become William Fehr's commercial perspective of the individual in society.

In Germany the *Biedermeier* had already become part of the receding past, displaced by the aggressive new Reich of 1871, when Carl Fehr had studied at the Grossherzoglichen Realschule at Mainz, graduating in 1876. Entries in a bound note-book by school friends, including passages from the ancient classics as well as more recent German, French and English writers, all pointed to a polyglot, cultivated middle-class youth.<sup>31</sup> A slip of paper had survived from those years which marked the date of Fehr's entry into commerce.<sup>32</sup> On the *recto* was portion of a business memorandum of Moritz Ehrenfeld, Frankfurt a. M., with the date 6 October 1879. Fehr had written on the *verso*, in German and English, "*Papier in welchem mein erstes Gehalt war. 75 Mark pro Monat mit welchem ich auch auskam mit allem.* [The paper wrapper of my first wages: 75 Marks per month by which I successfully supported myself.] *Carl Adolf Fehr. Paper of my first salary after 3 years['] apprenticeship.*"

The site of Wiesbaden had been inhabited since antiquity, but its sudden advancement as a spa and cultural centre, and its favourable position in the Rhineland, gave it a particular stature among German nobility and *bourgeoisie*. Wiesbaden had printed its first newspaper in 1770 and in the next year came its initial casino. In 1800 there were 2239 inhabitants, while the town itself boasted of its hospital, a new Town Hall and 23 private bath-houses. Not deterred by the revolutions of 1848, Wiesbaden's 14,000 residents enjoyed 34,300 guests, a relationship which helped the town in 1852 to earn the title of *Weltkurstadt* [Spa to the World]. In 1859 Carl Fehr was born at cultivated Wiesbaden. In 1866

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<sup>31</sup>VE. MSS in a contemporary souvenir album.

<sup>32</sup>VE. MS.

Prussia annexed the Duchy of Nassau and in 1873 the spa itself came under the control of the local government. In the following year Bismarck had gambling at the spa forbidden and late in 1880, Carl Adolf Fehr, then 21, left to pursue a merchant's life at the Cape.

Fehr landed at Cape Town aboard the *Dunrobin Castle* on 6 November 1880, and connections were established around that time with Blaine and Co. of Port Elizabeth, with whom Fehr would later be commercially associated. He also travelled in the pre-railroad days of horse and oxen to Graaff-Reinet and the Orange Free State.<sup>33</sup>

In 1884 Fehr had settled at Burgersdorp, a town not yet forty years old yet busy developing a nearby coal mine to fuel the rapidly approaching railway line. The Standard Bank's Burgersdorp branch first recorded Fehr in 1885, when he had a credit balance of £52:15:2 in his current account and was described as being a clerk.<sup>34</sup>

The many and varied businesses of Burgersdorp in the 1880's had been owned or run by a patriarchy of professionals. Often those with legal, medical, commercial and other special training advertised regularly in the *Burghersdorp Gazette*. Several had more than one string to their bow. They were auctioneers, general dealers, agents, surveyors as well as being gifted amateur players, musicians and natural scientists. With the development of the Cyphergat Coal

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<sup>33</sup>VE. Unidentified [Cape Times?] undated [late Feb. 1944] newspaper cutting; also draft of letter from William Fehr to Africana Museum, December 1947.

<sup>34</sup>Letter from Standard Bank Archives, Johannesburg, to author, 9 March 1999.

Mine and the Border Railway Line, many of the same persons became shareholders and members of the respective Boards. A few also became Commissioners of the town, and thus Burgersdorp patricians. They were of importance to the active life of the Musical Societies<sup>35</sup>, the Library, Drama and other cultural organisations, and were always aware of the current status and potential growth of Burgersdorp. Already before Carl Fehr had taken up residence in the town it had been appreciated as no mere frontier outpost, since many of the townsmen were well educated and concerned with the cultural improvement of the community.<sup>36</sup>

Some of the Black African population of the district had also received attention in terms of education, health and cultural enrichment since missionaries had been active there, though life there generally demanded a resilient body and character. By the end of the century work at the mines in the North had made regular passage through Burgersdorp a necessity for labourers coming up from their homes in the South. They returned with often serious illnesses, in part a legacy of *Uitlanders* who had originally flocked to the gold fields. Smallpox had begun to haunt the Albert district, along with syphilis, leprosy, cholera, typhus and malaria, while crime of all degrees was confronted throughout the area, all making heavy demands on the Resident Magistrate and the Town Council of which Carl Fehr had become a member.

Some of Fehr's social and material successes were chronicled in the *Burghersdorp*

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<sup>35</sup>Tennent, F. R., *Burghersdorp 50 Years Ago*, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup>WFLG. Goldmann, R., *A South African Remembers*, p. 4.

*Gazette*. During the latter 1880's he had been an employee or even partner of one of the town's merchants, Messrs. Cash & Co. being the most likely. It was reported that Fehr was an efficient stage manager for the Dramatic Society's reading of *Macbeth*.<sup>37</sup> He also appeared as an actor, announced in a hand-bill for a performance of "The Chimney Corner," in December 1889, while a performance of Gilbert & Sullivan's *Trial by Jury* had also involved Fehr.<sup>38</sup> He took to the boards as a solo singer in musical events of the town, though his voice was not as polished as that of others.<sup>39</sup>

In mid-1890 appeared the first advertisement of Messrs. Fehr & Co., evidently having taken over from the firm of C. A. Assmuth & Co.<sup>40</sup> Fehr & Co. was run in partnership with the highly respectable firm of Blaine & Co. of Port Elizabeth, whereby Fehr was the franchise manager at Burgersdorp, trading under his own name. Early notices indicated that there was no connection to Cash & Co., suggesting that there had earlier been a link. Some six months later, probably after Assmuth's own franchise had concluded, Fehr also took over agency of the Castle Steamship Line, in competition with John Blake, agent for the Union Line.<sup>41</sup>

In acknowledging civic duty, Carl Fehr at that time had also become one of the

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<sup>37</sup>NLSA. BG, 15 August 1889, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup>NLSA. BG, 12 December 1889, loose handbill; BG, 24 April 1890, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup>NLSA. BG, 21 August 1890, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup>NLSA. BG, 10 July 1890, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup>NLSA. BG, 18 December 1890, p. 4. Previously Assmuth & Co. had been the Castle Line's Agent.

Commissioners of the town, and attended the meetings as regularly as he could.<sup>42</sup> In 1890 the Commission had been elevated to the rank of Town Council, and Burgersdorp's first mayor was elected. That official was the well-known businessman, amateur artiste, impresario and active citizen H. Kannemeyer, from one of the town's best known and gifted families. Thus Carl Fehr was counted among the leading members of the town.

Still Burgersdorp continued to bear the appearance of its earlier rough frontier decades. Fehr himself had not been above the Council's light censure on the occasions of rough-cured sheep-skins or ploughs and other implements being left in public view outside his shop.<sup>43</sup> Fehr & Co. had met firm competition in Burgersdorp, and in the Albert district. But Fehr's business improved among the Dutch and English-speaking farmers, as well as the townsfolk, who were kept aware of his imported goods and their refined and exotic air on that exhausting, depressing and even dangerous frontier. Though Europe may have seemed vastly distant, its many useful and enjoyable products were viewed as refined necessities.

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<sup>42</sup>NLSA. Municipal Minute Books, Burgersdorp, 2 volumes, 13 May 1874 - 3 November 1884 and 11 November 1884 - 23 July 1897. Including Minutes of first meeting of the Town Council held at Burgersdorp on 5 August 1891. Present Messrs. H. Kannemeyer (Chairman), C. Hennings, E. J. Knight, W. A. Sutton, C. Fehr. Minutes of a meeting of Members of the Albert Choral Society held in the Town Office on Tuesday, 16 July 1889. Present Messrs. C. Fehr (Chairman), E. J. Knight, E. Hoffa, F. Knight, Dr. Kannemeyer and A. W. Fincham. Carl Fehr "was only once in Johannesburg in 1892 as a delegate to the first meeting of the Associated Chambers of Commerce...." VE. Letter from William Fehr to G. L. Lewin, 8 December 1959.

<sup>43</sup>NLSA. Municipal Minutes, Burgersdorp, 5 September 1892, "That Fehr & Co. to be informed that they must discontinue the habit of drying skins in the public streets." 7 November 1892, "Letters read from Messrs. Strydom & Venter complaining of the ploughs etc left in the public street by Fehr & Co. Resolved 'that Fehr & Co. be called upon to remove goods complained of without delay failing which fines in terms of Regulation 97 be enforced.'"

Increasingly Fehr had been absent from official meetings and public performances. On the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, 1890, The Hon. M. A. van Breda, C.C. and R.M., had died quite suddenly,<sup>44</sup> and soon was succeeded by W. W. Maskew, who had been posted with his small family from Clanwilliam to Burgersdorp.<sup>45</sup> A daughter of that family would in a while be married to Carl Fehr, their first child being William Fehr. The Maskews were of English ancestry.

William Wilson Maskew had been born at Cape Town in 1832. He was the son of Thomas Maskew who had landed at the Cape in 1819, following on his brother William Miles Maskew who had arrived in 1817. They were both born in the important commercial town of Kendal, in Westmoreland, of merchant stock, and could trace their antecedents back as far as James Wilson in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. They had gone out to the Cape on a commercial mission for an uncle, a ship owner with business interests in the East Indies.<sup>46</sup> A granddaughter of James Wilson, one Isabella, had married William Maskew.<sup>47</sup> They were the parents of five children, among whom were William Miles and Thomas, the founders of the Maskew family at the Cape.

By 1821 William Miles Maskew had set up a retail shop in Cape Town<sup>48</sup> and subsequently moved premises many times over the next years down to 1855.

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<sup>44</sup>NLSA. *BG*, 5. June. 1890, p. 3.

<sup>45</sup>NLSA. *BG*, 17. July. 1890, p. 3.

<sup>46</sup>VE. Draft of letter from William Fehr to Africana Museum, Johannesburg, December 1947, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup>VE. Scheepers, John, *The Maskew family of South Africa - Origins*.

<sup>48</sup>NLSA. *South African Court Calendar and Directory*, [Several in WFLG.]

Entries in the Cape Town Directories listed a variety of occupations, some related, others not, but several of a legalistic nature: retailer, sworn broker, Messenger of the Petty Court, sworn appraiser and Messenger to the Judge of Police. In 1837 William Maskew was recorded as a haberdasher at fashionable addresses. From 1847 he was in the equally important Strand Street, and finally, from 1852, again as broker and accountant, in Dixon Street, located just below the quarries on Signal Hill. William Maskew also wrote *The Philosophy of Astronomy* and *The Philosophy of Banking*, both published at Cape Town.<sup>49</sup>

William's brother Thomas made his appearance in the Cape Town Directory, with occupation not specified, from 1832 at Longmarket Street. From 1839 he was at Roze Street. Thomas Maskew was recorded as a grocer and haberdasher. William Maskew married Josina Maria Berning, and the wife's niece, M. S. Berning was married to Thomas Maskew. Within a few years the same Roze Street would demarcate the commercial aspect of the city from what would gradually become at about that time the Malay Quarter, eventually to be an area of much historic and cultural concern to William Fehr.

A taste for books and learning manifest itself particularly in William and Josina's second child of three. He was Frederick Simon Berning Maskew who, from 1841, was Assistant Librarian of the South African Library, and later Chief Librarian from 1845 down to 1885. His portrait was displayed in the South African Library,<sup>50</sup> since Frederick Maskew was also responsible for a thorough

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<sup>49</sup>[Fehr, William,] "The Maskew Family," *ANN / AAN*, Vol. 5., No. 3, June 1948, p. 74.

<sup>50</sup>NLSA. INIL 6599.

catalogue of the Library.<sup>51</sup>

Thomas and M. S. Maskew also were parents of a number of children, the first of whom, William Wilson, carried the family name, reputation and literary skills into Cape history. William was born at Cape Town on 23 December 1832, during the time his father was listed at 31 Longmarket Street.

Shortly after the English Maskew brothers had made their home at Cape Town, a collective movement of British settlers had arrived in 1820. Victory in the Napoleonic wars had left Britain in the depths of economic and industrial depression, and various initiatives had been set in motion to relieve the land of surplus subjects from among the labouring and middle classes. The noted traveller and naturalist William Burchell had already presented to the Home Government an informed personal impression of the Cape, published 1819, as being a good destination for that subsidised emigration.<sup>52</sup> Many resourceful Britons settled at the Cape and its Governor, Lord Somerset, favoured further inroads, considering especially the Colony's turbulent Eastern frontier.

Among those who had left Plymouth aboard the *Weymouth* early in 1820 had been the large Trollop family, a daughter of which would be married into the Maskews. Variousy spelled Trollop, Trollip, or Trollep, they sailed among Hyman's party. Joseph Trollop, senior, with his wife Susanna (*née* Crouch) and their six sons and three daughters -- several of whom were married and had

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<sup>51</sup>Maskew, F. [compiler], *General Catalogue of Books of the South African Public Library, Cape Town* [...].

<sup>52</sup>Burchell, W. J., *Hints on Emigration to the Cape of Good Hope*.

children of their own -- arrived at the Cape on 26 April 1820. All but one son, who found employment for the time at Cape Town, continued on to Algoa Bay, landing there in mid-May.

The eldest son of Joseph senior was William Trollop who had taken with him to the Cape his wife Patience and their infant son Alfred. William Trollop rose within a generation from his emigrant status of labourer to that of prosperous landowner, a respected and devout member of the community.<sup>53</sup> William had earned his livelihood at Grahamstown as a butcher, and successfully so in that he could purchase two farms near Cradock in 1837-38. By 1840 the farm *Daggaboersnek*, some thirty miles from Cradock, also had become his property.

While still in their most adventurous years, before becoming established in the relative security of Grahamstown, William and Patience had already become parents to most of their nine children. The third, their second son, was Henry Trollop. Like the sister born before him, Henry married a member of the Leppan family which had emigrated with them aboard the *Weymouth*. Henry and Maria Trollop (*née* Leppan) had three sons.

In the last days of 1851 Henry and his younger brother Edward had taken some of their cattle over the mountains, toward Bedford, to a place called Blaauwkrantz. Hottentot and Xhosa rebels were known to be in the area, during the Eighth Frontier War, and indeed they attacked the two brothers and their accompanying servant. The three managed to return to within sight of the

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<sup>53</sup>Trollip Gordon, D., *The Trollops of South Africa*, pp. 51-55.

## A SMALL TRIBUTE

TO THE MEMORY OF THE LATE

**MR. HENRY TROLLIP AND HIS BROTHER EDWARD,**

WHO WERE WAYLAIN AND SHOT AT DAGGE-BOER'S NECK,

BY A BAND OF REBEL HOTTENTOTS AND KAFFIRS ON WEDNESDAY EVENING,  
THE 31ST DECEMBER, 1851.

DEDICATED TO THE WIDOW AND FATHERLESS CHILDREN, AND TO THE BEREAVED  
PARENTS AND RELATIVES OF THE DECEASED.

Come, join with me, my muse, to shed  
A tear in memory of the dead—  
A tear which cannot cease to flow,  
While thinking on that hour of woe,  
When two fond brothers, kind and true,  
Fell by the hands of Rebels, who  
In ambush or concealment lay,  
From whence they fired upon their prey,  
And Edward their first victim made;  
Poor Henry turn'd to render aid,  
When he, by an unerring ball,  
Was also doomed, alas! to fall.  
Thus these two gallant brothers died,  
(Though slain so basely) side by side;  
And lay all night together there,  
Uncovered in the open air.

Oh, dismal night! my pen would fall  
To picture forth the widow's wail,  
Or sorrowing parents' mournful cries,  
When darkness overspread the skies,  
In dread suspense and fearful fright  
They passed that dark, unhappy night,  
Lest those foul fiends, insatiate still,  
The measure of their crimes to fill,  
And consummate their murderous deeds,  
Should fire the dwelling o'er their heads.  
But God restrained the wrath of man,  
And kept the Rebels from their plan.  
The darkness fled; the day appeared,  
And with it those so much endeared,  
Brought lifeless, cold, inanimate,  
With marks of their most cruel fate.  
Oh, woeful scene! Oh, barbarous deed!  
To cause so many hearts to bleed!  
All nature, dress'd in mourning deep,  
Appears at the sad sight to weep:  
The widow o'er her husband moans,  
The parents grieve o'er murdered sons!  
No last farewell, no parting word,  
By parents or by partner heard;

Nor one fond look, that might impart  
Some comfort to each aching heart.  
Ah! who shall then assuage their grief,  
Or give their wounded minds relief?

My muse would her just tribute pay  
To one of those who fell that day:  
Henry, as kind as he was brave,  
No signs of fear in danger gave,  
But e'er was foremost in the strife  
For justice, property, and life,  
And, as of patriot bands the head,  
He for his country fought—and bled.  
In manners gentle; temper mild;  
In war, a man; in peace, a child;  
Upright, and in his dealings fair;  
An honest living his sole care;  
Industrious, frugal throughout life,  
A loving husband to his wife,  
E'er faithful to the marriage bond;  
A father of his offspring fond;  
A safe companion and firm friend;  
Who would not mourn his hapless end?  
Thus did he live: and now his dust  
With Edward's mingles; though no bust  
Erected to his memory be,  
To hand down to posterity  
How he had for his country fought,  
Nor what he for her welfare wrought:  
Yet shall my muse lament his fall;  
His widow'd wife the most of all,  
And children fatherless, so young,  
Who round his neck once fondly clung;  
While parents thus of sons bereaved,  
Shall to their day of death be grieved:  
And relatives, both far and near,  
Their names in memory revere:  
Who trust, though thus to part gave pain,  
That they in heaven shall meet again,  
Where God shall recompense each sigh,  
And wipe the tears from every eye.

Graham's Town, 19th Jan., 1852.

S. E. BOWLES.

Daggaboer farm when they were ambushed at dusk on New Year's Eve. The faithful servant came out of hiding at dawn to tell the anxious family of the double tragedy, retold in contemporary verse (*vide opposite*) by S. E. Rowles.<sup>54</sup> The murderous rebels were brought to justice and Maria brought up her three sons, to mourn again in 1858 at the death of the first-born. In 1862 the widow Maria Trollip was married to William Wilson Maskew who was then Acting and Regional Magistrate at Somerset.

William Wilson Maskew was destined to spend over forty-five years in the Colonial Civil Service at the Cape. He had commenced his career as a teacher at the Government School at Cape Town from July 1847. His talents had not gone unnoted and from February 1851 he was Clerk of the Treasury. Then followed the first of several postings further afield. Maskew was appointed Magistrate's Clerk at Somerset East from August 1861. His evident abilities with legal matters saw him named Acting and Regional Magistrate at Somerset for 1862, 1863, 1864 and 1866, while he was also Mayor of Somerset between February 1868 and August 1874.<sup>55</sup> Maskew was Regional Magistrate at Jansenville from August 1874 and elevated to Civil Commissioner and Regional Magistrate from September 1875. With like responsibilities he was transferred as R. M. & C. C. to Clanwilliam from August 1884, and then appointed in June 1890 to Burgersdorp, where he arrived with his family at mid-July 1890. A man of deep religious faith and empathy, Maskew was much appreciated by both the Dutch and English communities of the Albert District. He had already written

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<sup>54</sup>Mrs. B. Lindhorst. Rowles, S. E., *A Small Tribute...*, Grahamstown, 1852. Originally printed on silk, reproduced actual size.

<sup>55</sup>NLSA. Smith, J., ed., *Somerset East*, 150, p. 150.

some volumes of Scriptural commentary for use in teaching.<sup>56</sup>

The Maskews had four children. Maria was born at Somerset East on 10 December 1862 and the infant was baptised later that summer in the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1863.<sup>57</sup> William Henry, a future barrister, was born at Cape Town in 1864. Frances would appear in 1866 and the fourth child, Frederick, in 1868.

In the winter of 1891 fashionable Burgersdorp witnessed a splendid wedding which received close attention in the *BG*. It was a society event of stature. On 23 June 1891, in the Dutch Reformed Church,<sup>58</sup> Carl Fehr was married to Maria Maskew, eldest daughter of William and Maria Maskew.<sup>59</sup> Maria's sister Fanny [Frances] and brother Frederick participated in the ceremony. The presiding minister had been Ds. William Cormack who had been at Burgersdorp since 1862. In the register Carl Fehr was recorded as being a merchant. That afternoon the couple left by train for the honeymoon in Natal, whose coast offered a warmer climate, while those left behind danced through the night. The wedding explained his further absence from Council meetings, but shortly Carl Fehr would keep himself only to commercial and family matters. Their first child appeared at Burgersdorp on 17 April 1892, and was named William Adolf Fehr. He was

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<sup>56</sup>Vide [Fehr, William,] "The Maskew Family," *ANN / AAN*, Vol. 5, No. 3, June 1948, p. 74.

<sup>57</sup>VE. Certificate of Baptism, copy dated 27 February 1915.

<sup>58</sup>Archive of the Dutch Reformed Church, Cape Town, Marriage Register, 1891, Burgersdorp, No. 1697.

<sup>59</sup>NLSA. *BG*, 25 June 1891, p. 2.

baptised at Burgersdorp on 15 June 1892,<sup>60</sup> and his godparents had been Louis Henry Trollop and Emma Simmons. The period was one of considerable activity for Carl Fehr, though the pressure was noted in a report by the Standard Bank.

“Partners – Blaine & Co., Port Elizabeth & Carl Fehr, Burghersdorp. Blaine & Co. are considered undoubted. Fehr who manages the business has but limited means. Do a large retail Boer business, but the management is somewhat reckless. No liabilities with us other than under your [letters of credit]. Bankers, Ourselves.”<sup>61</sup>

The Fehr’s second child, daughter Bertha, was born on 18 March 1893, and the third child, Gordon, on 27 July 1894, both also at Burgersdorp. Maria Fehr was confirmed at Christ Church, the Anglican centre of Burgersdorp, in August, 1896.<sup>62</sup>

On 1 December 1892, William Maskew gave a month’s notice to retire from the Civil Service. He had elected to work until his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday (23<sup>rd</sup> inst.) and requested a week’s leave of absence from that date to the end of the month.<sup>63</sup> William Maskew suffered a major stroke while hearing the Periodical Court at Molteno on 21 December 1892. He died on 28 December, and was buried in the cemetery at Molteno the following day, within a few days of what would have been his retirement.

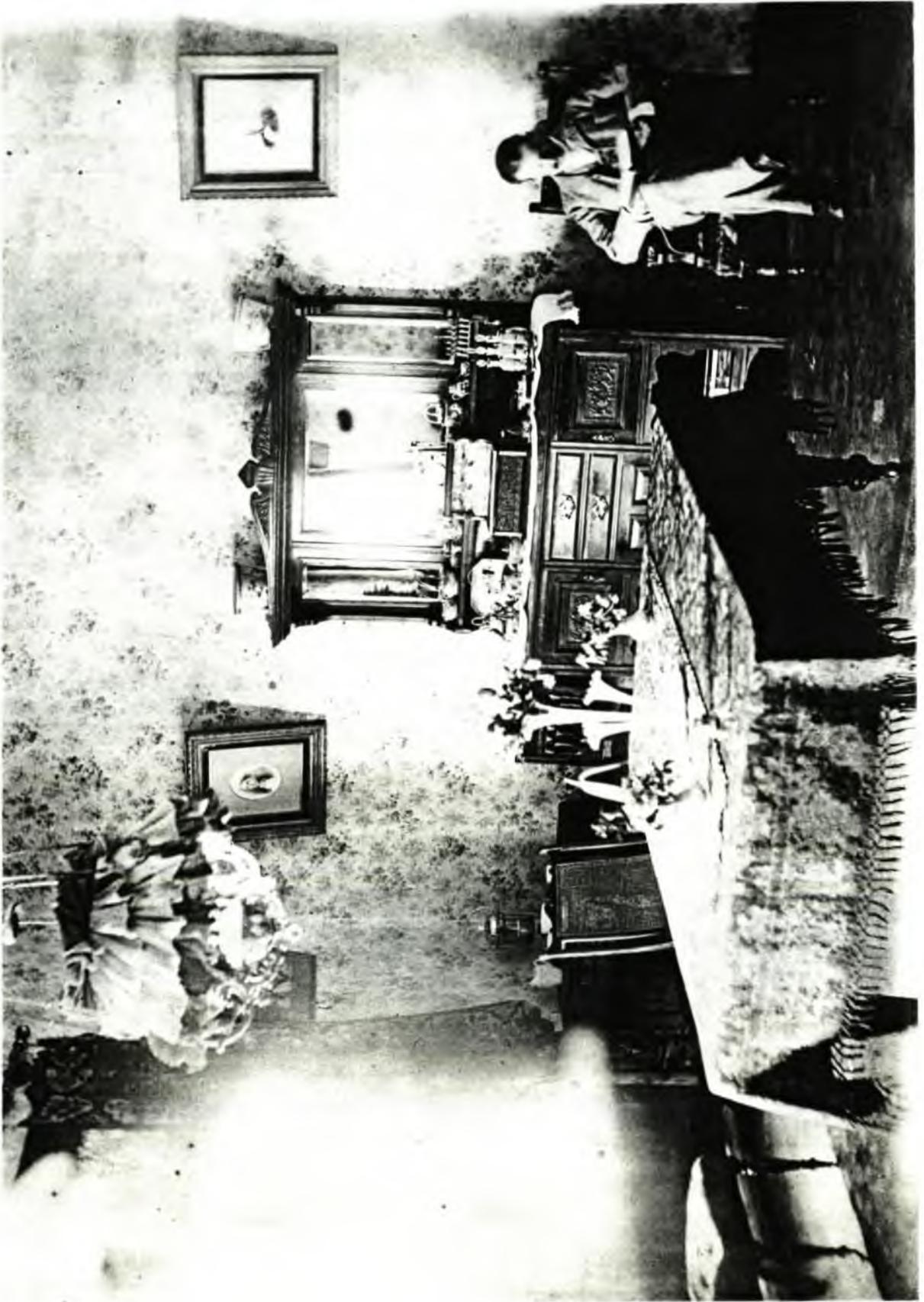
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<sup>60</sup>Archive of the Dutch Reformed Church, Cape Town, Baptism Register, 1892, Burgersdorp, No. 259.

<sup>61</sup>Standard Bank Archive, Inspection Report, Port Elizabeth, 2 December 1892, p. 71.

<sup>62</sup>VE. Confirmation Certificate.

<sup>63</sup>VE. Letter from Maskew to unnamed official, Burgersdorp, 1 December 1892.



In the photograph opposite (VE.) is seen Carl Fehr, while above him are portraits of (left) Maria Maskew (*née* Leppan) and (right) William Wilson Maskew. They represent in that comfortably appointed room (ca. 1896) at the Cape Colony the union of the two families.



## II. Formative Years, 1900-1934.

William Fehr, known to family and friends as Willie (*vide opposite*<sup>1</sup>), was enrolled in the Albert Academy in 1900, Standard A, aged 8. He held a very good attendance record at the Academy, and had already begun to travel abroad with his family during that period, since Carl had gone to Germany to regain his health.<sup>2</sup> In a brief reminiscence were described something of life in Burgersdorp. The extract below [with author's spelling changes and free translation,] appeared between references to Diaz and da Gama at the Cape, and closing with the description of a tactful, indeed saintly, Vicar's wife at Burgersdorp. Almost nothing survived in German from William Fehr's hand.

"...Hundert Meilen nach Nord und Osten [vom Kapland] dehnt sich eine überaus Fruchtbare Landschaft, steigt plötzlich auf ca. 3000 Fuß [und] eine Hochebene erstreckt sich von dann ab, baumlos und monoton. In oft großen Entfernungen von einander trifft der Reisende einfache Farmhäuser, Dörfchen und meist kleine Städtchen.

Nun von einem dieser kleinen Städtchen will ich heute erzählen, in welchem ich mich einige Jahre in meinem jüngeren Leben aufhielt. Keine Eisenbahn gab es zu jener Zeit im ganzen Lande, außer ein paar Strecken nahe der Küste und dieser Ort war viele hundert Meilen hiervon entfernt. Für Unterhaltung waren die Einwohner auf sich selbst angewiesen. Der Bildungsgrad der Bewohner

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<sup>1</sup>VE. Photograph shows the young Fehr family ca. 1896. On the left are Maria and Bertha and at centre are Carl, William on his knee, and Gordon.

<sup>2</sup>NLSA. [As from 1 January 1894 *The Albert Times* incorporated the *Burghersdorp Gazette* and *Stormberg Collier.*] Concerning the Fehrs' departure *vide AT*, 13 October 1894, p. 2; concerning their return *vide AT*, 1 May 1895, p. 2.

war überraschend hoch und das Leben verhältnismäßig  
angenehm. Ich fühlte mich bald in den verschiedenen Familien  
heimisch. Es wurde politisiert, und viel musiziert [...].<sup>3</sup>

(A rich countryside stretches for a hundred miles North and East from the Cape. It rises suddenly some 3,000 ft. to a great plateau, treeless and dull. Small towns, villages and simple farmhouses, often widely separated, are met by the traveller. Today I'd like to tell you about one of these little towns, where I lived as a child. This town was hundreds of miles from the coast where there were only a couple of short railway lines. The townsfolk had to be self-reliant. They were surprisingly cultivated and life was relatively comfortable. I soon felt part of the scene. There was political chatter and a great deal of music-making....)

In Burgersdorp the Albert Literary Society and Debating Club had kept some of the townsfolk of Burgersdorp similarly occupied, and Carl Fehr was a member of the Society's committee. A wide variety of current issues was considered in one particular year including Essays, Darwinism, the Modern Novel, Crime and its Treatment, Parliamentary debate, Should trial by jury be abolished? Should Divorce be made as easy as Marriage? Was the abolition of the Monasteries justifiable?<sup>4</sup> Carl Fehr was also occupied as a Director of the Cyphergat Coal Mining Company, as well as being a member of Burgersdorp's Chamber of Commerce.

Burgersdorp had for some years been a centre of political debate. In 1898 William Schreiner became the Premier of the Cape and Paul Kruger was re-elected President of the Transvaal Republic. On 11 October 1899 the Anglo-Boer War had begun. A commando of Bethulie burghers under Floris du Plooy

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<sup>3</sup>VE. From "Schnitzel & Spähne aus Süd Afrika," undated, unsigned typescript.

<sup>4</sup>NLSA. BG, 29 April 1893, p. 3.

entered Burgersdorp on 15 November 1899. Though the town's shopkeepers and patricians were loyal to the Colony, and some were married to locals, there were divided sympathies. Burgersdorp "was looked upon as a Boer stronghold and accordingly 'disloyal.'"<sup>5</sup> A British view of the town was unequivocal, referring to it as "rebel" Burgersdorp, the centre of "upright Afrikanerdom."<sup>6</sup> Less than a month later occurred a major reversal for British forces at the Stormberg on 10 December 1899. Molteno appeared to the British to be the last loyal centre on the road to the north, since many of Burgersdorp's long-lived residents and neighbours were descended from early *Trekboeren*. Cape rebels continued to defy the British, forcing Lord Kitchener to apply drastic measures. Young Piet Kloppert became the focus of a spectacle which put some into a frame of mind which was not only melancholy but also set on departure.

A British order had gone out for all of Burgersdorp to assemble on the Market Square. There at mid-day on Friday, 19 June 1901, the sentence of death was read out before young Kloppert, attendant British officers, Town Guard (of which Fehr was a member) and the townsfolk. In the nearby gaol, while Kloppert spent his last night and morning in fervent prayer with two of Burgersdorp's clergy, a gallows was constructed within the adjacent yard. When the condemned man stepped out of his cell and mounted the wooden steps, he had been watched by another group of locals ordered to be present. The British purpose in that sad display had been "to frighten the populace into submission and to smother all

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<sup>5</sup>Meintjes, J., *Stormberg, a Lost Opportunity*, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup>Amery, L. S., ed., *The Times History of the War in South Africa, 1899-1902*, Vol. II, p. 293.

thoughts of rebellion.”<sup>7</sup>

Not long afterwards Fehr informed Blaine & Co. of Port Elizabeth of his intentions to leave Burgersdorp on grounds of health and retire to Germany. Blaine was disappointed at losing Fehr.<sup>8</sup> The latter’s retirement would commence from 31 July 1901, while Fehr was expected to stay on for a further three months to tend personally to any outstanding business. Fehr was to be succeeded by Mr. M. Beamish who would arrange to pay Fehr out his own capital in the firm.<sup>9</sup> Since its tentative early days the Cyphergat Mining Co. had begun to manufacture “Fire Clay Goods, Glazed Earthenware Pipes and Terra Cotta Ware”<sup>10</sup> as a further asset. Fehr had been well regarded by the Mine’s Board who regretted his departure.<sup>11</sup> According to advertisements in the *BG*, Fehr & Co. continued in business at Burgersdorp down to March, 1903, when the firm became Beamish & Co. Major Beamish had earlier been a clerk with Fehr & Co, and Beamish maintained contact with William Fehr into the 1940’s.

The Wiesbaden to which Carl Fehr returned – with his wife and three young children – had grown considerably since his departure over twenty years before. Originally a townsman of Burgersdorp, Richard Goldmann, had been engaged as

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<sup>7</sup>Meintjes, J., *Stormberg, a Lost Opportunity*, p. 163.

<sup>8</sup>VE. Letter from Blaine to Carl Fehr, 18 July 1901.

<sup>9</sup>VE. Letter from Blaine to Carl Fehr, 16 August 1901.

<sup>10</sup>VE. Letter from F. R. Tennant, Managing Director to Carl Fehr, 5 August 1901.

<sup>11</sup>*ibid.*

civil engineer to help complete Wiesbaden's famous *Nerobergbahn*<sup>12</sup> which began to run in 1888. Kaiser Wilhelm II had opened the New Theatre in 1894 and the town received its first electric tramway in 1897. The presence there of large numbers of people was of no small concern since in 1900 the 86,111 residents of Wiesbaden needed to accommodate 126,000 spa guests. Late in the next year Carl Fehr and his family took up residence there. In 1906 the main railway station was opened at Wiesbaden and, in 1907, the new spa there was dedicated in the presence of the Kaiser. Wiesbaden had prospered to such an extent as a fashionable resort that during 1912-13 some 225 millionaires resided there. It was for Carl Fehr to claim his appropriate place in cultivated society. The charmed *Weltkurstadt* of half-a-century earlier was newly poised to achieve the status of *Großstadt* with its population of over 100,000. In such an urban milieu Burgersdorp and the Anglo-Boer War could have been forgotten, but such was not the case. Carl Fehr had generally been a successful businessman, dealing in quality items from Germany and Britain. His first-hand knowledge of markets abroad and commerce were assets in the distant Cape Colony. He had proven to be reliable yet adaptable, thereby achieving customer loyalty in very difficult economic conditions. Fehr's business connections were spread over a wide area of the Eastern Cape which included Port Elizabeth and East London, in addition to links with the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.<sup>13</sup> While at Burgersdorp it had been possible for Carl Fehr to keep himself apprised of affairs in the Colony, Southern Africa, Europe and beyond.

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<sup>12</sup>WFLG. Goldman, R., *A South African Remembers*, p. 34.

<sup>13</sup>VE. Correspondence from banks and brokers.

Shortly after arriving at Wiesbaden, Carl Fehr was baptized, thus becoming a member of the German Lutheran community.<sup>14</sup> There had survived little to suggest Fehr's closer involvement in formal religious associations, the weight of family devotion being maintained by Maria Fehr. William was confirmed in 1909 at Wiesbaden,<sup>15</sup> shortly before his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Eventually settling in Wiesbaden's fashionable centre, the Fehrs took up residence at 12 Wilhelminenstraße from 1903/4, and remained there until 1910/11.<sup>16</sup> It appeared from a few letters that both Carl and Maria travelled between Germany and the Cape, as well as to Berlin, London and Switzerland and Italy. The three children were enrolled at the Königliches Real-Gymnasium Schule at Wiesbaden. School reports traced William's formal education between 1 October 1904 and 19 March 1910.<sup>17</sup> The syllabus included Religion, German, Latin, French, History, Geography, Mathematics (Accounting), Natural Science, Drawing, Singing and Physical Training. Those were subjects already familiar to William from Burgersdorp and the Albert Academy. At Wiesbaden he did well at German, English and Drawing while his progress in the other subjects was usually either satisfactory ["genügend"] or deficient ["mangelhaft"]. He was well behaved, with a good attendance record, but he did not care for the school's regimentation and the teachers' overbearing character. Fehr was reported to

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<sup>14</sup>VE. Tauf-Schein [Baptismal Certificate], Evang. Berg-Kirchen Gemeinde, Wiesbaden, 13 November 1901.

<sup>15</sup>VE. Certificate attested his Baptism (15 June 1892) and Confirmation (21 March 1909).

<sup>16</sup>Letter from the Landeshauptarchiv, Wiesbaden, to author, 1 July 1998. Wiesbaden had been bombed in 1945 and the local residents' archive was destroyed.

<sup>17</sup>VE. School reports, Königliches Real-Gymnasium zu Wiesbaden.

have enjoyed the satire of *Professor Knatschke*,<sup>18</sup> by Hansi, *nom de plume* of Jean-Jacques Waltz. A brief biographical note described a source of Fehr's dislike of Germanic education, as he, like Hansi, was not strictly a German.

"Born in Colmar, in Alsace, in 1873, Hansi went to school in the Lycée of his native town after the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine to the German Empire, and the main thing he learnt from his German teachers was a thorough hatred for Germanism, as embodied in the stupid vanity and overbearing manners of these insufferable pedants. Tasks and punishments were passively accepted by the Alsatian child, whose observing mind, naturally gifted for irony, never forgot the grotesque figures of his teachers."<sup>19</sup>

That was not an isolated circumstance. A contemporary British view of German culture and education was similarly unflattering.

"A teacher, a professor who did not teach and preach, in and out of season, the racial, moral, intellectual, and physical superiority of the Germans to all other peoples, their extraordinary devotion to war and their dynasty, and their inevitable destiny under that dynasty to lead the world, was a marked man, doomed to failure and obscurity."<sup>20</sup>

The languages William Fehr had studied took firm hold and contributed in helping to sharpen his abilities with the written word as a formidable instrument of reason. Language was also an art form through which he widely exchanged views on history and culture.

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<sup>18</sup>VE. Hansi [Jean-Jacques Waltz], *Professor Knatschke*, [English tr.] London, [2<sup>nd</sup> impression] 1917.

<sup>19</sup>*ibid.* Introduction by Abbé E. Wetterlé, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup>Wells, H. G., *The Outline of History*, p. 1044.



As Maria Maskew survived until 1904, evidence suggested that Maria Fehr had continued to visit her mother and family at the Cape, and also her brother William in England. William Henry Maskew, of the Inner Temple, Barrister at Law (of Cape Colony), had passed the Trinity Examination in 1884.<sup>21</sup> As an amateur he was the author of a small but popular book of poems,<sup>22</sup> distinctive and important as verses in Afrikaans, with a few in English. He continued his father's legal frame of mind, as well as writing skills, including a poetic and witty sensibility shared by his sister Maria. William Henry Maskew died at London in April 1903, and was buried at Nunhead Cemetery. That was yet another tragedy visited upon Maria Maskew, then seventy-four years of age and a daughter of the British 1820 Settlers at the Cape and, for William Fehr, a further personal link from the old century.

The Fehr children's surviving German correspondence revealed close family attachments, and an awakening to the world of cultivated Western Europe (*vide* opposite<sup>23</sup>). But much of that cultural nourishment had already begun years before in Burgersdorp, suffused with the equation of family and history, with a pervading view of past as present which was their inheritance. Generations of commerce and culture of the German *bourgeoisie* had left its mark, so it was felt, in the blood, continuous with national history. Apparent too were influences

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<sup>21</sup>VE. Notice of General Examination of students of the Inns of Court, held at Lincoln's Inn Hall, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, and 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1884. [London] 9 June 1884.

<sup>22</sup>NLSA. Maskew, W. H., *'n Jolly Hotnot en andere snaakse versies*, Darter & Walton, Kaapstad, 1890. *Vide* [Fehr, William,] "The Maskew Family," *ANN / AAN*, Vol. 5, No. 3, June 1948, p. 74, also *Boekspieël van Suid-Afrika / South Africa in Print*, Cape Town, 1952, p. 96.

<sup>23</sup>Mrs. B. Lindhorst. Photograph (actual size) of Gordon, Bertha and William Fehr, Wiesbaden, ca. 1904.

from Maria's side of the family, the Maskews. Her strongly compassionate and religious nature, an appreciative eye for the fine and the beautiful, with her deep sense of maternal love were apparent throughout her letters. There too were ancestral influences of commerce and law combined with a flair for verse, well turned prose and sober, discrete humour.

The Fehr family took their holidays regularly in Switzerland. A favourite resort, beautifully placed and well equipped, was Weggis, on the *Lac des Quatre Cantons*, along the lake's shore to the south-east of Lucerne. There William had many opportunities to travel by boat and lake-steamer. Photography, an increasingly practical method of recording and preserving facts, was a commonplace for the Fehrs. The children wrote to Maria at Cape Town about their new "cinematograph" which had arrived for Christmas.<sup>24</sup> Those popular facets to documentation were already known from the Burgersdorp days. Photography created reassuring and useful records, adding both to the Fehr family album and William's visual acuity. Those portable and scientific though sometimes prosaic images captured a fleeting eye-witnessed moment. The practical perfection of photography would mark the terminus of William Fehr's future collecting. Of the late Victorians' taste for photography, it had been pointed out that:

"by reducing the importance of picture-painting as a trade, and surpassing it in realistic representation of detail, it drove the painter to take refuge more and more in theory, and in a series of intellectualized experiments in Art for Art's sake."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>VE. Letter from Gordon at Wiesbaden to Maria Fehr, undated [ca. 1906].

<sup>25</sup>VE. Trevelyan, G. M., *English Social History*, pp. 571-572.

Rapid improvements made in the taking and processing of pictures helped photography to spread rapidly. The fine art of miniature portraits, epitomised in England by Cosway around 1800, “was only [later] killed by photography, as so many other arts have been killed by science.”<sup>26</sup> The youthful joys of clambering up courses of mountain streams, exploring shadowy forests or boating on picturesque lakes (or posed in a photographer’s studio,) were kept by the Fehrs in surviving reflections of an alpine Arcadia.

The Fehr children at Wiesbaden had, in their most impressionable years, only recently been transplanted from a frontier town in the remote Cape Colony. On one occasion the quick eye of the camera had captured a sylvan holiday image of the children and a rustic bullock cart with its rural attendants. Maria Fehr wrote,

“When on an excursion we met this wagon [and] the children insisted on getting into it. ‘Strictly South Africans.’ It would never occur to a German child.”<sup>27</sup>

Young scions of German *Bürgers* would not have been encouraged in that innocent pastime. Such was rather for those from the outer reaches. Maria, William, Bertha and Gordon had themselves seen great spans of willing oxen draw rumbling wagons into Burgersdorp from the imposing *veldt*. William did not later view himself as a German and would remove the overt Teutonic connection carried by his middle name, Adolf.

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<sup>26</sup>*ibid.* p. 159.

<sup>27</sup>VE. Undated photograph [ca. 1905] with MS on verso in Maria’s hand.

The Fehrs' regular visits to the German and Swiss countryside offered a pleasant compliment to the demands of education and society at Wiesbaden. Their wanderings also gave Maria and her children an opportunity to savour and reminisce upon what they might never again enjoy at the Cape. That was *Sehnsucht*, a romantic longing for what was past, carefully to be preserved. Maria's religious sensibility and verses also carried something of her own mother's embattled faith.

"Where the weary are at rest and / The wicked cease from troubling; /  
And if there be no meetings / past the grave, / If all be darkness, silence /  
still 'tis rest. / Be not afraid ye / Waiting hearts who weep, /  
For God still giveth his / beloved sleep. / He wills, so best."<sup>28</sup>

Among Maria's surviving verses were passages from Omar Khayyam, and parodies reminiscent of Edward Lear, while Maria made and kept copies of others' verses. She also put aside snippets of relevance to child care, domestic economy and the kitchen. She was concerned with marital happiness and woman's rôle in the world. Related to those matters was another undated MS in her hand describing a contrast in the nature of love between man and woman.

"What in man is self gratification, is in her self sacrifice. The difference, sharply put, is the difference between passion and devotion."<sup>29</sup>

Carl Fehr had helped awaken the children to the cultivated beauties and treasures of museums and historic sites in Europe. But William, over half-a-century later wrote that he had:

"never been a good sightseer, as my father was the opposite

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<sup>28</sup>VE. Undated MS in Maria Fehr's hand.

<sup>29</sup>VE. Undated MS.

and we had to visit many museums in our youth when we were hardly ripe to get a keen sense of enjoyment from it."<sup>30</sup>

William would later dislike a lifeless museum atmosphere, one disconnected from the viewer. He strove to make art and history both approachable and enjoyable.

At Wiesbaden the Fehr family often attended theatrical performances, while the children themselves took part in school productions. Brief mention was also made in letters of their various musical studies, since Gordon played the violin and the others the piano.

Soon time came for the boys' advanced studies, to prepare them to take their places in the professional world. William as the eldest was naturally expected to continue Carl's life in commerce, while Gordon turned to technology and science. Carl and Maria would have deliberated a suitable future match for Bertha. The Fehr family moved to the German capital, with its greater educational, cultural and commercial resources. They were recorded as residents of Berlin between 12 July 1910 and 8 August 1913,<sup>31</sup> and a letter of 30 December 1910 was addressed to Maria Fehr at Prinz Regentenstr. 7, Wilmersdorf, Berlin,<sup>32</sup> a comfortable suburb not far from the centre. Within a few years the shadows deepened before the Great War.

In the late 1980's Carl Fehr had been a member of the Town Guard at

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<sup>30</sup>VE. Letter from William Fehr to F. M. S. Winand, London, 5 January 1965.

<sup>31</sup>VE. Das Einwohnermeldeamt des Polizeipraesidiums, Berlin, 1 June 1920.

<sup>32</sup>VE. Letter addressed to Maria Fehr.

Burgersdorp, a patriotic activity he continued well into the Anglo-Boer War, as indicated by travel passes dated 1901 for use in the district.<sup>33</sup> Some time later, with fatherly financial advice to Gordon,<sup>34</sup> then a student in the United States, Carl presented a hard and final reality to his younger son. Fehr had taken up arms for Queen Victoria as a naturalised British subject in the Cape Colony.<sup>35</sup> Carl's subsequent position in Germany as an *émigré* and foreign national gave cause for earnest reflection on his position of independent means as a *rentier*. Concern for his colonial British wife and two children who remained in Europe, as well as his own investments, may have led to a recurrence of the physical and mental strain suffered at the Cape when the Anglo-Boer War became a threatening presence. Yet the Fehr's were not cut off from the Cape, since through their Berlin home passed:

"a constant stream of visitors from South Africa including at a later stage the regular congregation for some years of the whole colony of South African students who [like William and Gordon] were similarly completing their final courses."<sup>36</sup>

The contemporary growth of public art collections in Europe was much influenced by the rise of the Kaiser-Friedrichs-Museum, a focus of civic pride at Berlin. The London art dealer Thomas Agnew & Sons had opened a branch at

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<sup>33</sup>VE. Travel passes used under martial law.

<sup>34</sup>HUA. While in the United States he altered his name from Gordon Maskew Fehr to Gordon Maskew Fair in 1916; married Esther Lansing-Mead in 1919.

<sup>35</sup>VE. Letter from Carl Fehr to Gordon, 9 March 1916, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup>VE. *Cape Times Magazine*, 16 February 1952, p. 6.

the German capital in 1910, in acknowledgement of Berlin's cultural influence.<sup>37</sup> While residing in the city during that period, the Fehrs, particularly Carl and William, were aware of Berlin's international cultural significance.

William did well in the firm of Edward Markus at Berlin. He had been apprenticed in commerce there between 1910 and 1912. Thereafter he was head of the samples department at the firm's London branch. There, from 1914, he led its sales department, while being responsible for the account books. William took on more the air of a young man of the world. He wrote to his mother, for her fiftieth birthday, a letter which revealed an aspect of their close relationship.<sup>38</sup>

"Many happy returns of the day and health and good luck during the coming year.

'One only misses the sunshine after the shadows fall'<sup>39</sup> the saying goes and how dearly should I love to have spent your Birthday with you and especially so the fiftieth....

Not many can pride themselves on having a loving mother such as we children have and for me the thought of my good mother will always keep me on the straight path and will urge me to do my part for her sake. I selected a handbag for you...and told them to post it to you immediately, which I hope they did, so that it should have arrived in good time. I had to select it alone and I hope

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<sup>37</sup>Nowell-Smith, *Edwardian England*, p. 345.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. VE. Undated MS in Maria Fehr's hand. "Definition of a gentleman [:] / He is as gentle as a woman / And as manly as a man."

<sup>39</sup>An early example of Fehr's *penchant* to apply apt quotations, a trait his mother possessed. Cf. "Now the day is over, / Night is drawing nigh, / Shadows of the evening / Steal across the sky...." *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.

you will like it, as I thought you would get practical use out of it.

The bag is plain, but it is worked well and out of good material...."<sup>40</sup>

William had learned his practical commercial lessons well from his father and at school. William Fehr, then at London, was acknowledging a recent letter from his mother. Soon Gordon would be studying in Berlin at the Werner-Siemens-Gymnasium in 1913, and the Charlottenburg Technische Hochschule during 1913-1914.<sup>41</sup> Continuing his letter to Maria, William, who enjoyed dancing and being sociable, would very much have liked his mother and sister to have attended "the British Colonial Dance" at London.<sup>42</sup> Then, during the height of the winter season, William explained that:

"my next dance will come off between Xmas and New Year given by the College set of people..., a fancy dress ball but I am going in Evening Dress. Then there is the Hockey club ball on the 21<sup>st</sup> of January...and I am getting an invitation to the Austro-Hungarian Ball 21/- at Princess also for the 21<sup>st</sup> of January, so that I have the choice between 2 balls, one at 6/6 and the other at 21/-. I think I will make up my mind jolly soon about the one I am going to although the Austro-Hungarian Ball would have been very interesting, as a lot of the English ministers and Aristocracie [sic] will be there.

By my special request we will have a little dance here on 'Silvester' [the Germanic New Year's Eve] otherwise I will feel too sad and it appears to me that if we do not dance or do something of the kind these cold bludded [sic] Englishmen will creape [sic] off to bed in the

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<sup>40</sup>VE. Letter from William Fehr to Maria Fehr, [?] December 1912.

<sup>41</sup>HUA. Gordon continued studies in the United States at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University. His subsequent record became one of continuous and distinguished academic achievement in civil engineering, public health and pollution control.

<sup>42</sup>*op. cit.*

usual way, as if nothing special at all were happening."<sup>43</sup>

The tone of William's letter was that of an educated *bourgeois*. The partially Teutonic accent in word and outlook had roots in Burgersdorp, where the children grew up with English, German and Dutch/Afrikaans in fluent conversation. Even Maria Fehr wrote and received correspondence in German. Through those languages could be followed the prime pathways of William's cultural inheritance, already in place at Burgersdorp. Though he enjoyed dancing, his sociability was not limited to formality. In later life he played golf, though at London he enjoyed hockey, as he informed his mother.

"We played out at Southgate in the North of London, but I managed to get home in time for a hot scrub before dinner and it has done me a lot of good."<sup>44</sup>

The sociability and energy of William's later life had good foundations.

While in London William lived at 33-35 Lancaster Road (off Thurlow Park Road, S.E. 27), in a boarding house run by a Mrs. Maud Colman. The house was in West Dulwich, in the London borough of Lambeth. The offices of Edward Markus, where William had been employed, were at 55, Jewin Street, across the Thames in the City of London. The firm was listed in a London directory at premises there between 1911 and 1915. Markus had been described as a "South African and German colonial merchant," with their head office at Lindenstraße 3, Berlin. The reference in that London directory had been compiled around 1914, and when the Great War put an end to the business, Marcus left Jewin

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<sup>43</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>44</sup>*ibid.*

Punch, or the London Charivari, 1915, 10, 1231

# Punch



## Vol. CXLVIII.

LONDON:  
PUBLISHED AT THE OFFICE, 10, BOUVERIE STREET.

AND SOLD BY ALL BOOKSELLERS.

1915.

Street.<sup>45</sup> The illustration opposite<sup>46</sup> showed Wilhelm II as the New Augustus, in a parody of classical attributes. The world ambitions of the Kaiser were viewed in the long tradition of other famous conquerors. William was mindful of his own German patrimony, the greatness of past German cultural achievements, as well as the Britons' hatred of the Hun, a caricature of German aggression. William's daily travel over the boat-laden Thames gave substance to the allure of travel and the sea as became evident later in his enjoyment of ships and the many maritime pictures associated with commerce in his collection. All transport and communication over great distances was then by sea, and a variety of ships and cargo were to be experienced at the docks down the Thames.

With the Great War came, with reason, a general alarm in the Fehr Family. Gordon, to pursue his studies, moved to the United States, a move which Carl Fehr himself contemplated years later. William worked on at London, while Carl and Maria had taken Bertha to their usual holiday resort in Switzerland.<sup>47</sup> There William visited his mother and sister at Weggis in 1914, and thence returned to

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<sup>45</sup>Letter from Southwark Local Studies Library, London, to author, 12. July. 1999. A letter survived [VE.] from William Fehr at Wiesbaden to Frau Auguste Markus at Knesebeckstr. 70/71, Charlottenburg bei Berlin, 23. Dec. 1906. That may have been Aunt Auguste, a sister of Carl Fehr, and perhaps wife to Edward Markus. As Markus had evident commercial connections to South Africa and the German colonies, that could have provided the impetus to Carl's departure for Cape Colony in 1880, since it is unlikely that the latter would have decamped by chance for parts unknown. Markus may also have had connections to Blaine & Co. of Port Elizabeth, or to German-affiliated commerce in the Eastern Cape Colony and the Orange Free State. Markus may even have been linked to Carl Fehr at Burgersdorp. That potent idea of family business connections was, under the circumstances, appropriate.

<sup>46</sup>Frontispiece (slightly reduced) from *Punch*, Vol. CXLVIII, 30 June 1915.

<sup>47</sup>Interview between author and Fehr's nieces, N. Haddon & B. Lindhorst, daughters of Bertha, 14 June 1999.



London (*vide opposite*<sup>48</sup>). He set out for the Cape in 1915,<sup>49</sup> with a testimonial from Edward Markus.

“Hierdurch bescheinigen wir, daß Herr Willie A. Fehr vom 15 April 1910 bis 15 April 1912 als Lehrling bei uns tätig war und daß er seitdem die Leitung unserer Musterabteilung in unserer Londoner Filiale hatte, sowie seit Januar 1914 mit der Leitung des dortigen kaufmännischen Büros und der Kasse betraut war.

Herr Fehr hatte sich während seiner Lehrzeit durch Intelligenz, Gewissenhaftigkeit und größten Fleiß ein umfangreiches allgemeines Kaufmännisches Wissen ausgedehnte Warenkenntnisse angeeignet, sodaß wir ihm kurz nach seinem Eintritt in unsere Londoner Filiale die Leitung derselben anvertrauen konnten.

Diesen verantwortungsreichen Posten hat Herr Fehr nach jeder Richtung zu unserer vollsten Zufriedenheit verwaltet und stellen wir ihm hierdurch in jeder Beziehung das beste Zeugnis aus.”<sup>50</sup>

[We certify that Mr. Willie A(dolf). Fehr was an apprentice in our Firm between 15 April 1910 and 15 April 1912. Since that time he was head of the samples section of our London branch. From January 1914, he was entrusted with heading the sales office and accounts there. During his apprenticeship Mr. Fehr showed such intelligence, conscientiousness and industry in achieving a broad knowledge of commerce and merchandise, that we could soon promote him as manager of our London branch. Mr. Fehr administered this important post entirely to our satisfaction and we can commend him in every respect.]

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<sup>48</sup>VE. Photograph of William, Maria and Bertha Fehr at Weggis, Switzerland, 1914.

<sup>49</sup>VE. Passports and travel documents. Several biographical notes published later mention Fehr's return to the Cape as being *after* the Great War. Fehr himself gave the date as 1918 (VE. Letter from Fehr to G. L. Lewin, 8 December 1959.) Fehr's reference was to establishing himself at Cape Town, rather than to having worked elsewhere in the (since 1910) Cape Province.

<sup>50</sup>VE. Zeugnis von Edward Markus Export, Berlin, 1 Dezember 1914.

A letter of 1914 survived addressed to Carl Fehr at the Marine Hotel, Sea Point.<sup>51</sup> In the earlier part of 1914 Carl, Maria and Bertha were *en route* at the Cape, sailing for Europe aboard the *Tabora* from 30 April 1914.<sup>52</sup> According to the First-Class Passenger List, Carl, Maria and Bertha Fehr had boarded at Cape Town, as the *Tabora* had sailed outward *via* Suez. The *Tabora* was sunk during the war in 1915, as noted in Carl's [?] hand on a coloured postcard which showed the *Tabora* leaving Table Bay. The perilous nature of ocean voyages continued into the modern world of steam, speed and war.

Carl had been very anxious about the current state in Europe, as well as the potential difficulties attaching to his German origin. Being a British subject since 1887, Carl Fehr had written to the High Commissioner of the Union of South Africa at London. As it happened, Fehr could not have found a more sympathetic individual in that highly placed office. The incumbent of less than four months was none other than William Schreiner, a man well aware of his own German ancestry.<sup>53</sup> Schreiner's popularity was known to Fehr from the years of Afrikaner Bond activity back in Burgersdorp, as well as the former's term as Premier of the Colony from 1898 to 1900. Schreiner was, as ever, immensely conscientious in his new posting, even though the strain would help bring about his untimely death within five years. His personal concern was evident throughout his reply

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<sup>51</sup>VE. Letter from an unidentified correspondent at Marianhill, Natal, to Carl Fehr at Marine Hotel, Sea Point, 16 April 1914. The subject was Bushman [San] mural paintings.

<sup>52</sup>VE. "Die Deutsche Ost-Afrika-Linie, Passagier-Liste des Reichspostdampfers *Tabora*. Abfahrt: den 30 April 1914 von Swakopmund nach Hamburg."

<sup>53</sup>Walker, E. A., *W. P. Schreiner, a South African*, p. 365.

to Fehr, and it was appropriate to Schreiner's irrepressible good will.<sup>54</sup>

"The Imperial Government point out that the law does not permit of your being regarded as a British subject in the United Kingdom, since your naturalisation only has effect in South Africa.

I am again communicating with the Imperial Government, giving the needed certificate in your favour, inquiring about a Passport or letter which you could use in case of emergency, and pointing out that if and when you come to England your wife and daughter will accompany you.

I would, however, counsel your not leaving for England until you again hear from me with regard to some pass or letter which you might -- if it is procurable -- use in case of emergency [...]."<sup>55</sup>

Carl, Maria, William and Bertha Fehr returned to the Cape in 1915. From January, 1916, William had been employed by Messrs. Malcomess & Co., Ltd. of East London. He worked for the first quarter of that year as a salesman in the hardware department, then, to mid-1918, as their competent line traveller in "rough goods."<sup>56</sup>

William returned to Cape Town in April 1918, joining, "in important and

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<sup>54</sup>"I can hardly impress on you enough the tremendous trouble W[illiam] P[hilip] S[chreiner] took over every individual case which came to his notice [...] I am certain that his early death due to heart failure was simply caused by the worry and trouble he went through to make easy the path of others." Major E. B. Walker, *ibid.*, pp. 373-374.

<sup>55</sup>VE. Letter from Schreiner to Carl Fehr at Weggis, 22 February 1915. VE.

<sup>56</sup>VE. Testimonial from Messrs. Malcomess Ltd., 5 April 1918. A pocket address-book survived, in Fehr's hand, covering the region. According to [NLSA.] BG, 15 August 1889, p. 4, "Rough Goods" comprised raisins, jams and sweets, potatoes, meal, mealies, "Kaffir corn", bran, etc.

confidential capacities,"<sup>57</sup> The South African Nectar Tea Co., Ltd. William Fehr was at first general assistant to the managing director, and later head of their jute department.

"We have always found Mr. Fehr a man of strict integrity and excellent character. He has an excellent general business experience, and very exceptional business ability[...]."<sup>58</sup>

Thereafter Fehr discontinued using his middle name (Adolf) or initial, as shown by surviving documents, and his name no longer appeared Germanic. In mid-1918, aged 26, William had already presented himself at a military recruiting station to attempt his part in the war effort, but was exempted for three months as "temporarily unfit."<sup>59</sup> He was to become a chronic asthmatic in later life. Carl Fehr had been concerned with his own health and it appeared that William was similarly mindful, despite the fact that both Burgersdorp and Wiesbaden had each offered a salutary altitude and climate.

Carl Fehr in 1920 became one of the directors of Fehr, Gow & Co., Cape Town, including a contemporary from earlier days, C. A. Schweizer, who had kept a law practice at Burgersdorp. The others of the new company were William Wallace, [W. W.] Dickson Marquard, John Gow and William Fehr. The two latter were Managing Directors of the Firm, with Gow being responsible for orders and

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<sup>57</sup>VE. Testimonial from The South African Nectar Tea Co., Ltd., Thomas S. Somerville, Managing Director, 16 May 1919.

<sup>58</sup>VE. *ibid.*, p. 2. A further Testimonial from the Firm had it that "Mr. Fehr is shortly leaving us." 27 October 1919.

<sup>59</sup>VE. Union of South Africa. Headquarters: No. 1. Military District [The Castle], Cape Town, 5 June 1918.

travelling, while William Fehr wrote correspondence and kept the books.<sup>60</sup>

As a businessman at Cape Town, the twenty-eight year old William Fehr soon demonstrated his rigour in assessing commercial transactions, while even making practical suggestions for improvements drawing on his broad view of the context. In a particular case he put forward the comprehensive view that “a far more complete organisation in every detail of Office and Store are imperative,”<sup>61</sup> in order to establish a well-run and productive business. Foresight and thoroughness became characteristic (*vide* frontispiece).

While William looked after the family home *Fairhaven* at the coastal suburb of Sea Point, Carl Fehr with Maria and some family members resumed travelling to Europe. Conspicuous international affairs had taken Gordon Fair with his American wife to Switzerland, where they had joined the Fehrs during a summer holiday. William maintained regular correspondence and could share some sense of family unity, Alpine beauty and a recollection of childhood.

“We are very pleased to get a letter from you and thank you so much for writing each week. I forwarded your letter to Daddy as he found it necessary to remain longer in Berlin. In your next [letter] we hope to hear of the Belle Ombre dance [...]. On Sunday we had a trip on the Lake – Gordon, Esther, and Fred [Maskew?] and ourselves [Maria and Bertha] – the Steamer is large and has cane sofas spotlessly clean. There was music and excellent

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<sup>60</sup>VE. Memorandum of Agreement, October 1920. VE. There and subsequently William Fehr signed without his middle name or initial. Earlier travel documents were signed “W. A. Fehr.”

<sup>61</sup>VE. Copy of unsigned letter to H. J. C. Stephan, 5 June 1920. That letter may have been written by Fehr for use by his father.



dinner served....I was glad to hear you were keeping well and hope you really are and not only pretending to keep me from being anxious."<sup>62</sup>

Another letter regarding the same Swiss visit suggested the importance of Gordon's professional engagements, while not omitting nature's charms. Maria wrote to William.

"Gordon has decided that he cannot go to Constantinople until the 1<sup>st</sup> Sept. on account of the heat in August in Constantinople. He will have to be there two months, he is finishing his report on Austria, it is about a thousand pages. It was in German and had to be put into English and condensed which has been a lot of work."<sup>63</sup>

Within a decade William Fehr was appointed Sole Managing Director of Fehr & Co., at a salary of £1200 *per annum*, while the shareholders then were H. Wilson, W. W. D. Marquard, C. A. Schweizer and Mrs. A. T. Marquard.<sup>64</sup>

In the '20's William had been popular at the piano for dances.<sup>65</sup> Largely self-taught, he played throughout his life for his own enjoyment. A quantity of printed music was contained in the WFLG. Opposite<sup>66</sup> is a last photograph of all the Fehrs together. Carl with friend, Maria at the centre, Bertha and the first of her three children are seated, while standing are Gordon and Mrs. Fair, William

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<sup>62</sup>VE. Letter from Maria Fehr to William, 7 June 1921.

<sup>63</sup>VE. Letter from Maria Fehr to William Fehr, 28 June 1921.

<sup>64</sup>VE. Copy of *Draft Resolution*, 1 October 1931.

<sup>65</sup>Interview between author and Fehr's nieces, *i.e.* daughters of Bertha, 14 June 1999.

<sup>66</sup>VE. Photograph of the Fehr family, *ca.* 1928.

Fehr and Hans Classen, Bertha's husband. The photograph was taken not long before Maria's death in 1928.

Fehr, aged 39, would marry the beautiful Henriette ("Jetty") Nankin (b. 1897) of Paarl on 9 June 1931. Her parents were Herman Nankin (b. 1866) of Lithuania and Johanna Droomer (b. 1870) of the Netherlands. A daughter Vivienne was born to the Fehrs in 1932.

### III. Private to Public, 1934-1950.

According to recollections, the Fehr home at Sea Point, "Fairhaven," had contained some Africana pictures already in the late 1920's. An unidentified writer who had known William Fehr well confirmed the presence of Africana items in the 1920's.<sup>1</sup> William had been buying, sometimes risking to make telephone calls abroad in the process. At times the unidentified writer would take over a picture when William thought it was beyond his own means. At the Sea Point house the unidentified writer had often met Carl Fehr, as well as Dr. Walter Purcell. The latter was known as a connoisseur, while it seemed that the former was not particularly interested in art or Africana. The unidentified writer also noted that some persons thought William had inherited art from Carl and then sold it, to be able to purchase Africana pictures. Evidently William already had a notable collection before Carl Fehr died [in 1944], so that the question of an "inheritance" of art to be sold had not arisen. The unidentified writer wished merely to record the facts as remembered.<sup>2</sup>

William had responded sympathetically to Africana art, he wrote in 1958, but he was uneasy with the notion of being viewed as a collector.<sup>3</sup> Some of the early local pieces he had seen in museums prompted him to enquire about having reproductions made. He had been unaware of the quantity of good pieces then

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<sup>1</sup>VE. Letter in Afrikaans with illegible signature [J. Schuurink?] to Op't Hof, 17 February 1979.

<sup>2</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>WFLG. [Fehr, William] "The Fehr Collection," *Lantern*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 230-231.

still available on the market, or through the sale rooms. Dealers in art and antiques might, he feared, offer their goods at prohibitive prices, since a young man just starting out in the business world, with limited funds, should be careful of his spending.

Fehr had early discovered the necessity to browse and understand his chosen subject thoroughly.

“I learnt too that one’s relationship to a dealer is different from that of other kinds of business. Those who have not the experience of the special relationship of buyer and seller of antiques will find it hard to realize that it is the dealer who does the customer a favour when he agrees to let him have a really rare or choice piece [...].”<sup>4</sup>

Fehr was able initially to gather a few authentic pieces which sustained a numinous reflection of his own heritage. A list of 1936 recorded a quantity of contemporary pictures, particularly of a realist nature. There had survived little indication as to the sources of those paintings, some of which may have been acquired originally by Carl Fehr or his wife. Also listed in some detail was an already notable quantity of pictorial Africana,<sup>5</sup> all of which depicted Cape and Cape Town scenes. As no documentation has survived, some of those works may have been acquired at the Cape, as well as on a 1934 tour of cultural centres in Western Europe, during which William was recorded in Carl’s travel diary as having embarked for London. The list identified a number of key Africana works of high quality depicting inter-related subject matter from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially shipping. Those helped to set the standard of Fehr’s collecting for

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<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>*Vide* Appendix A. Much of that pictorial Africana found place in the Collection later.

decades to come, as:

“true collecting may be briefly defined as the intentional and selective gathering of related objects which, when assembled, form a unified and meaningful entity.”<sup>6</sup>

Those too were the roots of an important aspect of Fehr’s own foresight. He recorded in the list that among the original paintings, in oil or watercolour, appeared the sources of graphic versions made after them. Those in particular were Samuel Daniell’s *Boer returning from hunting* [VRFHE 333], and William Huggins’ *Man of War and East Indiaman in Table Bay* [VRFHE 26]. Fehr’s awareness was sharpened, and he grew watchful for other members of such rare and important couplings. One had been William Hodges’s *Cape Town and Table Mountain*, an aquatint of 1785. Eventually in the Collection would appear two earlier renderings of the same view by Hodges, one in oils [VRFHE 25], and the other in watercolour.

Toward the end of 1936 had been published the first public mention of Fehr’s Collection. In a popular South African magazine *The Pictorial*, of November that same year, appeared a page of illustrations, with brief letterpress, under the banner

“TREASURE TROVE, Early S. African Pictures in Mr. W. Fehr’s Collection.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>VE. Rigby, D. & E., *Lock, Stock and Barrel*, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup>VE. *The Pictorial*, November 1936, p. 65. On the facing page were two advertisements by Cape Town antique dealers who specialised in Africana, Messrs. Friedland’s Art Galleries, and Messrs. Maskew Miller, Ltd. The latter stated, “To all interested in Africana? Rare Books, Paintings, Aquatints, Engravings. The absorbing hobby of collecting Antiques is a very fascinating one and has the advantage of being a lucrative investment. Many Books and Pictures dealing with South Africa have, during the last ten to fifteen years, enhanced 100 per cent, and the rarer items are more difficult to secure. We pride ourselves that our Collection of “Africana” is the finest and most varied for Sale in the world [...]”

The text continued that:

“Probably one of the most interesting private collections of Africana is owned by Mr. W. Fehr, of Cape Town. *Mr. Fehr has specialised in original oils and water-colours by painters of the nineteenth century and has in his possession no less than thirty originals, many of them by such well-known painters as Daniell, Huggins, Baines, l’Ones [sic] and Bowler. He also has collected from time to time a number of very good early prints and lithographs of the Cape.*”<sup>8</sup>

Two most interesting pictures, the article continued, were Lady Eyre’s vast panoramic watercolour of the town, and Schott’s portrait of the old Fish Market there.<sup>9</sup> The four illustrated paintings bore the following captions, already indicative of Fehr’s concern for historic pertinence and social liveliness, as well as the imaginative association of three-dimensional objects with the painted image.

*“(Above) A delightful water-colour in Mr. Fehr’s collection, by Thomas William Bowler, showing a sailing vessel [the *St. Lawrence*] of the year 1861 entering Table Bay. Note the inevitable piece of wreckage floating in the sea. It was the north-west winds that wrought such havoc with shipping in those days. [Inv. C 29]*

*(Left) Of a much earlier date, probably around 1812, is this picture of a British East Indiaman and man-o’-war in Table Bay by W. J. Huggins, who later became the official marine painter of ships to William IV. [Inv. CG 36]*

*(Below, left) South-easter in Table Bay, painted by Thomas Baines in 1842, the year in which he arrived in South Africa*

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<sup>8</sup>*ibid.* Author’s italics.

<sup>9</sup>*ibid.* Vide Appendix A regarding those references and the works represented in the magazine article.

[aboard the *Olivia*]. [Inv. CG 34]

Another interesting picture appears in the photograph below.

It is Thomas Baines' frequently reproduced picture of the Loyal Fingo (1851). Note the resemblance of the [adjacent] old Voortekker [*sic*] gun and powder-horn to those in the picture."<sup>10</sup> [Inv. CA 1]

That Fehr had chosen to specialise in earlier 19<sup>th</sup>-century painting showed a reflection of the era during which his own immediate ancestors had established themselves at the Cape. If those important acquisitions had been made before and during the visit to Europe and London in 1934, Fehr would have had opportunity to secure Africana of greater antiquity, yet he chose vivid 19<sup>th</sup> century pictures. Cost was of necessity to be considered since economic depression had also gripped commerce in the Union. Fehr's collecting was private, narrative and specific, drawing on the best quality available, both in terms of art and historical interest. Yet there was no record of an encyclopædic and chronological overview of any extensive period, or the thorough collecting of other antiques.

"I think being an acute businessman he [Fehr] would have early learned the difference between the *pseudo* and the genuine. You can tell, if you've got any kind of eye, what is old wood and what is new wood; learn the marks on china, sometimes they actually aren't genuine, you have to be careful. But then you can learn all those fairly quickly."<sup>11</sup>

William Fehr had for some time enjoyed the friendship of Dr. Walter Purcell, himself a noted collector of oriental porcelain and Cape antiques. His father, Dr.

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<sup>10</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>Millar [Collier], Joy, interview with author, 9 Feb 1996.

William Frederick Purcell, was a well-known Cape personality, much appreciated for his engaging character and enquiring nature.<sup>12</sup> Though born in England, Purcell senior was schooled at the Cape. His scientific education culminated with the award of a doctorate at Berlin. Again at the Cape he married Anna Faure and their first son, Walter, was born in 1899. It was he who would become a lasting friend and artistic mentor to William Fehr. While working at the South African Museum, Purcell senior always acknowledged scientific contributions from amateur naturalists. Among those had been Dr. Kannemeyer of Burgersdorp, an echo of the cultural development of that town,<sup>13</sup> and a sign of the close relationship of science and culture.

Further to his scientific accomplishments, Purcell senior made lasting contributions to the appreciation and preservation of art and history at the Cape. This would be a direct influence on his son Walter, who continued his father's love of old Cape furniture and oriental porcelain and would himself collect many fine examples. Through their friendship Walter Purcell became in turn a considerable influence on William Fehr in those fields.

It was at the time of his joining the staff of the South African Museum that Purcell senior was introduced to "the most famous *salon* of the Capetown of the latter half of the nineteenth century."<sup>14</sup> Purcell had been promptly taken into Mrs. Marie Koopmans-de Wet's enlightened circle. "She expected great things from

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<sup>12</sup>WFLG. Purcell, A., ed., *W. F. Purcell* [1866-1919].

<sup>13</sup>*ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup>*ibid.*, p. 1.

him in the special lines of study and research which he had made his own."<sup>15</sup> He also discovered that she was especially interested in "the reputation and prestige of her own people."<sup>16</sup> Though Purcell stood outside politics, he was a keen patriot who understood the plight of the Transvaal facing the "aggressive newcomers" during the Second Anglo-Boer War. Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet, as a friend of Kruger,

"strongly defended his [Kruger's] cause and inspired all those with whom she came in contact with a fervent national feeling."<sup>17</sup>

Kruger had also been the first official to make nature conservation in Southern Africa a legislated actuality. Love of the land and its people also implied the love of its fauna and flora, an inseparable issue developed over ensuing decades by many concerned individuals, including William Fehr, in terms of active nature conservation enhanced by scientific methods.

Purcell senior was brought into a closer understanding and a deep appreciation of Cape history and its cultural estate. According to Mrs. Koopmans's will, the Theological Seminary at Stellenbosch was to have been a beneficiary of her and her sister's antique collection. That particular codicil of the will was overturned by the Supreme Court, and the goods were put up for private sale. So as not to lose those treasures, and to preserve the Cape Town house, a committee had been formed with Dr. and Mrs. Purcell as very active members. That committee gathered together a substantial amount of money which included subscriptions from the Government and the Municipal Council which helped to save the house

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<sup>15</sup>*ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup>*ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup>*ibid.*, p. 3.

and artwork, one or two pieces of which found their way into Fehr's Collection. An example was thereby set for national and local authorities to take seriously their commitment to the conservation of the already endangered cultural heritage. Entirely as a labour of love, Dr. Purcell accepted responsibility for the acquisition of appropriate items, based on his knowledge of old Cape wares and his personal appreciation of Mrs. Koopmans-de Wet. But the house itself, in a threatened position in central Cape Town, needed much attention. Purcell senior had been meticulous in his overseeing of the conservation of the building. It was so well revitalized as to be a model by which future restorations, a public concern then still in its infancy, would be undertaken. Indirectly William Fehr would be himself a beneficiary of Purcell senior's idealism and enthusiasm in the historical sphere. The house and the collection within, themselves memorials of Purcell's dedicated concern,<sup>18</sup> had come under the control of the South African Museum in 1913. As with Purcell senior, so too Purcell junior continued the love of old Cape art. Walter Purcell and Fehr remained close friends for decades, as their interests were complimentary. It has already been noted that Purcell was often at the Fehr's Sea Point house at the time when William Fehr had come to his novitiate in collecting during the late 1920's.<sup>19</sup>

By the mid-1930's Fehr had been earnestly gathering quality Africana pictures. Furniture and other articles, as well as Oriental ceramics and porcelain, both ancient and that made for export to the West, also made their gradual appearance. Numerous pictures which ultimately entered Fehr's Collection, to

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<sup>18</sup>*ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup>VE. Letter in Afrikaans with illegible signature [J. Schuurink?] to Op't Hof, 19 February 1979.

be housed at Castle Good Hope<sup>20</sup> and the old house “Rust-en-Vreugd”, could be traced through surviving commercial correspondence, insurance agreements, customs clearances, sale receipts and personal letters. Among those were numbers of a London agent’s reports on potential acquisitions, carefully transcribed for Fehr in typescript on foolscap with multiple carbon-copies. As with the remaining Fehr Papers, no systematic method of sorting and storage had survived, other than under the most general categories, e.g., Africana and other art; Fehr & Co.; personal matters concerning insurance, investments, tax returns, etc. Detailed catalogues of the art were not kept. Fehr had found such labour for his own use both uncongenial and tedious. He recalled that during the ensuing period he had “purchased very little at auction sales and even less from private individuals.”<sup>21</sup> Especially with the pictures, direct acquisition, seeing and purchasing from the seller either abroad or in the Union, was matched in quantity, if not quality, by indirect acquisition via agents surveying the field for Fehr from London. In both forms of acquisition, Fehr remained in most cases anonymous. Relying on agents, whether formally or informally engaged, proved to be a fruitful strategy for Fehr, in transactions both with dealers and individuals in the Union and abroad. The presence of a knowledgeable, dedicated and eventually well-known collector bidding at sales was avoided. Fehr did not wish to provoke attention among those present. Others had bid on Fehr’s behalf at

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<sup>20</sup> Author’s rendering of *Het Casteel de Goede Hoop*, where *het* (the Dutch neuter definite article) and *de* (the Dutch masculine and feminine definite article) were omitted in the English form Castle Good Hope. The author suggests that *de* had earlier been misinterpreted as the possessive preposition of Romance languages, leading inappropriately to Castle of Good Hope, analogous to Cape of Good Hope. The variant form Cape Town Castle is anachronistic, misleading and made no allusion to the VOC who had built the Castle.

<sup>21</sup> “The Fehr Collection,” *Lantern*, Vol. VII, No. 3, p. 231.

sales.<sup>22</sup> Sydney Mullne, noted collector of antique clocks, miniatures and Africana (especially Cape silver), wrote ca. 1952:

"At a Wynberg sale some years ago  
the place was at sixes and sevens,  
A Bowler was sold for £200, was it Fehr?  
No, by gad, it was Evans!"<sup>23</sup>

(Evans & Co. dealt in antiques and fine art at Cape Town.) Fehr also made regular peripatetic excursions into the City from the premises of Fehr & Co. in Riebeeck Street, often with Alfred Gordon-Brown, Purcell or others. The circuits included lunch at Stuttaford's Department Store, hence the appellation of the "Stuttaford's Scouts." Bookshops, including, after the War, that of Anthony Clarke in Long Street, sales and antique dealers' rooms were part of the rounds. Such excursions were part of the process of browsing and developing expertise in the fields chosen by Fehr many years before.

During that period Fehr pursued a frequent and regular correspondence, by sea-mail, air-mail and cable, with the London firms of Messrs. Walker's Galleries,<sup>24</sup> Messrs. Francis Edwards,<sup>25</sup> and Messrs. William Sandover & Co.<sup>26</sup> Messrs. Francis

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<sup>22</sup>Interview between Basil Robinson and author, 14 February 1996.

<sup>23</sup>Mullne's verse from Dr. Jean Branford, daughter of Alfred Gordon-Brown, 6 January 1999. Mullne had produced a Catalogue of his own Collection. *Vide ANN/AAN*, September 1953, Vol. X. No. 4, pp. 145-146, where it was considered "most important to record the history of ownership of antiques," as Mullne had done. Since the collecting of Africana, in particular, was on the increase in the Union, the usefulness of quality guides was evident. "May other collectors follow in Mr. Mullne's footsteps and make available catalogues of their collections!"

<sup>24</sup>New Bond Street.

<sup>25</sup>83, Marylebone High Street, London, W. 1.

<sup>26</sup>St. Mary Axe and later New Bond Street.

Edwards had been of invaluable service to Sydney Mendelssohn when collecting the Africana which became his gift to South Africa in 1910. In 1934 Fehr, with his wife and father<sup>27</sup>, had toured through several major cultural centres in Europe. A surviving notebook in Carl's hand served as a cultural diary. The tour included Nice (from 22 April 1934), Genoa, Pisa, Rome, Siena, Florence, Venice, Milan, Lugano, Lucern, Paris and ultimately London. There were included notable orchestral and operatic performances, as well as visits to famous sites, museums and collections. Carl Fehr recorded in the diary a specially fruitful day in Paris, and a rare family allusion.

"Sunday. 3/6/34. Paris. Louvre[.] Bought picture reproduct[ion]  
Portrait Lucrezia Crivelli by Leonardo da Vinci [*sic*], very much like  
the painting of my mother in likeness. Evening Toscanini Wagner  
Meistersinger."<sup>28</sup>

Having lived in London for a couple of years before the Great War, William Fehr had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with the British capital. There were opportunities during the 1934 tour<sup>29</sup> to make personal contact with London print, art and book dealers like Walker's and Edwards, while setting his system of agency in motion, before sailing home to the distant Union. Fehr was resolved to seek the best expert advice in the course of collecting and restoring, having already established relations with a few experienced fellow collectors in South Africa. Capt. Parker's booklet on prints was a handy source of information for Fehr in a

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<sup>27</sup>Maria Fehr had died in 1928.

<sup>28</sup>VE. Carl Fehr's tour diary, 1934.

<sup>29</sup>VE. "Paris 1. 6. [June]. 1934...Willie went to London." Entry in Carl Fehr's tour diary. Fehr senior arrived at London on 7 June 1934, and remained there until at least 30 June 1934.

field which still had a relatively limited following in the Union.<sup>30</sup>

One letter from a partner at Walker's set the tone of the period and the process. He was happy to have received nine parcels from Fehr.<sup>31</sup> Numbers of such food parcels were sent from Fehr & Co., or Fehr's franchise "A. B. C." Groceries, in the difficult circumstances following the war. When the German bombing of London had been underway, one dealer informed Fehr of damage to their premises and to the fact that most of their staff were away in wartime duty.<sup>32</sup>

While looking back to better times, the writer continued that the brisk art and antique trade had done poorly after war was declared. Though the first six months were barren, business improved steadily, while "art exhibitions in London are well attended and life is more normal."<sup>33</sup> A pair of unidentified Baines oils were offered to Fehr at £95.0.0, while a Bowler painting stood at £35.0.0. Both Bowler and Baines created some of the most accomplished art works done at the Cape in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and both were represented in the 1936 list of Fehr's pictures. Photographs of the three paintings were sent to Fehr to assist in deciding, while Whitehead was pleased to send an unspecified Huggins painting

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<sup>30</sup>VE. Parker, Capt. Harry, FRGS, FRHistS, *The A B C of Print and Picture Collecting*, London, n.d. [1930's]. Also among William Fehr's library (VE.) were Anon. *A few Words on Art...a Short History of the Printsellers' Association*, London, n.d. (1881); Rigby, Douglas & Elizabeth, *Lock, Stock and Barrel, the Story of Collecting*, Philadelphia, 1944. Over 200 of Fehr's historical and specialised collector's reference books, in addition to a large number of related smaller works and catalogues, would be included posthumously by his wife and daughter in WFLG.

<sup>31</sup>VE. Letter from R. Whitehead to Fehr, 24 March 1942, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>33</sup>*ibid.*

to Fehr at Cape Town. In those and other cases there survived no indication as to the subjects of the works concerned, but they were most likely Africana in subject. In general some pictures discussed may be recognized by a title, measurements, medium or remarks on the subject matter, though others can be precisely identified by entries in sale catalogues. Such were some of the problems made by lacunæ in surviving correspondence. Some of the firms with which Fehr had commerce continued well beyond that era, though their relevant records were not kept, as with Francis Edwards, Ltd., Maggs, and Appleby. The same letter<sup>34</sup> was also witness to Fehr's abiding and revealing interest in the watercolours of Thos. Rowlandson whose vigorous satirical illustrations of English social life around 1800 provided a platform from which to view aspects of the contemporary British Cape.

Casting his net further, Fehr had already initiated a series of advertisements in British newspapers and journals intended for a less general readership. One writer, F. C. Jordan, engaged as agent, informed Fehr of progress to date. Jordan named six publications in which the notices had been placed, after consulting London advertising experts, including *Country Life* and *The Spectator*.<sup>35</sup> Those publications represented for Fehr a means of access to others who, like himself, were interested not only in the æsthetics of pictures or their collectors' interest, but also their historic Southern African content.

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<sup>34</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>35</sup>VE. Letter from F. C. Jordan, William Sandover & Co., 9, St. Mary Axe, London, E. C. 3, to Fehr, 24 January 1946. Jordan added in closing that "we are still more or less on an austerity diet here, and although this actually calls for no complaint in the conditions prevailing, the relief afforded by your gift parcels is highly appreciated." Fehr was consistently generous with assistance.

*The [London] Times* and *South Africa* were also vehicles for advertising and Jordan posted Fehr a cutting as example:

"WANTED, early South African Pictures, Oils, Prints, Maps, &c.;  
good prices paid -- Write Box B. 1999, *The Times*, E. C. 4."<sup>36</sup>

Jordan explained that the line he followed was to locate worthwhile sources via quality publications which were considered seriously by their readers. Certain newspapers like *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, and the *Daily Express* were also involved in Fehr's quest.<sup>37</sup>

Jordan of Sandover & Co. was not like the art-specialists with whom Fehr had regular dealings. Sandover & Co. were, according to their letterhead,

"Buyers for all / Dominion Markets / and Colonies. / Overseas Agents &  
/ Sales Organisation / Hardware. / Engineering & / General."<sup>38</sup>

Jordan was always fastidious in his commerce with Fehr, though only rarely, and tactfully, voiced any opinion as to the artwork *per se*.

Straightforward dealers' letters to Fehr were usually brief, factual and often related to specific catalogue items. For example, Messrs. Francis Edwards, Ltd., wrote informing him that an album by an important amateur artist of India with Cape

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<sup>36</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 31 January 1946. The source of the cutting was not identified. The following advertisement [VE.] appeared in *Country Life*, 22 February 1946, "Early South African Prints, Water Colours, Oils, etc. Good prices paid. -- Write: Box ZU 199, DEACONS ADVERTISING, 36, Leadenhall Street, E.C.3." Fehr suggested a variation: "Private Collector wishes acquire early pictures and prints of Cape; also interested rare books and maps." VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 13 April 1946.

<sup>37</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 31 January 1946

<sup>38</sup>*ibid.*

connections, Sir Charles D'Oyly, which had been ordered by Fehr had already been sold. The firm then offered Fehr an unsigned watercolour of The Parade and the Keyzersgracht of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century in Cape Town.<sup>39</sup> Typically, the firm was prepared to send the work to Fehr for his approval. When Fehr saw the watercolour he felt it to be "unfortunately more of an historical document than of any pictorial value,"<sup>40</sup> and he decided to keep it. Fehr requested Sandover & Co. to pay from his account the £25 asked by Messrs. Edwards for the picture.

Fehr had set out two of his principal qualities for appropriate artwork, namely historical and pictorial merit, providing Jordan with a general guide:

"(1) Pictures, whether prints or originals, dating after 1880 are of doubtful interest, and, although there are important exceptions, it is best not to post without first submitting particulars. (2) Books printed after 1850 come into the more doubtful categories. (3) Maps printed after 1800 at the latest are not likely to be of interest from a Collector's point of view."<sup>41</sup>

Photography *per se* was of no interest to Fehr the collector, but it remained for him a valuable documentary asset. Fehr described the model method of payment in the process of acquisition. Sandover & Co. (usually Jordan) would draw a sum on Fehr's account to be paid to the seller. In turn, Fehr would be kept informed of his account's status, and would respond accordingly. Jordan, in the efficient pursuit of his commission, hoped to hear that his efforts had resulted in a real

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<sup>39</sup>VE. Letter from Francis Edwards to Fehr, 1 March 1946.

<sup>40</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Francis Edwards, 6 May 1946.

<sup>41</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 20 March 1946.

"find" for Fehr. The extra paper work involved was incidental to the service,<sup>42</sup> which included receiving post and items from potential sellers, informing Fehr of the same and either returning or forwarding as required, while settling the transactions or reinstating material found to be of no interest. On the last point, Fehr occasionally stated that though not himself requiring a specific item sent on approval, he may have been able to place it elsewhere in the Union. Concern was then being expressed by local experts over the export of Africana from the Union. Decisions to conserve Africana, it was thought, were to be framed by the idea that, contrary to hoarding it, people in other lands should also be able to appreciate South Africa's past, since culture was an international matter.<sup>43</sup> It was hoped that appropriate official controlling legislation would be put in place as in other countries better endowed with cultural treasures than the Union.<sup>44</sup> Fehr had been able thus to increase the amount of quality Africana in the hands of private collectors in South Africa, noting that his only significant competitors in the field were the Africana Museum in Johannesburg and the Union Government itself, via South Africa House in London. There had also been a few active buyers in Rhodesia [later Zimbabwe].<sup>45</sup>

As to sorting wheat from chaff, of which the latter was regularly represented in

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<sup>42</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan at Sandover & Co. to Fehr, 1 March 1946.

<sup>43</sup>Vide [Kennedy, F. K.] "The export of Africana," *ANN / AAN*, Vol. 3, No. 4, September 1946, p. 99.

<sup>44</sup>*ibid.* p. 100.

<sup>45</sup>VE. Letter from Africana Museum to Fehr, 30 December 1943; VE. Letter from Fehr to Africana Museum, 5 January 1944.

the process, Fehr gave Jordan<sup>46</sup> a variety of formalised replies whereby persons offering items were placed into a numerical sequence. The system helped to reduce the cumbersome apparatus of identities and addresses in correspondence. In his usual crisp tone and articulate manner, Fehr gave further advice to Jordan that items, as they were announced, should be numbered consecutively to help facilitate the process of acquisition.<sup>47</sup>

Fehr was mindful of the detailed work required of Jordan, but, in the spirit of the chase, the collector felt "the possibilities are that something really useful may come of it."<sup>48</sup> While in pursuit of art as history, Fehr was always mindful of commerce and its etiquette. He had no wish to "fall out with the regular Dealers" with whom he enjoyed sound relations. Rather than fuel adverse competition, in terms of the advertisement, he asked Jordan to consider "inserting the words: 'Private Collector requires &c. &c.'"<sup>49</sup> There Fehr added, "instead of Maps I should be inclined to mention Books." It was usual for maps to appear originally in books or atlases.

The entire process of search and acquisition was one of detailed communication over a great distance, bridging by the best means available both time and space. Time had been of more pressing significance to Fehr, who had become thoroughly preoccupied with his collecting. Surface post was always a matter of

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<sup>46</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 8 February 1946.

<sup>47</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>48</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, undated [February 1946].

<sup>49</sup>*ibid.*

14 days and more, particularly if there were parcels or crates with attendant customs papers. Air letters could be exchanged in a week, while cables involved a day or two. Fehr's transcripts of that commercial correspondence provided, in most cases, the only sources for the *provenance* of pictorial Africana acquired by Fehr. Speed was also desirable so as not to inconvenience sellers, or to clutter Jordan's office with prints, paintings, maps and books in transit. It was hoped to achieve a high standard of quality in an admittedly unpredictable system of collecting, apart from that with established dealers. Unnecessary expense was also a factor in those exchanges, though there had been some exceptions to the rule, as shown below. The examples of acquisition given here are by no means exhaustive, but were selected for their sense of continuum, their conversational nature and their identification of several specific works which eventually entered Fehr's Collection.

Fehr would soon be able to describe a personal motive to his collecting, in that "each successive item was filling a gap, and if it were not secured, the gap might never be filled."<sup>50</sup> The greatest number of his pictures would be "brought back from oversea, where they were being dispersed."<sup>51</sup> Also, Fehr was inspired in his heroic pursuit as he "had a feeling of missionary zeal"<sup>52</sup> to complete the work he had begun. For those potent reasons, Fehr's Collection, ultimately acquired by the nation, presented a uniquely coherent image of South African history.

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<sup>50</sup>VE. "The Fehr Collection," *Lantern*, Vol. VII, No. 3, p. 231.

<sup>51</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>52</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

In August 1946, Jordan wrote to Fehr concerning recent responses to an advertisement, including Item 36 from Col. R. B. Turbutt who had offered what were taken to be six old paintings of Cape scenery.<sup>53</sup> That letter, for example, elaborated on 12 other items, all at various stages of the acquisition process, from initiation to conclusion. With the passage of time, Jordan became more adept at winnowing items for Fehr's consideration.

Fehr's reply was hopeful, accommodating, even informative through his natural intellectual generosity. He had thought that item to be just the sort of thing the advertisement should help turn up. As some settlers at the Cape had decided to return to Britain in decades past, there was a strong chance of uncovering works in which descendants of those families had no interest.<sup>54</sup> In later years Fehr would be much concerned by the neglect of cultural heritage, whether individual, collective or national.

Fehr had inquired after more data on the paintings to help identify them and Jordan<sup>55</sup> passed on to Fehr yet more tantalising news. The pictures were relatively large and were contained within their original frames. Though the artist was unknown, the paintings were of "scenes in Cape Colony in the early days," having been bought at the Cape in 1875 when they were already old. Jordan had received that information from the Colonel, which was passed on to Fehr.

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<sup>53</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 9 August 1946.

<sup>54</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan at, 15 August 1946. That letter discussed 9 other items.

<sup>55</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 2 September 1946. Fifteen other items were described in that letter.

By then very keen, Fehr elected to have a professional photographer engaged to take good quality pictures, at reasonable cost, from the Colonel's evidently large and heavy paintings.<sup>56</sup> Jordan was asked to obtain the seller's co-operation, and that the resulting photographs should be posted to Fehr by air-mail. It was felt that an appropriate valuation would reveal itself on inspection. As it happened, correspondence was exchanged on many other items via Jordan, but the Colonel's pending items continued to interest Fehr. He mentioned that posting out only the negatives might speed the process, as they could just as well be printed in Cape Town.<sup>57</sup> Fehr emphasized that

"I am particularly interested in these Pictures because he [the Colonel] states that a relation purchased them in 1875 and that they were bought then as being old....I have a friend in London at the moment<sup>58</sup> who might be induced to go and see them, or he [the Colonel] may agree to them being taken to London for inspection."<sup>59</sup>

As before, several letters were exchanged without Jordan achieving something

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<sup>56</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 10 September 1946. In that letter 8 other items were discussed.

<sup>57</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 14 October 1946. In that letter were discussed 11 other items, queries as to advertising and Jordan's work, as well as a request to pay, on Fehr's behalf, for some unspecified maps from Francis Edwards, Ltd.

<sup>58</sup>Vivian W. Hiller, OBE (b. 1901, King William's Town.) Son of Harry Hiller an engineer, who was born not far from Chicago and was later employed to help build Cape railways. When Vivian was still an infant his mother died. Her own mother brought up the child. He studied at Dale College, King William's Town. Harry Hiller fell in the Great War in 1918. Vivian Hiller settled in Rhodesia where he founded the Central African Archives. Hiller and Fehr had met at Bulawayo. [The late Mrs. Valarie Hiller in interview with author, 26 January 1999.] Publications from the Central African Archives by Hiller were included in WFLG.

<sup>59</sup>*op. cit.*

positive to report concerning the Colonel. Fehr was informed<sup>60</sup> that the Colonel, who "lives in an isolated part of the country," had sent the paintings off to a professional photographer to produce large prints. Fehr was glad to receive that information and felt confident, in anticipation of the all-important photographs, that a significant acquisition was shortly to be made, but he cautioned that "one can never tell until particulars are available."<sup>61</sup>

Several letters later Jordan informed Fehr that the long-awaited negatives had arrived with a note from the Colonel and the photographer's account for 6 guineas, more than double the original estimate by Fehr. The Colonel wrote that the sum was moderate under the circumstances of the photographer's having travelled by car. Table Mountain had supposedly featured in most of the paintings, and the Colonel was confident that other topographical features could be identified.<sup>62</sup>

Jordan hoped that the expense had been justified by the results, but Fehr's reaction indicated otherwise. The Colonel had been mistaken, Fehr wrote, and the supposedly South African scenes were more likely of the Orient and even Italy.<sup>63</sup> Fehr was certain that the Colonel had acted in good faith, but from the outset the matter had been flawed by misapprehension. The pictures were

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<sup>60</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 28 October 1946. Only three items were mentioned there.

<sup>61</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 5 November 1946. In that letter 17 other items were considered.

<sup>62</sup>VE. Letter to Fehr from Jordan, 12 November 1946. The letter dealt only with that item.

<sup>63</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 19 November 1946.

incorrectly described as being "scenes in the Cape Colony in the early days."<sup>64</sup> Fehr was fully prepared to have the Africana Museum in Johannesburg, and other institutions, give further support to his assessment. He had also, for the Colonel's benefit, given the names of four "well known Dealers in Africana Pictures,"<sup>65</sup> as well as that of Vivian Hiller, who was himself then visiting London.<sup>66</sup> Hiller had been another good friend of Fehr who was well versed in Africana.

"Hiller would go to dealers all over London and he would be looking for Rhodesiana, which I think in those days was pretty easy to find. But he would be also looking on the side for things about the Cape, Africana, for Willie, and would let Willie know."<sup>67</sup>

Fehr dealt with a further three items in his letter to Jordan which concluded,

"P.S. Do not worry if you cannot get a refund or any portion of the costs of the photographs from Col. Turbutt. -- It is all in the game."

That was a rare expression of Fehr's own stance toward collecting by that or any other method, frustrated by the current case. In general he kept himself thoroughly informed to avoid unnecessary risk, potential errors and excessive cost.

Toward the end of 1946, the first year of that system of mixed success, gratitude was expressed to Jordan by Fehr, who advised that advertising should then be limited to the publications which provided the most fruitful results. Dealers, Fehr

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<sup>64</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 2 September 1946.

<sup>65</sup>All at London: Messrs. Walter T. Spence; Walker's Galleries, Ltd.; Francis Edwards, Ltd.; The Parker Galleries.

<sup>66</sup>Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 8 February 1946.

<sup>67</sup>Hiller, Valerie, interview with Author, 26 January 1999.

felt, were "still the most likely sources for better items."<sup>68</sup>

Several good pieces had, nevertheless, been acquired by Fehr in a process which continued over several years. Fehr had visited London and parts of the Continent again in 1950, and Jordan continued their correspondence to at least 1954. In addition to the search for Africana pictures, both Fehr & Co., Ltd., and Sandover & Co., Ltd., had been engaged in commercial enterprise in groceries and small goods, though the details have not been preserved. Fehr wrote:

"I am relieved to feel that we have put our House in order concerning Indents from all over the World because we are facing a peculiar position in this country [the Union]. Goods are still scarce and delivery dates are indefinite in many lines [of goods]....The cost of living has gone too high to make free spending possible and it is unlikely that Salaries and Wages can be raised further to meet the increased costs...."<sup>69</sup>

Jordan replied that he and his firm were "particularly interested in conditions prevailing in your country [the Union], whose prosperity to some extent, means ours."<sup>70</sup> Commercial dealings abroad were routine matters for Fehr & Co. in a time of post-war financial stringency.

With regard to collecting, after showing their initial interest some respondents did not proceed with the matter of further enquiry and sale, having either decided against parting with their items, or appreciated that the works offered had no

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<sup>68</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 3 December 1946. Subsequent post was to the new address, Bevis Marks House, Bevis Marks, London, E. C. 3.

<sup>69</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>70</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 10 December 1946.

Southern African connection. Some processes of indirect acquisition, as with Col. Turbutt, became quite involved, while others were less so.

In suggesting responses to prospective sellers for Jordan's benefit, Fehr sent a formal reply<sup>71</sup> to an earlier offer, stating that the seller could allow works to be sent to Fehr on approval, and if unpurchased the works would be returned in a sound state. Fehr needed to know all the details which may have been available of the works, including all the names of artists, engravers and printers which would be included in graphic works.<sup>72</sup> Fehr would thereby be in a better position to assess or discuss the works at Cape Town.

Jordan wrote that a certain transaction had been settled like many others: "I have remitted [...] the sum of £4. 19. 0. and have his receipt."<sup>73</sup> As was usual Fehr remained unknown to the sellers.

Other items came to be diverted along the way. Fehr was offered the following by Jordan. A Mrs. Salmon of London proposed a pencil drawing of Rondebosch in 1820 done by her grandmother who, it was said, had studied [at some time] under the earlier-mentioned Sir Charles D'Oyly. The dimensions of the work were given.<sup>74</sup> But before Jordan could finish his letter Mrs. Salmon had contacted him saying that she had earlier offered the drawing to the South African

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<sup>71</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 8 February 1946.

<sup>72</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 13 April 1946.

<sup>73</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 26 April 1946.

<sup>74</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 4 July 1946. Six other items were discussed in that letter.

Government. After some time they had come back to Mrs. Salmon, on the very day she had written to Jordan, and the picture was purchased as originally agreed. Fehr was disappointed, but the matter had not yet been closed. It might not have been the Government itself who had bought the picture, Fehr suggested, but rather an individual in South Africa House who might yet part with it.<sup>75</sup> The tone of Fehr's letter prompted Jordan to act by contacting Mrs. Salmon.<sup>76</sup> Fehr remained keen "to hear should she say anything more on the subject."<sup>77</sup> The prognosis, however, remained dark in that Mrs. Salmon found out that the picture had indeed already been sent to "a Department of the Union Government in South Africa."<sup>78</sup> Fehr's reply to Jordan's letter closed the affair: "I note contents, and, unfortunately, a good item has been lost."<sup>79</sup>

On occasion Fehr made use of experienced restorers and framers in London, if he was certain that the pieces concerned were of significance. In mid-1947 Jordan routinely informed Fehr<sup>80</sup> of the most recent responses to an advertisement which appeared in the [*London*] *Times*:

"Item 83. Commander W. E. Prowse, R. N. He offers a picture of Cape Town and Table Mountain from the sea, Subject, the Castle Battery

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<sup>75</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 29 July 1946. In that letter four other items were discussed.

<sup>76</sup> VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 9 August 1946. Eleven other items were discussed.

<sup>77</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 15 August 1946. Nine further items were discussed.

<sup>78</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 2 September 1946. Fifteen other items were dealt with there.

<sup>79</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 10 September 1946. Eight other items received attention in that letter.

<sup>80</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, copy undated [late June 1947]. Four other items were discussed.

saluting J - X L N C Sir Henry Pottinger<sup>81</sup> at his landing from the str. Haddington, by Thos. Baines, dated January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1847. Size 33 ins. X 23 ins., in a gilt frame 3 ins. wide. It does not appear to have any renovation."

Fehr replied that he knew the painting [*cf.* VRFHE 12] offered by the Commander, and awaited hearing the price.<sup>82</sup> In time the Commander again made contact with Jordan, to whom he wrote, "...if you can offer me £100 or as near as possible for it, I shall be glad to consider the same."<sup>83</sup> Fehr was already convinced that "this is a very important item,"<sup>84</sup> though not at the price asked. The picture was an eye-witness account of the event. Fehr explained that he knew the picture since it had been one of those painted in duplicate by Baines.<sup>85</sup> More letters and many items later, Fehr sent off a photograph of his own duplicate version of the Baines painting for the Commander's benefit,<sup>86</sup> and Jordan duly obliged.<sup>87</sup> In response the Commander noted that the photograph from Fehr was somewhat different from the version in England, notably in the ships, though the Mountain and Bay were "exactly the same." The Commander

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<sup>81</sup>b. 1789, first Governor of Hong Kong. Governor and High Commissioner of Cape Colony 27 January 1847 to 1 December 1847. Afterwards Governor of Madras. Died in retirement at Malta in 1856.

<sup>82</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 3 July 1947. Five other items were discussed there.

<sup>83</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 11 July 1947. Two other items were discussed.

<sup>84</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 15 July 1947. Twelve other items were discussed in that letter.

<sup>85</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 24 July 1947. One other item was discussed there.

<sup>86</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 21 October 1947. In that letter two other items were discussed.

<sup>87</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 30 October 1947. Eight other items were discussed there.

deduced that, according to the dates on the paintings, his was the original work.<sup>88</sup> He accepted the offer of £50, while Jordan was obliged to see to packing and shipping. The Commander wrote that he thought that Fehr's picture had been restored while his own had not.<sup>89</sup>

The matter seemed to be so nearly at a satisfactory conclusion that Fehr could "advise the despatch unframed and unglazed."<sup>90</sup> Jordan had written to the Commander asking after the condition of the painting. In return the Commander repeated his desire that the picture be inspected for the buyer's benefit, and that at that stage sending it up to London would be most difficult. "I am no longer young enough to do this myself," the Commander wrote, and moving the picture would be too much for him. He would have been happy to see the painting returned to the Cape, but, failing further suggestions, the matter was closed.<sup>91</sup>

Jordan continued that the gentleman concerned had been asked to hold the negotiations open, though the picture would not be sent to London. While Broadstone was in Dorset, some 120 miles from the capital, Jordan was willing to undertake the commission himself, over a week-end, but the decision rested

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<sup>88</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 3 November 1947. Nine other items were discussed there.

<sup>89</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>90</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 10 November 1947. Seven other items were discussed there. The secure packing of items was of great concern to Fehr, who had devoted an entire letter to Jordan (VE. 17 October 1946.) concerning a watercolour and an engraving (Item 20) damaged because "the packing was very incompetently done by the Packers." Jordan, who was regretful of the mishap, promised "personal inspection" if the need arose (VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 25 October 1946.)

<sup>91</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 17 November 1947. Two other items were discussed.

with Fehr.<sup>92</sup> Before the latter could reply, the Commander wrote again to Jordan, with regret, to say that there indeed was a tear in the canvas, but that it was the only damage. The painting had come to the gentleman through friends who actually were relatives of Sir Henry Pottinger himself. The owner would part with the painting for £50.<sup>93</sup>

While balancing the views of connoisseur and businessman, Fehr was confident of the picture's importance, and suggested that Jordan entrust the picture to a firm of carriers who would bring it up to London. Fehr did not think the work of such importance that Jordan should travel to the country to fetch it. Fehr asked that Walker's Galleries at London should be given the picture for an opinion on restoration, without bringing the Commander into the process. If Walker's judge the repair not to be worthwhile, he wrote, the picture should be returned without expense to the Commander.<sup>94</sup> A few letters later, Fehr was hesitant to pursue the matter further.

"I think that if he [the Commander] is not prepared to trust you with the Picture in the manner we have agreed upon it is better to leave him alone because we may have the same trouble as with Mr. Baber."<sup>95</sup>

Mr. Baber had been the centre of a long-drawn transaction which led to Fehr's acquiring Wassenburg's small oil [VRFHE 445; Inv. CG 25] of an African coastal

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<sup>92</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>93</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 20 November 1947.

<sup>94</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 24 November 1947. One other item was discussed there.

<sup>95</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 20 December 1947.

scene.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, the picture arrived at Walker's Galleries who informed Fehr that a restoration with relining would cost £10,<sup>97</sup> while Jordan repeated that message, adding "Walker's Galleries report that this is a good Picture."<sup>98</sup> Jordan settled the £50 with the Commander,<sup>99</sup> to whom the former would not divulge the buyer's identity.<sup>100</sup> Fehr himself forwarded a letter to the Commander through Jordan<sup>101</sup> and, with the usual Export Licence, the item was registered for shipping. That entire process would have taken nearly a year, while being put into its final phase by Jordan for shipping to Cape Town.<sup>102</sup> Commander Prowse had written to thank Jordan for all the efforts taken to secure the transaction. The Commander planned writing to Fehr, whose identity (with authorisation) had been disclosed, while telling Jordan that "I am very glad the Baines picture is worthy to join his collection. I could not have wished a better home for it."<sup>103</sup>

A few items brought in by the advertisements led to unexpected but significant and happy outcomes. At about the time of settling matters with Commander Prowse, Jordan wrote to Fehr concerning a recent offer by a lady, as Item 126, of two old books on the *Cape Colony*, and *Colonial Houses of the Cape*. They

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<sup>96</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 23 May 1947.

<sup>97</sup>VE. Letter from Augustus Walker to Fehr, 29 January 1948.

<sup>98</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 5 February 1948. One other item was discussed there.

<sup>99</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 10 February 1948. Three other items were discussed there.

<sup>100</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 4 March 1948. Two other items were discussed there.

<sup>101</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 9 March 1948. Two other items were discussed there.

<sup>102</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 6 May 1948.

<sup>103</sup>VE. Letter from [Cmdr.] W. E. Prowse to Jordan, 18 March 1948.

were "in excellent condition," though the first had been rebound. The lady concerned, a Mrs. A. P. Trotter, asked that an offer be made to her<sup>104</sup> and Fehr replied to Jordan that he had been puzzled by the name of the lady who made the offer. Her name was notably similar to that of the author and illustrator of the two books, Mrs. Alys Fane Trotter. Fehr had assumed that the two were related. He asked Jordan to enquire whether the correspondent might know of A. F. Trotter's drawings since Fehr was "particularly anxious to have some original examples of her work which was extremely good." He offered £10 for the books, judging them to be worth more than the £3. 3. 0. asked and received by an earlier seller of only *Old Colonial Houses*. Fehr was sure that friends at the Cape who were collectors would be willing to pay the higher price for the books. Such was another example of Fehr's active part in helping to bring valued Africana back to its source of inspiration, as he was doing with so many pictures.<sup>105</sup> Other items were bought in the Union, notably furniture, glass and silver.

Jordan replied to Fehr that the lady who wrote concerning the books had indeed been Alys Fane Trotter, who accepted the offer of £10 for *Old Colonial Houses*, though she asked a further £2 for *Old Cape Colony*. As to the few drawings remaining in her possession, she asked £2. 2. 0. each. Most of her sketches were at the Stellenbosch College, having been taken there by a friend.<sup>106</sup> Mrs. Trotter had travelled at the Cape between 1896 and 1898, having accompanied her

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<sup>104</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 10 February 1948. Three other items were discussed there.

<sup>105</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 23 February 1948. One other item was discussed there.

<sup>106</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 4 March 1948. Two other items were discussed there. Jordan recorded that "this lady's handwriting is rather difficult to read..." which could explain misreading her name.

husband who had been employed there on technical matters. A highly trained artist and gifted writer, Mrs. Trotter occupied herself recording the scenery, country houses and many people in the largely unspoiled rural regions at bicycling distance from Cape Town. Mrs. Trotter's fascination with Cape domestic architecture of the Company period led to a long series of sketches, done for her own diversion and delight. Many of them were subsequently published, with texts by her, in two individual volumes entitled the *Old Colonial Houses of the Cape*<sup>107</sup> [WFLG] and *Old Cape Colony*<sup>108</sup>[WFLG].

Mrs. Trotter was born in 1863, of established Irish and English families, and had studied art in the Slade School at London. She had worked under Alphonse Legros (or Le Gros, 1837-1911,) and her drawings showed evidence of his influence. Contemporary opinion described Legros as being one of:

“...those artists known at the time as ‘realists’ – which meant, in short, all those, come whence they might, who were opposed to the torpor in the routine of the Académie....”<sup>109</sup>

As a result of their mutual interests, Fehr and Mrs. Trotter would develop a close acquaintance which would last for the remainder of her long life. (For example, on his 1950 visit to London, Fehr would travel out to Teffont, near Salisbury, to

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<sup>107</sup>Trotter, A. F., *Old Colonial Houses of the Cape of Good Hope*, London, 1900. With an introduction by [later Sir] Herbert Baker, which was his only text on historic Cape gables.

<sup>108</sup>Trotter, A. F., *Old Cape Colony*, London, 1903. The subtitle was *A Chronicle of Her Men and Houses from 1652 to 1806*. From the outset (p. 7) Mrs. Trotter explained that “this is not a history.” It was but the outcome of her own personal interests in a Colony of the British Empire. The Cape had in fact been a colony for only 95 years, i.e., between 1815 and 1910. The reference of the title was to the predecessor of the British Colony, the VOC station established in 1652.

<sup>109</sup>Bénédicté, Léonce, “Alphonse Legros Painter and Sculptor,” *The Studio*, XXIX, No. 123, p. 8.

meet the Mrs. Trotter. In her letters to Fehr, she explained that since a recent serious fall she was increasingly forced to write while lying down. She continued to send thanks to Mrs. Fehr for her letters and gifts, and to Fehr for his welcome parcels, "such a lovely way of keeping in touch with S. Africa through its splendid products."<sup>110</sup>) While writing to Fehr, Mrs. Trotter showed an informed interest in the internal affairs of the Union by asking, for example, "Are you going to be happier without Mr. Malan at the Cape, or will his successor have the same influence?" (Prime Minister Dr. D. F. Malan retired from government in that year.) Her inquiring spirit and deep concern for peace stimulated her to read and write as much as her weakening eyesight would allow.

Fehr had been delighted at his good fortune. His brief reply to Jordan<sup>111</sup> included a letter for Mrs. Trotter (Appendix C.). By that time Fehr's collecting had become a serious undertaking. He recognized the educational value of his collection and had recently been asked to write an introduction to it. The text informed a major article in an important bi-lingual South African journal<sup>112</sup> which, since its inception in 1943, had proved to be an invaluable aid to collectors, historians and others interested in Africana, as well as occasionally featuring items from Fehr's Collection. In his letter to Mrs. Trotter, Fehr described himself not as being a book collector, but as a collector rather of paintings as historical records down to about 1900. His pictures filled a gap between the beauties of Cape architecture and the exciting written records of travellers, scientists and

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<sup>110</sup>VE. Letter from Mrs. Trotter to Fehr, [?] October 1954.

<sup>111</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 9 March 1948. Two other items were discussed there.

<sup>112</sup>VE. [Oliver, H. G.] "The William Fehr Collection," *ANN / AAN*, Vol. 5, No. 3, June 1948, pp. 55-63.

missionaries who had experienced Southern Africa and her seas. Fehr was happy to have achieved contact with Mrs. Trotter as being one of those hardy visitors, of an earlier era, who had left such a deep impression on Fehr, as well as creating valuable and artistic historic records.

Jordan later reported<sup>113</sup> that Mrs. Trotter had been sent Fehr's letter. The artist replied directly to Fehr.

"Thank you for a very kind letter. It is delightful to feel that the beautiful old things of the Cape are being looked after. I so hope that the sketch drawings I am sending you through Messrs. Sandover are what you want. They are the original sketch book ones and I went back to finish the more important of the drawings, but redrew without going again [over] some of them from the sketches in my books. I have of course a good many more but chose out these as being the most pictorial [...].<sup>114</sup>

She had been sent £15 for the two books and six drawings. It was evident that Mrs. Trotter had, like some other sellers, found Fehr to be a congenial collector and felt him allied to their own artistic and historical sensibilities.

Fehr at that time had grown aware of the increased responsibilities enforced by his growing collection. Over a year before, Vivian Hiller had written to Fehr from Rhodesia House at London that "Africana is fetching fabulous prices and colour plate books are not to be had."<sup>115</sup> Things became more costly. At the same time

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<sup>113</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 1 April 1948. Twelve other items were discussed there.

<sup>114</sup>VE. Letter from Mrs. Trotter to Fehr, 17 March 1948.

<sup>115</sup>VE. Letter from Hiller to Fehr, 8 February 1947.

a Mr. Taylor of King's Lynn, birthplace of Thomas Baines, was involved in negotiations over a pair of Baines oils.<sup>116</sup> Taylor made his intentions clear regarding the second painting in not wishing it to go into private hands, but rather to a museum.<sup>117</sup>

In an effort to prevent the loss to Fehr of that picture, Baines's oil of Bloemfontein [VRFHE 14; Inv. CA 138], Hiller wrote to Taylor, noting that the seller did not wish that it would go to an individual collector. Significantly, he added that:

"My friend [Fehr], however, intends that the whole of his magnificent collection shall go, either to the Nation [the Union of South Africa] or to some public institution after his death...."<sup>118</sup>

Thus Fehr by that date had realized that the narrative and historical nature of his collection required that it be kept in South Africa, of which it was such a comprehensive and useful reflection. Hiller repeated those intentions to Taylor after acquiring the Baines painting for Fehr.<sup>119</sup> Hiller liked the work, a particularly fine and colourful Baines and well framed. The seller insisted on a cash transaction, so Jordan made the appropriate arrangement with a bank at King's Lynn.<sup>120</sup>

In the case of Mrs. Trotter, it also seemed that she was keen to find a good and

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<sup>116</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>117</sup>VE. Letter from Taylor to Hiller, 15 February 1947.

<sup>118</sup>VE. Letter from Hiller to Taylor, 18 February 1947.

<sup>119</sup>VE. Letter from Hiller to Taylor, 28 February 1947.

<sup>120</sup>VE. Letter from Hiller to Fehr, 28 February 1947. There Hiller mentioned a friend of his, a Mr. Cornwell of the British Museum, who had mounted a number of Fehr's water-colours.

appropriate home for her own art work, which was made on the spot at the Cape – a high compliment to Fehr. The lady had sent to Jordan three sketch books and a book of verses<sup>121</sup> which were being forwarded on to Fehr, since Mrs. Trotter wished the collector to see the pictures and assess their worth himself.<sup>122</sup> Fehr received the drawings toward mid-July,<sup>123</sup> and later Jordan posted to Mrs. Trotter a cheque for £25.<sup>124</sup> Thereafter the lady corresponded directly with Fehr. Within a short time Fehr would be championing the cause of publicly acknowledging in the Union Mrs. Trotter's important contribution to preserving through art the rapidly vanishing physical remains of the Cape's cultural and architectural history.

In mid-April 1948, Jordan informed Fehr about recent replies to the advertisements. A Miss Forsyth had written concerning a quantity of material related to South Africa including watercolours by Edmund Caldwell.<sup>125</sup> No further details had been supplied, but Fehr's reply was enthusiastic.

"E. Caldwell [b. 1851] was an important painter specially of animal life and I should be very much interested to hear what Miss Forsyth has got of his. It is comparatively late, being around 1890. I should be glad if you could induce Miss Forsyth to give you details of all the books and prints or water colours that she may have and I would then be able to

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<sup>121</sup>VE. Trotter, A. F., *Houses and Dreams*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford [n.d.].

<sup>122</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 25 May 1948. Eight other items were discussed.

<sup>123</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 12 July 1948. Nine other items were discussed.

<sup>124</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 18 October 1948. Four other items were discussed.

<sup>125</sup>VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, undated copy [April 1948]. Five other items were discussed.

give an idea of their value. This seems to be worthwhile following up.<sup>126</sup>

That seller had for some time been otherwise occupied, when, toward the end of June, Jordan informed Fehr of Miss Forsyth's reply. In it were described the dimensions of the mounted watercolours. She also asked that before sending them out on approval, as she had not before done business with Jordan, a Banker's Reference should be supplied. Jordan wrote to her again, giving the information she required.<sup>127</sup>

Within a short time Miss Forsyth decided to pursue the transaction with Jordan, and she personally delivered the forty-four Caldwell pictures to be sent on in two parcels for Fehr's approval.<sup>128</sup> When the parcels arrived at Cape Town, Fehr decided to keep the watercolours, but not at the suggested price of £75, which had to be reconsidered since the mounts required replacement. Fehr offered £50<sup>129</sup> which was accepted by the seller.<sup>130</sup> Those studies of South African animals became a highlight of Fehr's Collection, since Edmund Caldwell had been best known as the illustrator of Sir Percy Fitzpatrick's *Jock of the Bushveld*. Though many of the studies Fehr had purchased were taken by Caldwell from animals in London's zoo, they represented numerous rare and endangered African species. The pictures would later be central to a book, written by Fehr

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<sup>126</sup> VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 17 April 1948. Fifteen other items were discussed.

<sup>127</sup> VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 24 June 1948. Five other items were discussed.

<sup>128</sup> VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 29 June 1948. Seven other items were discussed there.

<sup>129</sup> VE. Letter from Fehr to Jordan, 9 August 1948. Two other items were discussed though copy incomplete.

<sup>130</sup> VE. Letter from Jordan to Fehr, 26 August 1948. Three other items were discussed.

and T. V. Bulpin, which viewed South Africa's rich wildlife as part of every South African's natural and cultural inheritance, to be enjoyed and protected. Fehr was aware of the huge herds of animals which had vanished, as in the New World, in the wake of railways, expanding agriculture and commerce. Many of Fehr's pictures had immortalized those vivid scenes of earlier natural abundance in South Africa, already becoming legendary when he was a boy at Burgersdorp.

During many decades of active commerce, Fehr also demonstrated a profound concern for the survival of small traders as the very backbone of democratic society. He himself, like his father and other ancestors, had also been such small traders, pursuing commerce as their livelihood and profession. Fehr had published in 1943 a booklet<sup>131</sup> which set out ideas for an improved commercial system in the Union which should follow on the war then raging in Europe, North Africa and Asia. The booklet was divided into sections which included Trading by the State; The Dictatorship of Big Business; Opposite Schools of Thought; The Social Value of Small Traders; Trade Associations; Small Traders without a Voice; Viewpoint of other Empire Countries (Britain and Australia); a Summary, with praise for the Board of Trade and Dept. of Commerce which had been formed after the Great War; a Conclusion and an Addendum. In the Introduction, Fehr wrote that he was keen to see the improvement of social conditions after the war, in terms of the direct influence of commerce on personal liberty. Individualism, he believed, was of great national value to the Union, though it was being extinguished abroad in totalitarian states. Fehr equated sound business economy with individual liberty. Though Britain was weak in certain areas of social service,

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<sup>131</sup>VE. [Fehr, William] *Social Security and Personal Liberty*, 12mo, 12 pp., with Contents and Addendum inside covers, privately published, Cape Town, 1943.

it was the individualistic development characteristic of democracy there which had proved valuable. A sound balance, he felt, should be maintained to challenge threats. When Napoleon had thought Britain to be a nation of shopkeepers, he was highlighting the individual trader's democratic strength, and thereby the strength of the nation. Fehr continued, referring as much to art and history as commerce and democracy:

"The history of the South African people is the history of robust individualism. Our difficulty in uniting more readily must be traced to this fact. Our views and aspirations are not essentially different. We will not readily or for long forgo our right and opportunity for self-expression, which cannot find room in either a top heavy bureaucracy or the stultifying effects of 'Big Business' monopolies."<sup>132</sup>

Fehr saw the interference of such monopolies as inimical to "freedom of individual expression and individual enterprise," and offered his views as a concerned individual.<sup>133</sup>

William Fehr had been chairman of the Wholesale Grocery Distributors' Association, founder of the Cape Town Sugar Exchange and of the Wholesale & Retail Cigarette & Tobacco Distributors' Association. He had also served as chairman of the Cape Peninsula Commercial Employers' Organization, and other groups, before 1943. A life in major commerce, as any other, was rarely free from strife. Regarding the resignation of Fehr & Co. from the Wholesale Grocery Distributors' Association, Fehr presented his case, point by point, with exemplary precision. Fehr explained that he had resigned from the Rice Committee and

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<sup>132</sup>*ibid.* p. 1.

<sup>133</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

subsequently the Committees of the Sugar Exchange and the Wholesale Grocery Distributors' Association.<sup>134</sup> By way of a summary he described the circumstances which occurred around his 36<sup>th</sup> birthday.

"The impression that has been created is that after 18 years (*i.e.* I attended the first meeting of the Industry together with Mr. Luttie Spilhaus in Durban in April, 1928) I had to slink out of the Exchange in disgrace and relinquish all my public offices. The withdrawal of my Firm's resignation [...] would help to perpetuate this impression [...]."<sup>135</sup>

Fehr earnestly wished to have the affair "cleaned up completely," and that he be reinstated to his previous positions. He had been devoted to earnest and correct business practice<sup>136</sup> and had hoped for the re-establishment of a "friendly basis without ill-feeling on any side."<sup>137</sup> During that *impasse*, Fehr again turned to historical support, in noting that even Dr. Johnson became indifferent to reconciliation if his offer to make amends had been ignored by the opposing party.<sup>138</sup> Fehr sought to resolve the issues of "personal antagonisms" vs "friendly relations."

Fehr's broad views also demonstrated a commercial relationship between art and history. Though Fehr had been a cigar smoker, he enjoyed cigarettes later in life. He had taken up the marketing and sales of a particular brand of cigarette. The better to attract buyers to the new product, it was necessary for the public,

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<sup>134</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Leighton Ashmead, 11 October 1946.

<sup>135</sup>*ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>136</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>137</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>138</sup>*ibid.*, p. 5.

“to test it and to compare it, and, possibly, purchase it in preference to the rival brand.

In order to create such a state of things as would be conducive to consciously or sub-consciously, inviting the smoker’s attention to the fact that your new brand is a direct rival to the brand he may be smoking and thus persuade him to test and ultimately buy your brand in preference, it is necessary to create an association of ideas.”<sup>139</sup>

Fehr was acutely conscious of the subtle values of words, in addition to their associative powers. Some of the trade names of the cigarette were characteristically laden with often romantic connections, e. g., *Cavalla*, *Cavalcade*, *Cavalry*, *Traveller*, *Caballero*, etc.<sup>140</sup> Fehr then took a cultural approach to the matter of commerce. *Cavalier*, for example, summoned up for him the image of Frans Hals’s *Laughing Cavalier*, an attractive image for use in packaging. That painting, housed in London’s Wallace Collection, which Fehr admired, was for him the artist’s masterpiece, thereby connecting to the slogan “a Master Product” for the particular cigarettes. Thus to build up a solid impression on the purchasing public, Fehr felt it necessary to create “an association of ideas as [...] a necessary basis from which to start.”<sup>141</sup>

Fehr then devised a series of slogans as written texts to compliment that suggestive visual image. The words added significance to the picture and

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<sup>139</sup>VE. “Scheme referred to in letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> February, 1945,” p. 1, Signed William Fehr at Fehr & Co.

<sup>140</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>141</sup>*ibid.*, p. 2.

engaged the viewer more thoroughly. He suggested that the Cavalier laughed “because he knows he has no rivals.”<sup>142</sup> Fehr was also confident that the success of the product depended upon the dealers’ and consumers’ comparisons and choice, based upon the association of ideas.<sup>143</sup>

Fehr pursued fruitfully such association of ideas also in his collecting, and other cultural concerns, offering opportunities to the viewer who could balance an eye-witnessed view from the past with the state of a similar or related situation in the present. For example where earlier pristine countryside or coasts had been altered beyond recognition by subsequent farming, commerce and industry, the viewer could contemplate what the scene had been before large-scale human intrusion, as seen in any of the portraits of Table Bay and Cape Town. The fact that different peoples’ traditions had been diluted and scattered was also pointed out in eye-witnessed early depictions, as those by George French Angas of the Zulus or Samuel Daniell of the Bushmen, Hottentots and Xhosas. Also that certain flora and fauna had been put on the path to extinction was illustrated by many images and their associated artifacts. One such prominent association, had been the shooting of a *duiker* antelope as painted by Langschmidt [Inv. CA 11], displayed at the Castle with a musket [Inv. CA 6] and powder horn [Inv. CA 4]. The adjacent painting of a *Loyal Fingo* by Baines [Inv. CA 1] showed the subject similarly armed.

The continuing world war had influenced all aspects of life in the Union, not least its economy. As in his collection the life of ordinary men and women were a

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<sup>142</sup>*ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>143</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

great concern, not only for their achievements but also for the enrichment of humanity in general. Early in 1945 Fehr had sent a letter to the *Cape Times* under the heading of "The Treatment of Germany." The next day, "on mature consideration," Fehr asked that the letter not be published, since he "did not think that by putting forward those views at the present time it is in the best interests of the War Effort." Nevertheless, Fehr confessed to thinking,

"the best treatment for Germany is that she should go on with the War as long as possible so that the full impact of the illimitable crimes she has committed may be brought home as fully as possible to her people, and thus make them realise that aggression cannot be practised with impunity."<sup>144</sup>

At that time in the Union a heated debate was on between those who desired a charitable peace for Germany and others who called for dismemberment of the Reich.

Fehr's life in commerce and the private enjoyment of collecting art and history came to be merged with his increasing commitment to the practical implementation of cultural values. By June of 1947 Fehr had already been a member of the Cape Historical and Museum Society.<sup>145</sup> Later that year he was sought by co-option to assist with a special exhibition entitled "The Cape through

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<sup>144</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Editor, *Cape Times*, 17 February 1945.

<sup>145</sup>WFCCGH. Minutes of a Committee Meeting, 10 June 1947. Present: Lt. Col. C. Graham Botha (Chairman), Mrs. Dendy, Miss Ruth Prowse, Sir Alfred Beit, Mr. Varley, Miss Buyskes, Fehr, Mr. S. van der Merwe, Mr. Ribbink, and Miss Joyce Brookes (Hon. Sec.) Apologies for Absence received from Lady Bailey, Dr. Hall, His Worship the Mayor, Mrs. Bairnsfather and Mr. J. P. de Smidt.

the Centuries," to be held by the South African Association of Arts.<sup>146</sup> Early in 1948 Fehr was invited to become a member of the Koopmans-de Wet House Advisory Committee. Keppel Barnard, then Director of the South African Museum, had written to Fehr on behalf of the Museum's Trustees on recommendation of the Advisory Committee. It was intended that the Committee advise the Trustees and Director on acquisitions suitable for the Koopmans-de Wet House in Strand Street, Cape Town. The members of the Committee were Dr. Drennan,<sup>147</sup> Major W. Jardine,<sup>148</sup> Capt. M. Green,<sup>149</sup> Prof. Adamson (Museum Trustee) and Sir Alfred Beit.<sup>150</sup> Fehr accepted the invitation, since he had long been interested in the site and Collection.<sup>151</sup>

Fehr's mature concerns involving cultural matters were occasionally published in the Cape press. One article in particular<sup>152</sup> came to embody the characteristics of pictorial Africana, æsthetics and kaleidoscopic humanity which guided Fehr's cultural and historical activities for the remaining two decades of his life. His

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<sup>146</sup>WFCCGH. Minutes of the Special Committee meeting, 22 October 1947. Present were Miss R. Prowse (Chairman), Mrs. H. Bairnfather, Mrs. J. Beck, Mr. L. S. Sloman and the Org. Sec. In addition to Fehr it was agreed to co-opt Mr. A. Gordon-Brown to the Special Committee.

<sup>147</sup>Dr. M. R. Drennan, a specialist at UCT's Medical School; member of the HMC.

<sup>148</sup>A Trustee of the South African Library and member of the Africana Society. Jardine died within a few months.

<sup>149</sup>A respected collector of Africana who, like Jardine, wrote several articles. At his death early in 1951, R. F. Kennedy recorded that Capt. Green "will long be remembered as one whose love of country was based on a profound and intimate knowledge of its history and its material culture." *ANN/AAN*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, March 1951, p. 39.

<sup>150</sup>VE. Letter from Barnard to Fehr, 17 February 1948.

<sup>151</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Barnard, 18 February 1948.

<sup>152</sup>*Cape Times*, Cape Town, 21 December 1948, p. 8, under the significant title "First Historian of Old Cape Houses."

writing style was business-like, decisive and well informed. He was ready to quote illuminating passages from historic sources, acknowledging authorities, while retaining the integrity of his own lively and balanced opinions. His terse prose and factual descriptions were verbal parallels of narrative and topographical depictions and related objects such as found their way into his collection.

The article in the *Cape Times* began by referring to a substantial illustrated text, published fifty years before in the same paper, by the visiting English artist Alys Fane Trotter. Fehr pointed out that her intense activity was inspired by the calm simplicity and beauty of the subject, matched by her fine technique, and everywhere surrounded by the Cape's yet unspoiled natural grandeur. Fehr told readers of Mrs. Trotter's dedication of her *Old Cape Colony* to the "unpunctured bicycle," by whose agency and "without whose support on long hot journeys / this work would have been impossible...." More to the point, Mrs. Trotter had been in direct contact with the Cape, witnessing its rugged heritage and romantic isolation, and, "like Lady Anne Barnard and Lady Duff Gordon before her, Mrs. Trotter left us the richer for her visit."<sup>153</sup> As a Victorian traveller at the Cape, Mrs. Trotter was viewed by Fehr in the continuum of visitors who left behind their valuable records for others.

"These precious sketches which have never been bettered, either in water-colours or oils, were not merely the work of a very skilled and devoted artist but were made at a time when much that has since passed away was still in existence."<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*

He echoed Mrs. Trotter's sentiments that "modern improvement" could inflict irrevocable changes to the Cape's natural and cultural heritage. From that point Fehr acknowledged the significance of her drawings, including the engaging texts based on historic documents. He noted that some recent books had also begun to highlight the Cape's retreating past,<sup>155</sup> and few books on the subject were as engaging as Mrs. Trotter's *Old Cape Colony*. Her use of historical evidence had been shaped by a poetic sensibility which urged conservation. She also sprang on those who would despoil the Cape's heritage, whether local or from abroad. She demonstrated how some Oriental porcelain had become Africana. During the Company Period much of the Cape's household wares, particularly ceramics, had been shipped from the East. Sometimes the results of household accidents were quietly buried at a distance from the house so that a guilty servant or slave might evade responsibility, while the shards of porcelain might be turned up by some farmer or gardener a century later. Old records described the vast quantity of porcelain table ware, a major article of VOC commerce, imported to the Cape for local use. Yet Mrs. Trotter had grown indignant at the amount of old ceramic items being taken from their second home at the Cape and dispersed.<sup>156</sup>

Photographs taken in Fehr's home "Aboyne" showed the extent to which such Oriental wares at the Cape were consistently displayed by him to suggest that they were ready for family use, rather than being isolated as precious objects. A similarly spirited personal air of domestic activity of earlier times would also be brought into the Castle during the coming Van Riebeeck Festival, where Fehr

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<sup>155</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>156</sup>VE. *Old Cape Colony* (1903), p. 240.

could further exercise his dislike of an unimaginative and wearisome museum atmosphere.

Mrs. Trotter, with her close contemporaries Cecil Rhodes and Marie Koopmans-de Wet, had been pioneers in the appreciation of objects of Cape cultural heritage. Yet their efforts awaited broad public acknowledgement and appreciation. Within a few years of Mrs. Trotter's visit to the Cape, steps would be taken by concerned bodies, newly formed like the National Society of South Africa (1905), to help the public become more aware of their heritage which was being, in fact, trampled underfoot.

Since January 1950,<sup>157</sup> William Fehr had been a member of the South African National Society, founded "for the preservation of objects of historic interest and natural beauty of South Africa." Walter Purcell had put Fehr's name forward at the latter's request. During one of the Society's meetings at Cape Town it was noted<sup>158</sup> that Dr. Mary Cook, a medical practitioner, had recently been honoured with a bronze medal by the Historical Monuments Commission for her laudable research on historic Cape Architecture.<sup>159</sup> It was Fehr who, in the light of that award, had put forward the name of Mrs. Trotter for consideration by the HMC.

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<sup>157</sup>CAR. Letter from Hon. Sec. to Fehr, 8 November 1949.

<sup>158</sup>NMCCT. Letter from SANS to HMC, 26 April 1951.

<sup>159</sup>Vide her "Some notes on the origin and dating of the Cape gables," *ANN/AAN*, December 1946, Vol. IV, No. 1, pp. 31-50. Cook acknowledged there the debt to Trotter and Baker for their original writings on the history of Cape architecture. Next mentioned was Dorothea Fairbridge whose *Historic Houses of South Africa* (1922) [WFLG] was felt to be too "uncritical." Cook had praise for the more scholarly approach of G. E. Pearse in his *Eighteenth Century Architecture in South Africa* (1933). Cook's article closed with a plea to protect what remained of a genuinely Cape architectural heritage, "and that those of us who appreciate it should try to pass on that feeling to others less fortunate in their sense of values."

The National Society's letter made reference to Trotter's two Cape books, long out of print and thereby costly and difficult to obtain, as well as to Fehr's *Cape Times* article on the artist, in support of their suggestion. The HMC's reply was not encouraging, pointing out that such an award should be made:

"in recognition of long and outstanding collaboration with the Commission, and services in connection with the preservation of historical sites."<sup>160</sup>

Though Mrs. Trotter had been intensely active and creative during her three years at the Cape, that period was felt to have been "only a short time" by the HMC. Further, it was thought that,

"however valuable her books are, their effect on the preservation of Cape houses can only be indirect and comparatively slight."<sup>161</sup>

In view of its high standards, the Commission's medal could not be given too freely as "its value and significance will rapidly deteriorate."<sup>162</sup>

The matter took on an air of urgency when news arrived from England that Mrs. Trotter, then 88, had been injured in a fall. Fehr wrote about the artist to Justice H. S. van Zyl, chairman of the Cape branch of the HMC, who personally favoured:

"some recognition being given to the outstanding work she performed by being the first person to document the Old Cape Homesteads, and thus to direct attention to the necessity of preserving at least some of

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<sup>160</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Gertrude F. Kincaid, Hon. Sec., SANC, 3 May 1951.

<sup>161</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>162</sup>*ibid.*

our great heritage."<sup>163</sup>

In a short time Van Zyl had been so convinced of the case's merit that he wrote<sup>164</sup> to the HMC's national secretary, B. D. Malan, having enclosed Fehr's letter. Spurred on by Mrs. Trotter's ill health, Van Zyl intended to propose, at the next meeting in September, that a medal be awarded the lady, using Fehr's letter in support. Acknowledging his colleague's contribution, Van Zyl noted that "Fehr takes a great interest in our work and is with me on the Groot Constantia Advisory Committee."<sup>165</sup> Another letter to Malan from Van Zyl<sup>166</sup> mentioned the preparation of a "full statement about Mrs. Trotter for circulation among members [of the HMC]," while a further letter had the writer's wish that the artist be presented a gold medal.<sup>167</sup> Prof. Rupert Sheppard, of the Michaelis School of Fine Art, supplied an assessment:

"Mrs. Trotter's sketches are not only very beautiful (one must see the originals in Mr. William Fehr's collection fully to realise this) but from the topographical point of view they are excellent. They express most sensitively the character and atmosphere of the Old Cape Houses and are a unique record of what the houses and farms were like before many of them were either pulled down or remodelled on lines that destroyed their genuine flavour...."<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>163</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Fehr to Van Zyl, 3 June 1951.

<sup>164</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Van Zyl to HMC, 5 June 1951.

<sup>165</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>166</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Van Zyl to Malan, 27 June 1951.

<sup>167</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Van Zyl to HMC, 11 July 1951.

<sup>168</sup>*ibid.*, p.2.

A reply from the HMC again pointed to the rubric "for long and meritorious service" in the requirements for awarding their medal. Nevertheless, Judge Van Zyl was encouraged by the writer who had "an open mind about the issues" and hoped for a positive result, though the "degree" of the award was open to debate.<sup>169</sup>

Ultimately the HMC decided to award Mrs. Trotter a medal, and the letter sent to her highlighted the publications that "created general interest" in the earlier South African architectural heritage, "which has continued to grow and to inspire our people ever since."<sup>170</sup> The medal, ultimately struck in silver, bore the inscription, *For inspiring work on Old Cape Homes / Alys Fane Trotter / Awarded 1951.*<sup>171</sup> In view of the question of time, the High Commissioner of the Union, at London, accepted responsibility for presenting the medal to the artist, on the HMC's behalf. She was handed the award on 6 March 1952, and wrote to Fehr that she was very pleased at the extent to which Fehr had promoted her work at the Cape.<sup>172</sup> The lady remained an encouraging voice from the past for Fehr, who, typically and modestly, did not refer to his instrumental rôle in South Africa's acknowledgement of Mrs. Trotter's important contributions.

The 1920's, 30's and 40's in South Africa had witnessed a burgeoning of greater historical awareness after Union. Patriotism during and between the wars also

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<sup>169</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC [B. D. Malan?] to Van Zyl, 16 August 1961.

<sup>170</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Mrs. Trotter, 24 October 1951.

<sup>171</sup>NMCCT. Letter to S. A. Mint from HMC, 22 November 1951.

<sup>172</sup>UCTMS. Letter from Alys Fane Trotter to Fehr, 15 March 1952.

fuelled enthusiasm for the past on a broader scale, not exclusively a collectors' realm, one apparently detached from the everyday. The youth of a newly made Union gradually undertook to establish themselves in society. They began to acquire better incomes and many found it easy to sell their inherited old things for more stylish new ones. Auction rooms and antique dealers in the larger centres often did well through that process. In terms of sale and acquisition, there were also increasing numbers of those who could add to their own antiques, or make early acquisitions as novices. Well-crafted objects of interest as *Africana* were available at reasonable prices. But without informed opinion and specialised knowledge, the depth and quality of that awareness might be questioned, as with one aspect of the Empire Exhibition at Johannesburg in 1936. A contemporary publication averred that:

“the Cape has been the heart of the nation which is now South Africa. It can flaunt its dignified age almost with indecency in the young, sprightly [Witwaters] Rand, one of its pulsating arteries. It [the Cape] can hint, in its austere way, at history and romance which happened, in comparison with that of the life of the Rand, in the middle ages.”<sup>173</sup>

An old Cape homestead, *La Provence*, at Franschoek, had been selected for reproduction at the Exhibition grounds:

“for in the thatched roof, white walls, gables and flower-covered stoep of such a house, is written the story of these three hundred years...it will represent what the Cape Province represents to the rest of South Africa – the motherly old lady set among her

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<sup>173</sup>WFLG. *The Empire Exhibition, Supplement to the Cape Times*, 18 August 1936, p. 13.

precocious brood."<sup>174</sup>

Money and status, if not wealth, appeared high on the list of *desiderata* and the *Africana* placed on display had been no exception.

"From millionaires' houses, farm houses, little cottages tucked away in the side streets of Wynberg and Rondebosch, from the Rand and from Natal have come these precious hand-made pieces of furniture which were the comforts and refinements of their day.

Each piece has a history...There is romance in every piece and there was romance in gathering every one of them. They have been insured for thousands of pounds and while the Exhibition is in being, they will be guarded night and day by armed detectives.

Beautiful silver ware, executed by the armourers of Simon van der Stel who were also silver smiths, will be shown with the furniture."<sup>175</sup>

In spite of such journalistic inaccuracy, the uninitiated need not have feared being left behind in a recreation of the distant past, since,

"in one step, the visitor to the Homestead will pass out of the history book of the Cape into its modern reality."<sup>176</sup>

An antidote for those facile impressions was needed, as some had come to confuse in speech the words "*Africana*" and "*Afrikaner*," especially when associated with a collection, museum or cultural stereotype.

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<sup>174</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>175</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>176</sup>*ibid.*

In 1949 the South African Association of Arts' Cape Branch sponsored a few public lectures on Africana by D. H. Varley, Secretary and Librarian of the South African Library, Cape Town. Those talks were preserved by publication in 1949.<sup>177</sup> Varley's views carried contemporary currency as their author was an associate and friend of William Fehr, Walter Purcell, Alfred Gordon-Brown and others. It was through the University of Cape Town Extra-Mural Studies Board that Varley had been invited to speak there. That suggested two concerns: first that the subject and nature of Africana were widely appreciated by the layman, and second, that Africana *per se*, was considered to be extra-mural to the academic study of history. The joint publishers aired Varley's opinions on both.

In his preface to the book, T. B. Davie, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of Cape Town's University, admitted that a definition of Africana was "now [1949] a matter of conjecture." (Contemporary fact had it that the word first appeared in print in the *Annual Report* for 1913 of the Johannesburg Public Library.<sup>178</sup>) He continued that the term had become "a household word" for the South African reading public. Collectors were then to be found in all strata of society, Davie wrote, but increasing prices and individuals' possessiveness aided in devaluing much good work in private collections, "since their contribution to the story of the past is never told." An objection was later raised to that point by an enthusiastic writer and collector, D. Godfrey, who believed that a monetary value put on desirable Africana tended rather to awaken more people to its

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<sup>177</sup>WFLG. Varley, D. H., *Adventures in Africana*, Cape Town, 1949.

<sup>178</sup>ANN/AAN, "Notes and Queries," Vol. X, No. 4, p. 145.

presence.<sup>179</sup> That opinion could actually be applied to any form of Africana, Americana, Australiana, Indiana, or Orientalia. Godfrey's own special significance rested in his having made available some important insights on the nature of Fehr's Collection. The view held by Davie was appropriate to the years when culturally aware Capetonians were calling for an Africana museum in their city. Davie stressed the need for experts in the field to relate issues of interest to the broader public. (That, increasingly, was what Fehr, Varley and others in the Union, had been doing already -- personally as well as through publications of various kinds.) Varley's own bibliophilic expertise was applied to the oldest reference collection in the Union in his charge, a library containing much rare and prized Africana.

Varley continued some romantic associations through linking "Africana" with "Adventure" in the title of that short lecture series. Davie had suggested the larger discipline which subsumed Africana unto itself as being social history,<sup>180</sup> as was already accepted by Fehr. From the outset Varley plunged into the matter of Africana as denoting natural and man-made objects by which "...we think of Africana in terms of human settlement in the sub-Continent -- but always in terms of history and the living past."<sup>181</sup> He sounded the key-note for a suitable approach to the subject by explaining that "...the real stuff of history is not made up of wars, political conflicts and group animosities, but the lives of men and

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<sup>179</sup>Godfrey, D., *The Enchanted Door*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>180</sup>Varley, D. H., *Adventures in Africana*, p. 4.

<sup>181</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

women...,<sup>182</sup> recorded by whatever means were available and left to posterity as *Africana*. As with Fehr's collecting, that was an approach to social history which could be pursued and understood by anyone with the interest. It also concurred with G. M. Trevelyan's well-known contemporary opinion that a negative view of social history was its being the history of a people with politics left out. That was a difficult position to achieve but one which offered a useful balance to an altogether political approach, as had long been the case in Western historiography. Trevelyan was specific in that "without social history, economic history is barren and political history unintelligible."<sup>183</sup> Already identifiable in Fehr's collecting had been his inclusion of the ordinary events of daily life. Also to be seen in his collection were the varied commercial relationships between different people, among different social strata, as well as life at home, at work and at leisure. Nature formed the living support for all those endeavours while culture grew out of such conditions.<sup>184</sup> So too was it with Fehr's cultural pursuits in that all embraced and reflected the "ever-changing forms in religion, literature and music, architecture, learning and thought."<sup>185</sup> In Fehr's Collection each category had been represented. Religion, for example, was seen reflected in artefacts from or images of churches and mosques, as well as in the practice of Black African traditional beliefs seen in works by artists like I'Ons and Angas. Literature and music appeared in many depictions of reading, writing and music-making, the latter in many different

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<sup>182</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>183</sup>VE. Trevelyan, G. M., *English Social History*, p. vii.

<sup>184</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>185</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

circumstances from town to country life. Non-literate peoples who passed on their rich oral traditions were also illustrated. Architecture as well was represented throughout the collection from the symmetry and efficiency of reed huts to the formal façades of Georgian villas. Learning and thought also appeared, whether it be seen in the training of a Zulu regiment, children's lessons in the Qur'an, or celestial observations made at the Cape's Observatory.

With regard to Varley's lectures, he had taken the specific stance of a professional librarian -- on the path of social history through the printed word. Most laymen, he contended, viewed history as being the unfolding of "...a distinctive plot, sharply defined characters, swift action, a recognisable beginning and a definite end."<sup>186</sup> On closer view that was more appropriate to a great dramatic work which bound action to time and place, and was most unlike what was thought to be "academic" history. At its worst, Varley viewed the latter as:

"...a memory test, a farrago of names, a grotesque reflection of the past with precious little relation to the present and none at all to the future [...]."<sup>187</sup>

Similarly, Fehr's cultural activities were animated by contemporary needs of both the individual and society at large. Varley catalogued four stages in the perception, recording, and study of history. The first was Legend, typified by the passing-on of the Black Africans' history. Such oral tradition had also been practised by the "Europeans" at the Cape during the Company period. That was Varley's "Age of Whispers," since generations of the Company's servants and their dependants had little chance of being heard or remembered at all, save through

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<sup>186</sup>Varley, *Adventures in Africana*, p. 5.

<sup>187</sup>*ibid.* p. 7.

the VOC's voluminous logbooks.<sup>188</sup> The Cape had been one of the few settled regions of the earth where a daily record of proceedings was kept, as at other VOC establishments abroad. Many individuals' activities were often recorded. Of that legendary stage of history-making Varley exemplified The Flying Dutchman, Van Hunks and the Devil, Baron von Munchausen at the Cape and finally, the tale of the VOC's traditionally unloved Cape Governor Pieter Gijsbert van Noodt.<sup>189</sup>

The second of Varley's historiographic stages was chronology, or the recording of events in a *res gestæ* manner that had made its first appearance in the "free press" at the Cape from 1824. The author cited Suasso de Lima's *De Geskiedenis van de Kaap de Goede Hoop*, published at Cape Town in 1825 as the first printed evidence of specifically Cape pride and patriotism. George Leith's *Metrical Outline* of 1885 was another such Cape chronology, apparently still current in Varley's era. For some time that work had been a successful "mnemonic aid" to help "fix the chronological framework of the most important historical events of the country for many [of its] people."<sup>190</sup>

The third of Varley's categories was broad-sweeping narrative, in the mould of historians the calibre of Gibbon, Carlyle, Ranke and Macaulay, the last of which

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<sup>188</sup>[WFLG contained a valuable source on the duties of VOC officers in *Papieren, Documenten en Resolutien enz.*, 1630-1750; also Boxer, C. R., *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600-1800*, London, 1965.]

<sup>189</sup>Copy of a letter in author's possession from Prof. A. J. H. Goodwin of Newlands, 17 December 1949, to Varley, offering later origins of the Van Hunks legend, with comments on The Flying Dutchman and Baron Munchausen. *Vide ANN/AAN*, March 1948, vol. V, no. 2, pp. 50 & 52.

<sup>190</sup>Varley, D. H., *Adventures in Africana*, p. 9.

had been an inspiring ancestor of G. M. Trevelyan. The "long views and penetrating insights" of those Romantic minds were allowed by Varley and others to make up for some natural "faults of perspective and even occasionally of judgment."<sup>191</sup> In the Colonial Cape and Union context, the Canadian journalist George McCall Theal was identified for his monumental overview of the region's past, including "notably the reconstruction of the history of the native tribes of South Africa -- a subject near to his heart."<sup>192</sup> Theal's work, Varley noted, was good, though marked by a certain superficiality, an un-literary style, and a considerable bias. Nevertheless, he pointed out that Theal:

"must remain for many years the starting-point from which South African history must be revalued."<sup>193</sup>

Revaluation was the fourth of Varley's stages. The detailed processes of analysis and synthesis had, at the time of his lectures, been undertaken in England on issues as diverse as government, arts and the sciences. Varley emphasized his view that "...the essential matter of history was not what happened, but what people thought and said about it."<sup>194</sup> He recognised that the reintegration of people with their own history had yet to flower in the Union, though he shared praise for contemporary writers of note like Cory, Walker, de Kiewet, Boëseken and Hattersley. On the other hand, Varley remarked that an excess of the "academic thesis" in South African historiography could tempt students to match their evidence with preconceived conclusions, "a practice which makes mockery

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<sup>191</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>192</sup>*ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>193</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>194</sup>*ibid.*, p. 11.

of objective historical study and is, in fact, merely history written backwards."<sup>195</sup>

The "new history" was rather, for Varley, history re-inhabited. Ordinary daily events, which linked social groups, helped to refresh historical study and gave sympathetic recognition to the interested layman. Ancestors could speak a common language with their descendants through a legacy of *Africana*. Fehr's collecting had been similarly informed, begun as a mirror of his own past.

Varley had been writing in the full spate of Trevelyan's *English Social History*,<sup>196</sup> at a time when cultural and historical awareness in the Union was steadily rising. But from where, Varley asked, would come the many authoritative studies needed to help the layman into a more informed appreciation of the past? Costume, children's toys and games and all the other human involvements common to the past and the present needed to be re-studied and re-appreciated. In a wary tone Varley asked, "are we to wait on the efforts of the academic historians?"<sup>197</sup> He offered rather that it was the keen amateur who could best serve the cause of social history, and went on to list those non-professionals of the past who had left behind so much written material. Though he did not mention Alys Fane Trotter's Cape drawings, she initiated his list by reason of her two important Cape books; then followed Dorothea Fairbridge (a cosmopolite), P. W. Laidler (a medical officer), G. E. Pearse (an architect) E. E. Mossop (a

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<sup>195</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>196</sup>Due to paper shortages it was first published in the United States and Canada in 1942; first British publication in 1944. Trevelyan noted that "...it was nearly all written before the war." [Introduction.]

<sup>197</sup>Varley, D. H., *Adventures in Africana*, p. 12.

retired medical practitioner), Ian Colvin (a journalist), George Cory (a chemist), H. C. V. Leibbrandt (a clergyman), J. G. Gubbins (a mining engineer), and Sydney Mendelssohn (a mine owner), "perhaps the perfect amateur."<sup>198</sup> As though in anticipation of Varley's views, members at the first meeting of the Africana Society, held in the Public Library at Johannesburg on 27 October 1944, had been reminded of "the contributions to our knowledge of South Africa made by men of professions unrelated to history."<sup>199</sup> Also among that company of contributors were to be counted the medical specialist Walter Purcell and the merchant William Fehr. Indeed, from his early days in collecting and other cultural concerns, as in commerce, Fehr had not worked alone but in concert with other sympathetic individuals and organizations toward a common goal of preserving the shared historical inheritance. Fehr's own contribution was to the area of pictorial records and objects, large or small, closely related to them.

Fehr had lent some of his pictorial Africana as an historical prelude to a Union art exhibition, in 1948, of contemporary South African works at the Tate Gallery, London. The exhibition later went on tour to portions of North America. The intention had been to highlight art from another land of the British Commonwealth. The organizers of the exhibitions had been the SAAA at Cape Town. The catalogue produced for the Tate Gallery included as an historical prelude 12 major works from Fehr's Collection. They were by Angas, *Cape Malay Woman* [VRFHE 252], *Bushman with Arrows* [VRFHE 251]; Baines, [VRFHE 16]; Bowler, *Table Bay with early East Indiaman, 1857* [VRFHE 296],

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<sup>198</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>199</sup>Kennedy, R. F., "Meeting of the Africana Society," *ANN / AAN*, Vol. 2, No. 1, December 1944, p. 1.

*Table Bay with East Indiaman St. Lawrence entering the Bay, 1861* [VRFHE 290]; Samuel Daniell, *Boers returning from Hunting* [VRFHE 333], *Bosch Wannah Hut* [VRFHE 332]; D'Oyly, *Cape Characters* [VRFHE 369?], *Going to the Protestant Church* [VRFHE 364]; Lambert & Scott, *Table Bay* [VRFHE 38]; Langschmidt, *Long Street, Cape Town, 1845* [VRFHE 34] and l'Ons, *The Witch Doctor (Damo)* [VRFHE 30]. The majority of the exhibition consisted of 149 recent works in various media by artists of the Union. The catalogue offered an overview.

"The small historical section has a romantic 'African' appeal. Then the country was still wild, big with mystery. Thomas Baines was an explorer first and artist only after that. Documentary he may be, but his paintings show discovery. High adventure.

But by 1900 the horizon had drawn in and the boundaries had fixed. Gold, rivers, mountains all had been discovered. Guns and wagons gave way to spades and engines. This was progress...."<sup>200</sup>

An ironic notion of progress as above also underlay Fehr's Collection, since demolition of past ways of life, not only in Africa, was becoming characteristic of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A succinct appraisal of Fehr's growing collection had been written by Hermia G. Oliver, a member of staff in the Africana Museum.<sup>201</sup> The collection had, with that article, become firmly identified as being distinctively South African.

"Mr. Fehr has so many important items, particularly original paintings, which are of the greatest interest to all students of Africana and to the

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<sup>200</sup>Tate Gallery. "Exhibition of Contemporary South African Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture / with a Prelude of Historical Paintings [...]". Introduction by G. Long, p. 2.

<sup>201</sup>[Oliver, H. G.] "The William Fehr Collection," *ANN / AAN*, Vol. 5, No. 3, June 1948, pp. 55-63 [with 10 pls.]. *Vide* Appendix B for draft of a letter from Fehr to Africana Museum, December 1947, in advance of article's publication.

nation as a whole, some description of his collection is long overdue. In size, range, and carefully chosen examples of the work of well-known early South African artists, Mr. Fehr's collection of original pictures is one of the most important in existence."<sup>202</sup>

His collection also embodied elements that made it a coherent entity, as described in a text from Fehr's own library.

"In the highest type of collecting, selection reaches its maximum, and here is evidence of a man's maturity, for every true collector creates an ordered entity, endeavouring to give his collection form, meaning and value, in varying degree, within the limitations of his speciality and his own resourcefulness, and according to the capacity of his mentality and imagination.

"By the restricted definition, then, an accumulation may not properly be called a collection when the assembled objects bear no intelligible relationship to each other."<sup>203</sup>

Fehr had been characteristically generous with assistance in preparing the overview of his collection. In her acknowledgement, Oliver hopefully recorded that:

"it is greatly to be hoped that Mr. Fehr's magnificent collection, formed with so much enthusiasm, knowledge and discrimination, will one day belong to the nation."<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup>*ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>203</sup>VE. Rigby, D. & E., *Lock, Stock and Barrel*, p. 338.

<sup>204</sup>*ibid.*, p. 63.

#### **IV. Festivals, Africana and the Old Malay Quarter, 1950-1963.**

Portuguese mariners and merchants had already sailed past the stormy Cape in 1488. In 1620 the English had claimed it for the Crown, while the French also refreshed themselves at the Cape, though none but the VOC had been in a position to develop the site in a consistent way. The common destination of all those seasonal callers had been the distant Orient, especially the Spice Islands and other rich lands of the Indies. Pirates abounded on the Indian Ocean, as elsewhere, but the relentless problems facing long-distance commercial mariners were malnutrition, infectious diseases and ravages of the sea. The Cape, approximating a half-way point between East and West, provided a tenuous African station for the beginnings of systematic though experimental agriculture, as yet unknown to the inhabitants of the Cape -- the nomadic Bushmen (San) -- and later Hottentots (Khoi).

For a strenuous decade that supply station grew under orders of its Commander, Senior Merchant Johann van Riebeeck, despite stormy weather, dangerous animals and unfamiliar humans. Centuries later fragments of Van Riebeeck's tombstone had arrived at the South African Museum from Batavia in 1914 and 1933. The large stone had been reconstructed and publicly displayed at Cape Town since 1934. Carved originally on that tombstone at Batavia, one particular phrase had been seen by many to bind that merchant's name forever to the Cape and, subsequently, South Africa. It had hailed him as the *Eerste stichter der Colonie aan Cabo de Boa Esperance*, the first founder of the colony at Cape Good Hope, in a characteristic mixture of languages.

However truthful to his own view, the eulogist neglected to point out to posterity that the notion of a colony at the Cape was in its nature restricted to the VOC's commercial activities as a joint-stock trading company, chartered by the home government. The station was to be entirely self-supporting, not interfering with the locals, and shaping a VOC policy of being *at* the Cape, but not *of* it. The inland movement of future *vrijburghers* would lead to a very different demography. According to original intentions, the Cape was not to be a colony in the sense of a sapling transplanted to Cape soil as a complete and functioning miniature, root and branch, of the Fatherland in Africa.

With the demise of the VOC at the close of the 18th century, the Cape went through a rapid change of hands between Britain and the French-dominated Batavian Republic. Continuing Napoleonic threats forced Britain to occupy the Cape again in 1806. Seven years later, after the Congress of Vienna, the Cape was negotiated, with other convenient maritime stepping-stones to the Orient, as a British Colony.

During the subsequent British Period, down to Union in 1910, the Van Riebeeck ancestry of the Cape was regarded as a venerable old tale resounding with romantic adventure. There was also an echo in patriotic Victorians' sense of King Alfred the Great (d. 899) as the virtuous and heroic founder of the British Empire. No less a personage than Sir Bartle Frere, Governor of the Cape Colony between 1877-80, had viewed Jan van Riebeeck with a sense of kinship. Frere had written at length on his administrative ancestor,

"partly in justice to his memory as the real founder of the European colonies in South Africa, and partly because, in his voluminous

journals and despatches, we find recorded the germ alike of almost every improvement since effected and of every difficulty encountered by his successors....He had voyaged much to many remote regions, then either recently discovered or lately opened to commerce, always observant, and bent on turning what he learnt to practical account."<sup>1</sup>

Frere in that passage had inadvertently helped to entrench Van Riebeeck's nearly epical position as the founder of a "colony," in addition to describing the Company period at the Cape as "colonial." Neither notion was accurate, though both had lived long lives. At the Cape Van Riebeeck was head of a *comptoir*. That William Fehr had included pictures relating to Van Riebeeck and his family in the collection acted as an historically substantial balance to the legends inherited from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at times augmented in the decades which followed.

In the turbulent years that closed the 19<sup>th</sup> century in South Africa, with more civil awareness and a religious sense of destiny fulfilled, Van Riebeeck, rightly or wrongly, came more to be seen through the mists of time and circumstance as the true creator of a rising nation, a Founding Father in spite of historical accuracy.

"The birth and development of political consciousness in South Africa have been attended by the growth of what one might not improperly

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<sup>1</sup>From an "Historical Sketch of South Africa," read, in May 1883, before the Royal Historical Society in London; published posthumously in the *Transactions* of the Society in 1885 (New Series, v. ii) and 1889 (New Series, v. iv). Passage quoted in S. A. Rochlin, "Riebeeckiana," *ANN/AAN*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 18-19.

call the Van Riebeeck legend."<sup>2</sup>

Hard-working yet frustrated Van Riebeeck was elevated, by some earlier 20th-century admirers, to the ranks of those praised as being "Father of a Nation." In that case three aspects of Varley's historical progress, from legend, chronology and the broad-sweeping narrative, would come to encounter the serious proposition of revaluation.

The 1938 *Voortrekker Festival*, of national proportions, had been a notable event, particularly among the Afrikaans-speaking population of the Union. The *Festival* had followed the 1936 *Empire Exhibition* of commercial and industrial British connections. The Voortrekker Monument at Pretoria reached completion in 1949, after the interruption of war, and preparations for the Tercentenary (1652–1952) lay not far ahead. As early as February 1950, government ministries had been alerted to the coming event<sup>3</sup>. Its name was popularly taken to be *The Van Riebeeck Festival*, highlighting the eponymous Company merchant, though the practise of it all was to view the full sweep of three centuries, rather than being limited to the activities of an isolated historical character.

The principal theme and its presentation were clearly set out as "South Africa after 300 years," and the message was to be as much addressed to the local public as the rest of the world. The country's spiritual values and material growth were to be highlighted, with due recognition given to the contributing founder

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<sup>2</sup>David, Sir Percival, "The Van Riebeeck portrait of the Old Town House," *ANN / AAN*, Vol. 3, No. 1, December 1945, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>DDS. Letter from Ministry of Defence to Chief of General Staff, 14 February 1950.

nations. The Festival was to be a symbol of the overall slogan “We build a nation.”<sup>4</sup> The portrayal of over 300 years of South African history would involve considerable pageantry, including a reconstruction of Van Riebeeck’s flagship *Dromedaris*, as well as the use of numerous old post-coaches and other historic remains. It was considered most important:

“that the necessary steps be taken to equip Cape Town Castle [sic], which has already been declared a national monument [in 1936], as an historical monument.”<sup>5</sup>

Other major issues for exposition from that period of three centuries included educational and cultural development, reflected in “...an Exhibition in Cape Town of seventeenth-century and South African Art;”<sup>6</sup> protection of the natural environment, including the proclamation of Table Mountain as a National Monument. The list continued with social and religious development; the growth of agriculture, industry and mining; the rise of defence; the enhancement of communications. Youth and sport received their acknowledgement. The list also included the Coloured, Malay and Black African populations who were also to demonstrate their rôles in the collective festival celebrating historic growth.<sup>7</sup>

A “Gateway to Africa” [analogous to the Gateway of India (1913) at Bombay] was to be built at Cape Town’s docks, while international co-operation would be sought among nations traditionally related through the Cape, notably Portugal,

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<sup>4</sup>DDS. Undated memorandum, p.1.

<sup>5</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>6</sup>*ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

the Netherlands, France, Germany and Britain. The production of commemorative coins and postage stamps was intended to round off the festivities.

A further memorandum<sup>8</sup> announced that a Central Committee would be put in place, to co-ordinate events in the Union and abroad, under the chairmanship of the Governor-General Dr. E. G. Jansen, to whose own committee the important Cape Town Committee would be responsible. The latter group had already taken up its responsibilities, since Cape Town was the centre of concern as the Festival's historic *fons et origo*. High on the agenda was an estimate of the total costs to be expected as post-war budgets were strained.

A diverse selection of men and women was put into the principal committees. One of the more strategically placed was Colin Graham Botha, Chief Archivist of the Union, a well-known historical writer and Lieutenant-Colonel in the Citizen Force of the UDF, and initially chairman of the Historical Defence Sub-Committee. Toward the end of 1950<sup>9</sup> the latter group had been informed of the Cape Town Committee's resolutions, which emphasized that the coming Festival was for the whole nation, not only Cape Town. A link would also be established to the Cape Tercentenary Foundation which had been founded in 1950 by Edward and Harry Molteno to preserve, promote and encourage literature, the visual arts and the cultural and natural environment of the Cape Province. William Fehr had become a member of the Foundation from 24 May 1955.

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<sup>8</sup>NAR. Undated [1950] Memorandum.

<sup>9</sup>DDS. Minutes of Meeting of Historical Defence Sub-Committee, 24 Nov 1950.

The military authorities at Cape Town, in accord with the HMC, had granted permission<sup>10</sup> so that formal activities and historic art exhibits during the Festival could be held in traditionally significant rooms within the Castle. Those were contained largely along the Kat Wall, which bisects the Castle courtyard, and includes the state rooms and a banqueting hall above. Though altered to some extent, the large main room had been the site where the VOC's Council of Policy and other official bodies gathered in the Company Period. At the time of the Festival, the UDF's presence in the Castle was viewed as being in succession to the judiciary, executive and military authority of the VOC and the succeeding British. Similarly, the upper rooms, which had been reserved for VOC Governors, were romantically associated with Lady Anne Barnard. At her arrival during the First British Occupation, place had been made for Lady Anne and her husband, the new Government Secretary. Those domestic arrangements had been much to their liking, and *soirées* regularly held in the large council chamber below were recorded in Lady Anne's diaries. Thus a British ancestry of the UDF was reinforced through the Castle itself. The "banqueting hall" above would come into being only in the 20th century through uniting a series of smaller rooms facing the outer yard. Some renovations had been initiated by the PWD, guided by C. Graham Botha in the mid-1930's, though the HMC had not been consulted and a letter of enquiry was posted.<sup>11</sup> A display of military history was also planned for an adjacent area, in anticipation of a permanent military museum in the Castle.

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<sup>10</sup>DDS. Brief van die Hoof van die Generale Staf aan die Organiserende Sekretaris, Van Riebeeck-fees, 8 Maart 1951.

<sup>11</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to OC, Cape Command, The Castle, 1 September 1937; copy to PWD.

Further spaces were provided for specific purposes. The large barracks in the Castle's north-east wing was put aside for a display of William Fehr's Collection, and space was also made available for Cape Malay artwork.<sup>12</sup>

The Castle had stood for decades surrounded by a mass of temporary and neglected structures visible from all sides. The buildings were of use to the Cape Command during the Second World War when access to the area was severely restricted. Though on the outer edges of the war, South Africans at home, including William Fehr, had been saturated with world news reports. During that time the Castle was known as *Cape Fortress*, a more accurate description of the edifice than the sometimes fanciful and misleading notion of "castle". It was the HMC's earnest wish that after the war all the temporary structures around the Castle would be removed.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, when the war had ended, a member of the HMC voiced continued concern for the Castle, with an appreciation of the UDF. Some, except the military, had said that Cape Town did not need the Castle. The military had proven to be "good tenants" in many national monuments.<sup>14</sup>

Castle Good Hope had never been allowed to stand unoccupied. First in place had been the VOC, then briefly the British, then an even shorter occupation by the Batavian Republic, followed by the British during the Colonial period, and succeeded by the UDF. Some of those groups of trained and disciplined men, accustomed to travel, hard work and a common goal, had added portions to the

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<sup>12</sup>DDS. *Oorsig van die UVM Van Riebeeckfees-Program*, undated, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Town Clerk, Cape Town, 23 February 1944.

<sup>14</sup>*Cape Times*, 20 July 1945, p. 7.

Castle while still preserving its integrity. The impending Festival gave a fillip, both to civilian and military authorities, regarding the long-neglected fabric and general appearance of the Castle. Particular attention was given to refurbishing rooms intended to house various cultural exhibits,<sup>15</sup> though the proximity of the Festival -- and the quantity and cost of work yet to be done -- caused some anxiety on all fronts. The status of the Castle as a national monument (1936) required close attention to restrictions in relation to renovations and alterations. In order to facilitate communication, the HMC had enabled the Officer Commanding, Cape Command, "...to deal with applications for the use of the Castle when he is approached."<sup>16</sup> The Castle was to be a venue only for events which enhanced its dignity.<sup>17</sup> Special requests from the Governor-General or the Prime Minister were also open for consideration, while permission had been granted for the Festival to set up "a temporary art-gallery" in the Castle.

In a draft of a short speech to be made by the Minister of Defence, F. C. Erasmus, the symbolic and historic value of the Castle was described. The Minister accepted "custodianship of the Castle on behalf of the Union Defence Force."<sup>18</sup> He continued with an historical justification for the military presence in the Castle.

"Since its completion in 1679 the Castle has been garrisoned by successive Military Garrisons, firstly the Dutch until 1806,

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<sup>15</sup>DDS. Letter from Organising Sec., VRF, to Sec. for Public Works, 3 September 1951.

<sup>16</sup>DDS. Letter from HMC to Sec. for Defence, 19 October 1951.

<sup>17</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>DDS. Draft copy of speech, p. 1.

thereafter British until 1910 and finally the Union Defence Force.<sup>19</sup>

The events described had been compressed, with a natural bias toward the military. The Castle had not been completed in 1679, but, rather, brought to a fit enough state at which to take up residence, commerce and defence by officials and servants of the VOC. The Company continued its activities in the Castle down to September, 1795, when the garrison capitulated to British forces. In 1802, as promised, the Cape and the Castle were handed over to the VOC's successor, the Batavian Republic. Continuing war with Napoleon forced Britain to re-occupy the Cape from 1806, though their Governors soon took up residence at Government House, leaving the Castle to what would become part of British colonial administration and a military base. Though the Union had been inaugurated in May 1910, the UDF came to tenant the Castle only from December 1921, when the South African military could assume responsibility for national defence. The position was made law according to Act No. 33 of 1922. Already then the inclusion of a suitable historical and military museum was being discussed.<sup>20</sup>

Though by no means an up-to-date example of military fortification, the Castle, the Minister felt, continued to "...inspire a feeling of permanency and supplies a historical background to our young nation."<sup>21</sup> While the Castle had been spared from attempts in the 19th century to remove it from the path of commercial and

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<sup>19</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>20</sup>*Cape Times*, 31 May 1922, pp. 6 & 7.

<sup>21</sup>DDS. Draft copy of speech, p. 1.

industrial growth in the form of large railway yards, the Minister described it as being a monument to past achievement, "...a National Shrine." The draft of the Minister's speech continued that the Castle, filled with important associations, belonged historically to the entire community, and that it would be for its custodian, the UDF, to maintain especially in the public areas, its fabric and atmosphere.<sup>22</sup>

The Cape had originally been intended by the VOC only as a maritime supply station for its commercial activities. Down to the time of the Festival, the Castle was viewed increasingly as "the symbol of the foundation of Western civilisation in Southern Africa."<sup>23</sup> The Castle thus represented a huge and rich source of Africana at the historical centre of the Union.

An official publication for the Festival was to be compiled by a friend of Fehr's, Victor de Kock, of the Cape Archives, while it had been recommended that Graham Botha collaborate with De Kock.<sup>24</sup> Concurrent with the Festival would also be a major commercial fair which was intended to be "...South Africa's show of the century...a great national 'shop window,'"<sup>25</sup> since the country's mercantile and industrial growth during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had helped bring it to international prominence.

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<sup>22</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>23</sup>DDS. Draft copy of speech, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup>DDS. Minutes, Historical Defence Sub-Committee, 11 May 1951, p. 2. De Kock, V., *Ons Drie Eeue / Our Three Centuries*. [WFLG.] With copious illustrations, 61 of which were taken from Fehr's Collection.

<sup>25</sup>*Rand Daily Mail*, Johannesburg, 5 July 1951, p. 9.

The Festival Fine Arts Committee had been drawn from among major cultural institutions at Cape Town, including the South African Association of Arts, the S.A. National Gallery, the Michaelis Collection, the University's art school, the South African National Society, as well as prominent individual artists, authors and collectors.<sup>26</sup> William Fehr had made available a portion of his collection for the Exhibition, and he supplied the relevant notes for the catalogue of works displayed at Castle Good Hope. Author Madeleine Masson, a member of the Committee, and one who knew Fehr, was herself delighted by the quality of the displays. She had returned from travel abroad only shortly before the Festival, and contemplated "...repose in the eyes and in the faces of the South Africans and that gives the returning traveller a sense of serenity and confidence,"<sup>27</sup> since the Union had not felt the experience of wholesale destruction. The Historical Exhibition, for her, contained art treasures of "...artistic magnificence...which could take its place with any I have recently seen oversea."<sup>28</sup> The historic venue had helped make it all romance and enchantment, more especially so since many rare pieces from private collections had generously been placed on public display for the first time. She, like others, acknowledged the expert assistance always given her by Fehr, and was herself astonished at the magnitude of his collection, only a portion of which had been displayed at the Castle.

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<sup>26</sup> VRFHE. Sir Alfred Beit, *chairman*; Fehr, *vice-chairman*; members: Mrs. H. Bairnsfather, Prof. D. Bax, Miss. H. Dommissie, Mr. M. van Essche, Mr. L. M. J. Keyzer, Mr. V. de Kock, Mrs. G. K. Lindsay, Mme. M. Masson, Dr. J. W. von Moltke, Mr. J. Paris, Miss R. Prowse, Dr. F. W. F. Purcell, Mr. L. M. Sanderson, Prof. R. Sheppard, Mr. C. J. Pauw, *organising secretary*, Mr. A. J. B. de Klerk, *asst. org. sec.*, Mr. R. K. Cope, *arts organiser*. *Art adviser*: Miss E. Esmonde-White. *Architects*: Leeb, Ritchie-Fallon & Partners.

<sup>27</sup> *Cape Times*, 6 March 1952, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

The exhibition catalogue [VRFHE] enumerated 462 entries, though the inclusion of a few sub-entries, marked (a) and (b), gave a grand total of 478. The loan from the Netherlands had comprised 8 Van Riebeeck Family portraits and 43 watercolours, prints and maps of interest as Africana while the Old Masters in the loan were displayed at the National Gallery which stood, appropriately, in the Company's Gardens. Shown in the exhibition at the Castle were oils, watercolours, prints, furniture, glass, silver and porcelain, all related to the region's early experiences of worldwide contact, commercial enterprise, and social history. The lenders (and numbers of items) were: Mrs. Bairfather Cloete (1); Sir Alfred Beit (25); Cape Archives (4); Cape Historical and Museum Society (4); Castle Collection (9); Fehr (254); Government House (2); Mr. F. D. Lycett Green (11); Mr. & Mrs. H. Heller (41); Mrs. G. Herbert Jackson (1); Mr. V. de Kock (1); Lodge *de Goede Hoop* (1); Mr. D. S. Preller (3); Dr. F. W. F. Purcell (48); Mr. A. Rolfe (26); S. A. Public Library (3); Mr. A. F. Stephen (1). William Fehr's contribution, mainly pictorial Africana, represented over 53% of the Catalogue entries. The State Rooms housed a display -- largely of Fehr's Collection -- which in effect was "...a history of taste and refinement,"<sup>29</sup> at the Cape.

The so-called Long Gallery, which had been a barracks before the Festival, was on the first floor, between Catzenellenbogen and Nassau bastions. The room was approximately 63m x 2.4m x 6m. Its windows opened onto the inner courtyard and faced Table Mountain. During the windy and hot late summer, that stark, poorly lit and dusty room was given over entirely to Fehr's Collection

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<sup>29</sup>*Cape Times*, 6 March 1952, p. 6. *Vide Cape Times*, 1 March 1952, Week-End Magazine, p. 1, for other pictures of displays.

which would give "...a faithful representation of the life and times of the Cape."<sup>30</sup> The conversion of such an uninspiring and inadequate room into an hospitable venue for Fehr's exceptional and valuable exhibition had been the creative work of Eleanor Esmonde-White,<sup>31</sup> a South African who had travelled abroad and studied at the Royal College of Art in London. The construction of the Long Gallery display itself was undertaken by the PWD.<sup>32</sup> Miss Esmonde-White would efficiently and memorably present the Fehr Collection to the public, through modern international standards of display, in an archaic room laden with extreme difficulties. Yet it provided another opportunity to contrast in an engaging way the old and the new. Miss Esmonde-White happily recalled her involvement in the Exhibition, providing an insight into the original public display of the Collection, as well as Fehr's relationship to it and the viewers.

The artist had been involved in numerous discussions about the Exhibition with Fehr. She had then recently returned to the Union from England where she had been contracted by several architects to work on their displays for the prestigious and world-famed Festival of Britain in 1951. Her reputation abroad had already been such that Prof. Rupert Sheppard recommended her to be head of design at the Michaelis School of Art in Cape Town. Later Miss Esmonde-White was approached by Douglas Varley, Head of the South African Library, to undertake the display of some of their many historic books, maps and atlases of pertinence

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<sup>30</sup>*op. cit.*

<sup>31</sup>*Vide South Africa*, 23 March 1935, p. 372 and 18 January 1936, p. 85; *London Times*, editorial, 8 January 1936; *Die Burger*, 23 January 1936, bl. 3. At the suggestion of Prof. Rupert Sheppard, Eleanor Esmonde-White had been appointed head of design at the Michaelis School of Art at Cape Town from 1949. Interview between Esmonde-White and author, 7 September 1998.

<sup>32</sup>NAR. Letter from Organising Sec., VRF, J. C. Pauw to PWD, 3 September 1951.



to life and culture in South Africa during the previous three centuries.<sup>33</sup> Miss Esmonde-White had then been contacted by William Fehr. After several discussions of the plans she was shown the emptied barrack room which made a deep impression. The project was not intended exclusively for the connoisseur, but was planned as well for the general visitor who was without specialized knowledge.

The intention of Miss Esmonde-White, in consultation with Fehr, was to leave the hall's windowed inner wall bare, save for a few objects and pictures. Along the opposite or outer wall she designed a zigzag pattern of large panels which projected and returned at moderate angles. The views opposite<sup>34</sup> show the Long Gallery display looking toward the entrance (above) and the exit (below). Before the next panel moved out again from the wall, a glazed cabinet was put up against it, with glass shelves for smaller objects like silver spoons and brassware. Those modular units were repeated down the hall. The display became thereby an efficient application of the most modern design, using simple materials and artificial lighting, as the windows had been closed and shuttered. In the cabinets, which were lit from above like the panels, many small items took on more importance and seemed to be floating in the space of their glass environment. That had been a remarkable innovation in the Castle and in Cape Town, and one which through contrast presented Fehr's Collection in an appealing way.

While some of Fehr's oil paintings had been displayed with the exhibitions in the

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<sup>33</sup>*Vide Boekspieël van Suid-Afrika / South Africa in Print.*

<sup>34</sup>Photographs (reduced) from Miss Esmond-White.

state rooms of the Castle, his watercolours and drawings in the Long Gallery were grouped in their mounts on the panels behind sheets of glass. The viewers' attention was thereby concentrated on coherent narrative units within the entire harmonious display. While Fehr had been concerned primarily with the artwork as mirrors of history, Miss Esmonde-White helped him to make those pictures and related objects easily comprehensible and of worth to the man in the street who had come to see them. Fehr was thoroughly aware of all the items' historical connections and thereby thought them to be of equal worth. For the sake of æsthetic clarity and continuum the artist tried to insist, as best she could, that the works were not jumbled, and yet that display retained a sense of historical movement.

Objects and paintings were viewed together, along with some free-standing items, such as a clock or a chair, much in the spirit of Fehr's own home. The items bore numbers which corresponded with the Historic Exhibition Catalogue [VRFHE], and a few benches had been provided for the convenience of visitors. Miss Esmonde-White felt that it had been a very successful exhibition and that she had given Fehr anything but the sort of dull and lifeless museum display which he so disliked. Often delighted visitors had found it hard to believe that so many items were made at the Cape long ago. Miss Esmonde-White thought that "Mr. Fehr was really honoured by the response he had from the display of his Collection."<sup>35</sup> The author Madeleine Masson had written of the Fehr Collection, in particular among the other historical displays at the Castle, to be:

"a lesson for those who [like Fehr] have the courage and enterprise to pursue a hobby which, developing into a passion,

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<sup>35</sup>Portions of an interview between Eleanor Esmonde-White and author, 7 September 1998.

brings pleasure and instruction to thousands of people."<sup>36</sup>

Other collections of high-quality Africana had been known to the public, as at Cape Town's Koopmans-de Wet House, or the Africana Museum in Johannesburg, though none but Fehr's Collection had afforded such a comprehensive and coherent view of historic scenes in such an appropriate though demanding setting as at the Castle.

Fehr had sent some Festival publications to Mrs. Trotter, affording her a glimpse of the Historical Exhibition. She complimented his dedication to the "constructive historical work, for that is what the collections and exhibitions really must be."<sup>37</sup>

The Historical Exhibitions at the Castle had proven to be among the most successful and memorable aspects of the entire Festival. Those few busy weeks had also been significant for Fehr himself in that the public acclaim achieved by his Collection helped to consolidate artistically the abstract and the factual, materializing his notion of art as history. He wrote of the realization that it had been those "tangible objects which gave history a real and vital meaning."<sup>38</sup> Books and other documents, he felt, needed a greater degree of imagination for interpretation. In contrast he had observed the immediate and prominent effect of his pictures and intimately related items.

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<sup>36</sup>*Cape Times*, 6 March 1952, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup>VE. Letter from Mrs. Trotter to Fehr, 15 March 1952.

<sup>38</sup>VE. "The Fehr Collection," *Lantern*, Vol. VII, No. 3, p. 231.

"I believe it will be generally agreed that these tangible objects form what has been appropriately termed a third dimension to a balanced appreciation of history."<sup>39</sup>

Not only was his belief applicable to the comparison of dry printed pages with fine old crafted objects viewed in the round, but also, within the Collection, that the pictures, the artistic and historical heart of the Collection, were complimented by many juxtaposed and varied three-dimensioned objects. Hence, the necessity arose to view the Collection as an integrated and comprehensive entity, each valuable portion of which had been subtly linked to its fellows, providing Fehr with his sense of equal value throughout. If compared with any other similar collection, that of Fehr stands out boldly. Fehr's Collection is a cultural history the land and seas he loved. Considering all the many and varied people represented in the Collection, Fehr acknowledged that "we look to history not merely, like our ancestors, for noble examples, or diversion, but for guidance -- that I think, is something new in our days -- history has become a branch of purposive education."<sup>40</sup> The cultural values which the founder nations had brought to South Africa were part of a living heritage of all South Africans,<sup>41</sup> an humane and unselfish vision of unity championed by Fehr, and others, at a time when the people of the land, and their cultural values, were deliberately being divided and kept apart.

Upon conclusion of the Van Riebeeck Festival, notable compliments and approbation appeared, all with a similar tone of hope that such outstanding

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<sup>39</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>40</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 231-232. H. Trevor-Roper was quoted from an unspecified source.

<sup>41</sup>*ibid.*, p. 232.

historic and cultural material would be conserved and made available to the widest public. Fehr himself, some years before,<sup>42</sup> had already contemplated placing his Collection in the public domain, as a valuable educational asset. Scholarly thought at the time had reflected similar views. Knowledge of the past had, *per se*, no utilitarian value. Also science remained of little use in predicting human choice. History's value was in education through reflection. "It is not man's evolution but his attainment that is the great lesson of the past and the highest theme of history."<sup>43</sup> Fehr's Collection presented an image of such attainment, enjoyable in itself and useful as a guide.

The Head of the Johannesburg Public Library, R. F. Kennedy, in a review of numerous publications which appeared at the time, had hoped that "...the Castle will, as a result of the Festival, become the home of a permanent museum of Africana."<sup>44</sup> Some of the cultural history holdings in the South African Museum had included the Alfred de Pass Collection of pre-Classical, Classical and Oriental antiquities, which represented an important step toward increased public awareness of broader cultural and historical horizons. Cape Town's only public historical Africana display of eminence was the one at the Koopmans-de Wet House in Strand Street. The well-restored building, proclaimed a national monument in 1940, was a rare urban survivor of the 18th century, centrally placed, but increasingly dwarfed both by the rising city-centre and the dynamic cultural confluence actively demonstrated by the Festival's Historical Exhibition

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<sup>42</sup>VE. Letter from Hiller to Taylor, 18 February 1947.

<sup>43</sup>Trevelyan, G. M., *Clio, a Muse...*, p. 12.

<sup>44</sup>Kennedy, R. F., "The Festival in Print," *ANN / AAN*, Vol. 9, No. 3, June 1952, p. 73.

at the Castle. The single major museum of Africana in the Union was still part of the Johannesburg Public Library. That Africana Museum remained a heterogenous mixture of varied materials, well documented, and gathered from diverse sources, though it did not represent a coherent collection.

The entire Tercentenary Festival had concluded on the 6th of April, Van Riebeeck Day, 1952. Some three weeks later a meeting<sup>45</sup> was held at the Castle to discuss the evident need for an historical museum to be established within its walls. The minutes of that meeting rang with a note of urgency, since Fehr's Collection (the majority of the historical exhibition) was to be reclaimed by him at the end of that month. Among the most active and responsible members of the military personnel at the Castle during the Festival was Col. Louis du Toit. He had been thoroughly and knowledgeably engaged with the military aspect of the Festival, as well as being concerned with the Castle's historical significance. He had an eye for æsthetic values and, with his wife, was supportive of Fehr's and Purcell's concern for historic appreciation and conservation. Mrs. Fehr and Mrs. Purcell had also assisted their husbands with the Castle displays. Col. du Toit was willingly engaged with details, and he was determined to promote the Castle's historic rôle in social, cultural and military matters.

The idea of an historical museum in the Castle had been fully supported by the Minister of Defence, while Justice H. S. van Zyl also felt confident of the backing of the Historical Monuments Commission, of which he had been the Chairman.

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<sup>45</sup>Minutes. "Meeting held at the Castle on 26. 4. 1952, to discuss the Historical Museum which it is proposed to open at the Castle." DDS. Present were Justice & Mrs. H. van Zyl, Mrs. H. Bairnsfather, Mr. J. Paris, Fehr, Dr. F. W. F. Purcell, Mr. V. Calder [PWD], Col. & Mrs. L. du Toit., while Justice Van Zyl took the Chair.

It was felt that expert museum supervision should be sought, citing as examples J. Paris and J. W. von Moltke, respectively the Director and Assistant Director of the S.A. National Gallery at Cape Town. Col. du Toit had already discussed the subject with Van Zyl, Purcell and Fehr, concluding that a representative committee should be formed. Loans or donations by the public might be accepted and given a secure home, while what had already been on display during the Festival could form the core of a museum. The Long Gallery, where Fehr's Collection was still in place, appeared to be a good venue, while Du Toit stressed the need to find someone with the right skills to act as curator. Thus remuneration, as well as other needs, called for funds yet to be found. As the Castle had then been adopted by the Government through the Ministry of Defence, Paris put forward the idea of linking specialist branches into a National Museum, a theme he had already taken up with the appropriate authorities. Such an historical museum would:

"ensure the care and maintenance of objects on display, and he suggested that his [National Gallery] Board should assist in the display of exhibits at the Castle."<sup>46</sup>

Mrs. H. Bairnsfather presented a summary of the position of historical museums in Cape Town:

"...There already existed an Historical and Monuments association, which was started about 15 years ago [*i.e.*, ca. 1937]. It had always been the hope that the Old Supreme Court [in Adderley Street] would become a museum. It had never been possible to find a building suitable for the display of articles of historical value. Some were being housed very badly

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<sup>46</sup>*ibid.*, p. 2.

in the [Cape] Archives at the moment, and Miss [Ruth] Prowse had arranged for certain pieces of furniture to be placed in the Old Town House, where they are today."<sup>47</sup>

Bairnsfather herself had showed particular interest in historic costume and felt the Castle to be a better place than the Old Supreme Court building in Adderley Street as a museum, and Van Zyl agreed with the latter point. Fehr, in a characteristically practical tone, spoke of the Old Supreme Court building as a good venue, since, as with the Africana Museum in Johannesburg, it was centrally located for easy access during the lunch hour for those who worked in the city centre. The Castle should certainly continue to function as a museum, since it had already been serving as one, being home to the old Castle Art Collection, whereas the Old Supreme Court issue "was still very much in the air."<sup>48</sup> The latter building would shortly come under severe threat during the municipality's controversial plan to widen Bureau Street.<sup>49</sup> One plan had it that the Old Supreme Court building would be mutilated beyond recognition; another called for razing of the site altogether to favour a roadway. Ultimately the Dutch Reformed Church, adjacent to the Old Supreme Court building, acceded to having its own Consistory altered. Fehr wrote a memorandum<sup>50</sup> on the need to preserve the building as a museum for Africana. Fehr explained also

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<sup>47</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>48</sup>*ibid.* The building's history and current position were presented in Botha, C. Graham, "The Cape Supreme Court," *The South African Law Journal*, Nov. 1932, vol. XLIX, reprinted Cape Town, 1933 [WFLG]; Lückhoff, C. A., *Die Ou Hoogeregshof Gebou*, Kaapstad, 1954 [WFLG]; also in Geysler, O., *Die Ou Hoogeregshofgebou*, Kaapstad, 1958.

<sup>49</sup>*Vide* De Kock, *Ons Drie Eeue / Our Three Centuries*, Cape Town, 1952, p. 248, for a contemporary illustration of the intersection of Bureau and Adderley Streets.

<sup>50</sup>VE. 15 May 1952. *Vide* Appendix D for Fehr's own summary.

that there was much still to be gathered and displayed at the Castle, since many items, as at the South African Museum, had never been put before the public. He also noted that items like "general documents and books [...] should be housed in a proper place,"<sup>51</sup> *i.e.*, a more specialised environment. Fehr was conscious of the relatively small amount of original historical material available in the Union, if compared with the vast resources of Europe, even after two huge wars there had destroyed countless items of merit. At the Cape more material should be put on display, but in the appropriate venues. The Castle, Fehr explained,

"should not be allowed to become again merely a monument, but a place in which things could find a home. We should not abandon the idea of using the big stately rooms of the Castle as a museum."<sup>52</sup>

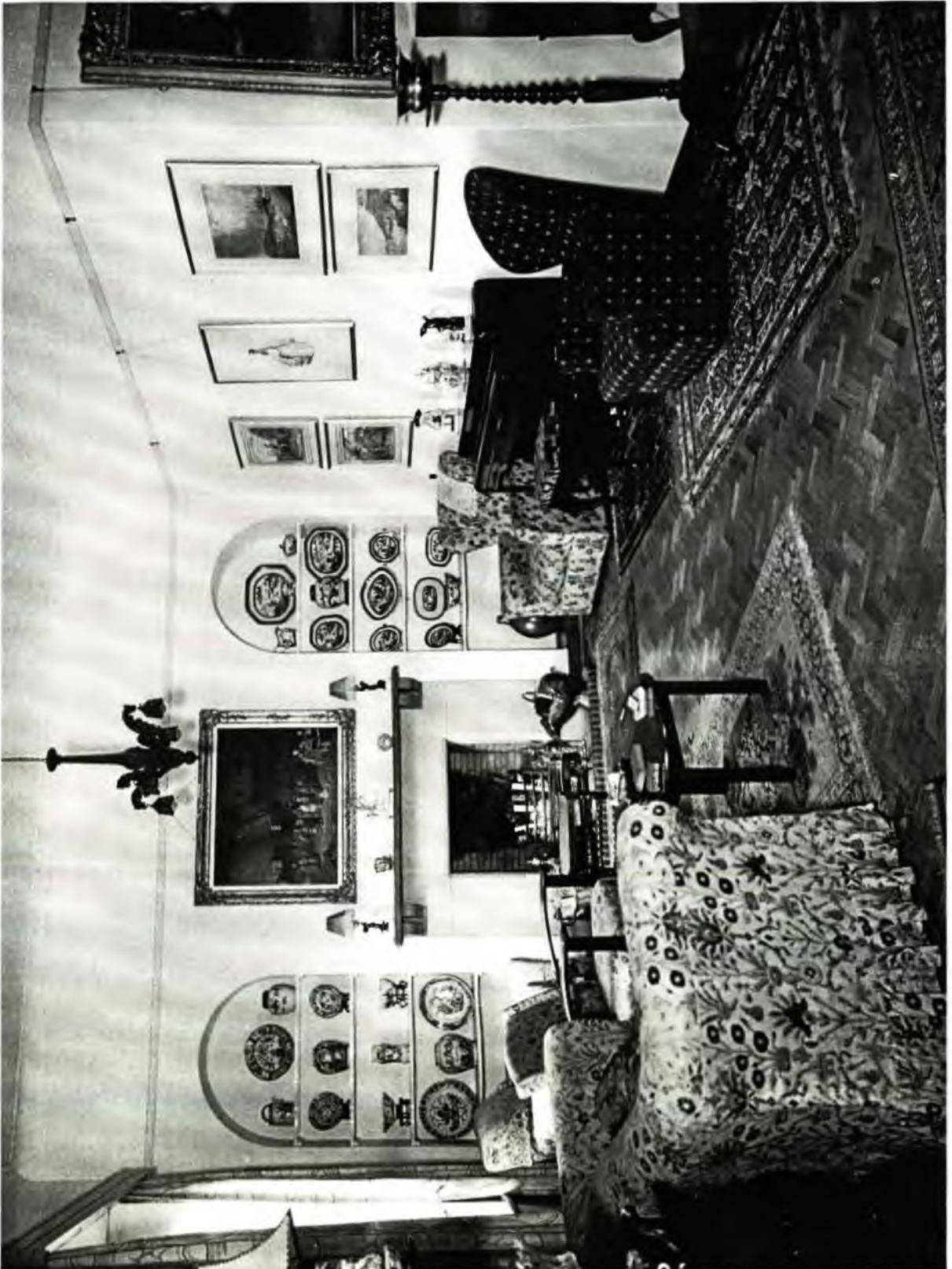
The Festival, as at no previous time, had provided an opportunity in which the Castle became a great historical and cultural showcase, open to all, rather than being kept on solely as an ageing military HQ and barracks. The Festival had also brought together a large number of individuals who were concerned with the history and culture of South Africa, highlighting the co-operative nature of such an undertaking.

In the course of that initial and significant meeting, Fehr felt anxious that his pieces still in the Castle were considered to be "looking for a home," and made it clear to all that "...he was quite prepared to have them back and [he] had ample space to house them." Fehr's house since 1937 had been "Aboyne" (*vide*

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<sup>51</sup> DDS. Minutes of Meeting held at the Castle, 26 April 1952, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid. loc. cit.*



opposite<sup>53</sup>), in the southern Cape Town suburb of Kenilworth. He had equipped the house with cupboards, boxes, chests of drawers and vertically sliding panels in which to store conveniently much of his pictorial collection.

"I transported the whole of my water-colour and print collection, exhibited in the Long Gallery at the Castle during the Van Riebeeck Festival, accounting to well over two hundred items, in the back of my car."<sup>54</sup>

At the meeting Mrs. van Zyl asked plainly "whether Mr. Fehr would be prepared to loan his Collection until a decision was arrived at." Her husband, the Chairman, proceeded with a pertinent comment on the need for proper care of the works. Fehr's reply appeared to have been well considered, as he was conscious of the Collection's proven worth. He covered points of re-hanging, light control and other improvements, seeing the urgent necessity for measures "to prevent dust and fish-moth" in the "Long Gallery," as well as the use of "volunteer curators as suggested by Mr. Paris." Fehr left the door open by suggesting that:

"the Government should be approached with regard to the amount of support they would be prepared to offer in the creation of a permanent museum."<sup>55</sup>

There, as in the future, Fehr would emphasize the responsibility of government in supporting cultural matters. At the Castle, with regard to personnel costs, if the displays were to be kept in the Council Chambers, Fehr decided that "it would require only two attendants who would be responsible for the

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<sup>53</sup>VE. Drawing room at "Aboyne" ca. 1950. Note small piano between two wing-backed chairs at right.

<sup>54</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Elizabeth Meyer, 23 May 1958, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup>VE. Minutes of Meeting held at the Castle, 26 April 1952, p. 4.

maintenance of order and supervise cleaning -- total cost £1 per day."<sup>56</sup> Discussion continued along the lines of day-to-day care and, again, Fehr was specific:

"For this work trained cleaners were needed not merely labourers. What was required was somebody in charge, in the nature of a curator, two assistants to control the staff, and at least two expert cleaners."<sup>57</sup>

The question of wages again arose and the minutes continued with a revealing entry, unusually recorded as a quotation: "Chairman: 'Mr. Paris, you agree with what is meant by Curator?' 'Yes, head attendant."<sup>58</sup> There appeared thus to be no question of constructing a costly and, while Fehr was around, unnecessary specialist apparatus for the new museum, since Fehr would maintain the integrity of the Collection. Further, for the lighting of his works, Fehr had earlier loaned his own fittings. If the exhibition "were to be left here [in the Castle] for a longer period, [he] would expect the lighting to be taken over eventually by the Government." That was perhaps a relatively small point but one which Fehr insisted upon in propriety, good business form and with careful regard to ultimate responsibility.

Col. du Toit added that "his Department [of Defence] was primarily interested in exhibiting objects of a military nature,"<sup>59</sup> the idea of a military museum in the Castle going back to at least 1932, in fact to 1922. Consideration of an historical

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<sup>56</sup>*ibid. loc. cit.*

<sup>57</sup>*ibid. p. 5.*

<sup>58</sup>*ibid., loc. cit.*

<sup>59</sup>*ibid. p. 6.*

or Africana exhibit in the Castle also referred to the latter date.<sup>60</sup> Though other items might be welcome, Col. du Toit believed that "exhibits should be associated with the history of the Castle as far as possible."<sup>61</sup> He presented a balanced idea that the Castle was to be presented as a military centre, both current and historical, though not ignoring its "administrative and social" rôles. The proposed historical museum should be divided into suitable sections. As a matter of future consequence, Fehr:

"expressed his willingness to consider leaving a portion of his collection at the Castle for an indefinite period, as he was anxious to assist with the launching of the project..."<sup>62</sup>

The Great Barracks / Long Gallery was not "entirely suitable" for the display of his works, Fehr believed, but rather for "items of Military interest." Again the Chairman's wife interjected at that meeting that she "thought it a matter of urgency that we retained as much as possible of Mr. Fehr's collection." She interposed her offer of the two important portraits of François Renier Duminy and Johanna Margareta Nöthling, currently held by the Historical Society which Bairnsfather represented, "as the Castle was the right place for them." She added that "pictures of early life should be displayed here and not works of contemporary artists."<sup>63</sup> Purcell advised circumspection if venues in the Castle were to be changed, since the sum of £6,000 had already been spent on renovations, while new lighting would also be costly. To that concern Paris suggested the pursuit of a Government grant.

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<sup>60</sup>*Cape Times*, 31 May 1922, pp. 6 & 7.

<sup>61</sup>VE. Minutes of Meeting held at the Castle, 26 April 1952, p. 6.

<sup>62</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>63</sup>*ibid.*, p. 6.

That meeting had witnessed the public consolidation of William Fehr's Collection, in addition to a Military Museum and the further development of Castle Good Hope as a cultural centre; there also appeared *in ovo* what would evolve as recurring and serious questions of maintenance and responsibility for the Collection.

For the sponsoring Ministry of Education, Arts and Science, the Exhibition's strength rested in giving "...a very fair picture of the cultural basis of our South African way of life."<sup>64</sup> At the conclusion of the Festival, a letter of thanks suggested that:

"it could be a matter of the greatest satisfaction to everyone if only ways and means might be found by which the public might always have access to so complete and remarkable a collection."<sup>65</sup>

Throughout that period Alfred Gordon-Brown (b. 1902, Liverpool) had been in regular contact with Fehr, as a friend and fellow collector. Gordon-Brown had travelled extensively and succeeded his father as editor (from 1939) of *The South and East African Year Book* [WFLG], as well as, from 1951, *Guides for Visitors to Madeira and the Canary Islands*, all for the Union-Castle Company. He shared his time between Britain and the Cape. His numerous books, copies of which Fehr owned, included *Narrative of Private Buck Adams (1843-1848)*, edited for the Van Riebeeck Society, (No. 22) Cape Town, 1941 [WFLG]; *Christopher Webb Smith, 1837-1839*, Cape Town, 1965; *South Africa's Heritage*, Cape Town, 1965 [WFLG]; W. J. Burchell's *Travels in S. Africa, 1810-1815*, Cape

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<sup>64</sup>VE. Letter to Fehr from Minister of Education, Arts and Science, 2 May 1952.

<sup>65</sup>*ibid.*

Town, 1967; and the Introduction to *Cape Sketchbooks of Sir Charles D'Oyly, 1832-1833*, Cape Town, 1968. He also wrote extensively in *ANN / AAN* [WFLG]. Some of the surviving correspondence between Fehr and Gordon-Brown dealt with much of the pictorial Africana which the former came to purchase from dealers in England as well as through private sales there and in the Union. Gordon-Brown's well-reasoned advice was consistently based on his encyclopædic knowledge of the subject, as well as his eye for artistic quality, although, by self-admission, his preference was for printed Africana -- books and pamphlets.

"I started to form my collection of South African books in 1930, and, as is very liable to happen with Africana collectors, my interest gradually extended to pictures."<sup>66</sup>

In another article by Kennedy, later in the same Festival year, there appeared a significant and necessary association among Fehr, Gordon-Brown and the Africana Museum. The latter was, as noted above, the one major institution in the Union to gather, preserve and document pictorial as well as other forms of Africana, in all the heterogenous variety characteristic of a museum. Fehr, in turn, was recognised as being one of a new sort of collector. At a time when "...Africana used to mean books...",<sup>67</sup> Kennedy pointed out that Fehr [an individual] and, loyally, the Africana Museum [part of a municipal institution] were leaders among "...collectors who endeavour to cover the whole field of South African historic art."<sup>68</sup> As with Fehr's collecting, the Africana Museum "sets

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<sup>66</sup>Gordon-Brown, A., *Pictorial Art in South Africa during Three Centuries to 1875*, p. 9.

<sup>67</sup>Kennedy, R. F., "Pictorial Africana," *ANN/AAN*, Vol. 10, No. 1, December 1952, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup>*ibid. loc. cit.*

itself the task of giving representation to all races which have contributed to South African history...."<sup>69</sup> Kennedy also acknowledged the important rôle played by many lesser collectors who could each make their individual contribution to the greater advance of the subject. That pictorial Africana had been receiving keen attention had been proven to Kennedy by the notable rise in prices paid by collectors since the early 1930's, being coincidentally about the time that Fehr began in earnest to collect historical South African pictures. The article was, in fact, a review of Gordon-Brown's *Pictorial Art*, an important book which Kennedy regarded as "...comprehensive and accurate."<sup>70</sup> It was "the first serious attempt at a work on early South African artists,"<sup>71</sup> and its author had considered most types of pictures. Bushman (San) art had not been included since that specialized field had been well worked by others. Further, he did not discuss portraits other than those done at the Cape.<sup>72</sup>

Gordon-Brown also highlighted cases of the dispersal of Africana, in contrast to consolidation. The deceased estates of Sir Abe Bailey and Capt. Maurice Green, two well-known collectors, had both been sold at high prices during 1951. Gordon-Brown foresaw a further stimulus to interest when Fehr would exhibit a portion of his Collection in the following year.<sup>73</sup> Jacob van Reenen's 1772 portrait of Cape Town [VRFHE 437] appeared then among Fehr's Collection,

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<sup>69</sup>Kennedy, R. F., "The Cape Malays," *ANN / AAN*, Vol. 1, No. 4, August 1944, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup>Kennedy, R. F., "Pictorial Africana," *ANN / AAN*, Vol. 10, No. 1, December 1952, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup>Gordon-Brown, *Pictorial Art*, p. 10.

<sup>72</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>73</sup>*ibid.*, p. 11.

having been acquired at the Green sale.

In reply to interest shown further afield, Fehr had lent pictorial and other Africana to the historical exhibition of the Rhodes Centenary in Bulawayo, Rhodesia, in 1953. Mrs. Trotter had followed Fehr's involvement in the proceedings intently, since the two had met during Fehr's visit to England in 1950.

"We are so interested and excited about the great events at Bulawayo – you are greatly to be congratulated on your able introduction to the picture catalogue. It seems to me exactly right and so well put. I do hope that all your splendid work will be recognised – good work always is sooner or later but one has to confess sometimes much later. It's a comfort to think that amongst all the wrangles and the tragedies such good constructive use is being made of the really absorbingly interesting history of S. Africa. Who could have believed even 50 years back that such wonderful developments could be going on in Bulawayo. One used to connect it with hard bitten pioneers and men who had taken their lives in their hands or big game hunters who were out for hair breath [sic] adventures."<sup>74</sup>

Like the Van Riebeeck Festival of the previous year, the Rhodes Centenary would prove to be a huge undertaking both for Fehr and Purcell. (*Vide* Appendix E.) The origins of the exhibition in Rhodesia were clearly recorded. The Centenary was to have commenced on 1 April 1953, but, in deference to the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth, the opening was moved ahead to June, to be viewed for two

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<sup>74</sup>VE. Letter from Mrs. Trotter to Fehr, 4 July 1953.

months. The Union Government decided to participate, since Southern Rhodesia had been represented at the Van Riebeeck Festival Fair.<sup>75</sup>

Negotiations with William Fehr had begun cordially, based largely on the acclaim generated by Fehr's Collection in 1952. The Union Department of Commerce and Industries wrote to Fehr concerning the display of some items from his Collection at the South African Pavilion during the Rhodes Centenary. An interior designer had already consulted with Fehr, when the latter had suggested displaying in an imitation "Cape-Dutch," *i. e.* Company period house, to show not only a former way of life, but also to emphasize Rhodes as an early collector of Africana at the Cape.<sup>76</sup>

Prof. M. Bockhorst of the SAAA at Cape Town had been nominated by the Union Dept. of Education, Arts and Science to be responsible for an art display in the Union's pavilion at the Centenary. From early in the proceedings Fehr had become apprehensive. Other art works had been turned down by the Rhodesian authorities since they could not adequately conserve them. Fehr was anxious that his own pieces might suffer in that sub-tropical northern climate.<sup>77</sup>

Though he had been advised against sending items to the Centenary, Fehr suggested adequate alternatives, since he found the project worthwhile. Good

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<sup>75</sup>NAR. Agenda. Meeting held in the Board Room, Department of Commerce and Industries, 10 July 1952, p. 1.

<sup>76</sup>NAR. Letter from Sec. for Commerce & Industries to Fehr, 30 December 1952.

<sup>77</sup>NAR. Letter from Fehr to [Union] Sec. for Commerce and Industries, 5 January 1953, p. 1.



photographs of some 25 works could be made, coloured by hand and framed, and also be available for further use, while furniture might be brought in from the Africana Museum at Johannesburg, which was very much nearer Bulawayo than was Cape Town.<sup>78</sup> Ultimately Fehr relented and agreed to have an appropriate selection from his Collection transported to Rhodesia (*vide* opposite<sup>79</sup>). His inventory for insurance purposes enumerated 15 pictures (most from the Castle, courtesy of Col. du Toit), 14 pieces of furniture, 24 items of china and pottery and 33 pieces of copper and brass ware.<sup>80</sup> The pictures, most of which reflected strong British and commercial connections, were Baines, T., *Death of Col. Fordyce*, 1851 [VRFHE 10], *A Loyal Fingo*, 1851 [VRFHE 13], *Landing of the 1820 Settlers*, 1874 [VRFHE 16]; Bowler, T., *Table Bay from Robben Island*, 1851 [VRFHE 19]; Dodd, R., *Table Bay in 1778*; Hodges, Wm., *Table Mountain and Cape Town*, 1772 [VRFHE 25]; l'Ons, F., *1820 Settlers near the Fish River*, 1837 [VRFHE 31]; Langschmidt, W. H. F., *Long Street in 1850* [VRFHE 34], *Man shooting a Duiker* [VRFHE 35]; Lauvergne, B., *Table Bay*, 1851 [VRFHE 37]; Scott, S., *Cape of Good Hope*, 1730 [VRFHE 38]; Smit, A., *Table Bay*, 1683, [recently acquired by Fehr, *vide Cape Times*, 31 January 1953, p. 2]; Smirke, R., *Wreck of the "Grosvenor,"* 1784 [VRFHE 427]; Mitchell, C. C., *Montagu Pass* (drawing) 1840 [VRFHE 416], *Montagu Pass* (engraving). The transport of Fehr's Africana received attention in the Cape press.<sup>81</sup> Notes by Fehr revealed something of the inner character of his collecting, as well as his discernment.

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<sup>78</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>79</sup>VE. Photograph of Africana display in Rhodes Centenary Exhibition, Bulawayo, 1953.

<sup>80</sup>NAR. "Inventory of Fehr Collection for Insurance." [Cape Town, 1953.]

<sup>81</sup>*Die Burger*, 14 Mei 1953, bl. 7; *Cape Times*, 14 May 1953, p. 9.

Rhodes' many worldly achievements would be considered elsewhere during the Centenary.

"Our tribute here is to Rhodes the Trustee and his love of and veneration for the natural beauties of the Cape, and his recognition of our rich heritage in Architecture and the Arts and Crafts, on which he found time to place a protecting hand, and thus by precept and example to awaken in us a consciousness and pride in their preservation [...]."<sup>82</sup>

Eventually the exhibition was praised as having been a great success, with the local press recording that such a display from South Africa, of modern and early art, had not before been seen there.<sup>83</sup> No efforts were spared in returning safely the items of Fehr's Collection to the Castle.

Though Fehr was gradually becoming a major figure in Africana collecting in the Union, others also made notable contributions in the field. Mrs. M. M. Jansen, wife to the Governor-General of the Union, had planned to write a history of Cape furniture and Fehr was to be responsible for the foreword to the book. At about the same time, Prof. G. E. Pearse, of the University of the Witwatersrand, had approached Fehr asking permission to photograph some of his pieces displayed at the Castle. Pearse, who was "busy on research for the letterpress," intended to publish a work on 18<sup>th</sup>-century Cape furniture, silver, porcelain, glass

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<sup>82</sup>NAR. "The Old Cape House. Introduction to the Reception Room or Voorkamer of the Old Cape House." p. 1.

<sup>83</sup>*Rhodesian Herald*, 12 June 1953, p. 4.

and interiors in a good illustrated volume.<sup>84</sup>

Apparently Mrs. Jansen had been unaware of Pearse's plan and Fehr had written to inform her. Illustrations of a number of items from Fehr's Collection had already been published in many works on South African art and history. Fehr was generous with assistance of that sort, but it would have been inappropriate and impractical to have published two sets of pictures of the same objects, at about the same time, in new publications intended for the interested public. Though Fehr was prepared to assist Pearse, Mrs. Jansen's book held priority. Fehr wrote to her with the assurance that he would not consent to Pearse's using illustrative material which Mrs. Jansen might already have selected.<sup>85</sup> When Fehr received a copy of Mrs. Jansen's text, with the information that photographs had indeed not yet been taken from certain private collections, he urged that it be done before Pearse's visit to Cape Town in search of quality material. Again, Fehr complimented Mrs. Jansen by appreciating the comprehensive work done by herself, and thought it especially noteworthy as it would be published in Afrikaans.<sup>86</sup>

Mrs. Jansen had been thoroughly engaged with, among other things, the cultural life of the Afrikaner, and Afrikaans, which had from 1925 become another official language of the Union. Fehr had enquired whether the text of his foreword had met with approval. It was suggested he mention that the book

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<sup>84</sup>VE. Portion of Letter from Pearse to Fehr, 25 July 1957, quoted in Letter from Fehr to Mrs. Jansen, 29 July 1957.

<sup>85</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Mrs. Jansen, 29 July 1957, p. 2.

<sup>86</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Mrs. Jansen, 9 August 1957.



would first be published in Afrikaans. Fehr remarked that he had originally intended doing so, and further that the book was “a pioneering effort on the subject of early Cape Furniture.”<sup>87</sup> Rather than take up too much letterpress, Fehr decided to leave out those two allusions. Incorporating the suggestion, Fehr sent a revised draft of the foreword to Mrs. Jansen. Two new paragraphs had been included. Fehr’s letter closed with the formality and grace appropriate to such an exchange. A transcript of the unedited text of the foreword appears below (Appendix F.). Included are the two new paragraphs, taken from Fehr’s revised draft, marked with asterisks.

The foreword was characterised by Fehr’s brief and precise text highlighted by quotations and historical references. The opening paragraph contained a description of what could have been Fehr’s own Collection at his house “Aboyne,” or, more likely, the display he had assembled in the Council Chamber (*vide opposite*<sup>88</sup>) and adjacent rooms at the Castle following the Tercentenary Exhibition and at the Rhodes Centenary. Fehr described the “paradoxically regal splendour” which furnishings of the old Cape gave to the imposing though austere country houses which grew out of the Company period. Rather than being viewed in the contemporary settings of cities and courts in Europe, those Cape-made furnishings

“ask nothing better than to stand against a clean white-washed wall,  
squarely planted on the wide yellow-wood flooring boards or the

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<sup>87</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>88</sup>VE. Photograph of Council Chamber with Fehr’s Collection, Castle Good Hope, Cape Town, ca. 1955.

polished surface of the large red-brown Batavian tiles.”<sup>89</sup>

Fehr’s description of the setting also created an image of those who had lived in that unadorned and hospitable simplicity. As it happened, the book by Mrs. Jansen was not published. The final illness and decease (1959) of Dr. Jansen had intervened. Fehr’s unpublished foreword remained a useful document on the subject, as well as reflecting his own characteristic relation to collecting art as history. In essence, he believed that tenacity and great faith had been required when establishing, in the Company period, a worthwhile existence at the Cape. Later, the British could be thanked for their active part in trying to preserve what was becoming part of a national heritage, embracing in Africa the cultural influences of East and West. Though Fehr’s own times had become more prosperous, he freely acknowledged the important contributions made by those who had gone before. He pointed again to private and public responsibility for the conservation and enjoyment of the cultural heritage.<sup>90</sup>

“In guarding culture, we are guarding that foretaste of immortality to which alone man by his own works can aspire. And it is an immortality worthy of the name, for it represents enrichment of the spirit, increase in stature.”<sup>91</sup>

Throughout that period Fehr enthusiastically took up a key rôle in the complex and long-drawn matter of conserving the Old Malay Quarter at Cape Town. Newspaper articles from mid-1943 began increasingly to express concern for the current and future status of the Quarter. The HMC had been sent petitions from

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<sup>89</sup>VE. Draft of foreword by Fehr, p. 1.

<sup>90</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>91</sup>*ibid.*, p. 4. Quote by Fehr from Arciniegas, G., “Culture – a human right” in UNESCO (compiler) *Freedom and Culture*, p. 24.

"a group of influential people" and representatives from the Malay populace concerned.<sup>92</sup> An architects' *Report*<sup>93</sup> described the matter as it stood. After describing the boundaries of the area they continued that it represented a mixture of styles from the late Company period down to early Colonial. Still quite intact, some of the houses were of considerable merit.

"We wish to emphasise that the undoubted attraction of the 'Quarter' does not reside in individual examples of building but in the grouping and relationship of the houses, and in the fact that the area as a whole is still so largely unspoilt, and so typical of the eighteenth century, and also in Oriental atmosphere created by the costume and general appearance of the Malay inhabitants, their mosques and other Eastern attributes, tinged as these are by a distinctive local Cape flavour...."<sup>94</sup>

All of those traits were distinctively reflected in the Fehr Collection, both in the artefacts related to Cape Malay culture and through the depictions of those people displayed at the Castle since the Van Riebeeck Festival. Many more watercolours and graphics of the subject were still in Fehr's private possession. The Quarter, like the Collection, was more than being only the sum of its individual parts.

Under its chairman, Justice H. S. van Zyl, the HMC met the official deputations at the Michaelis Collection in the Old Town House at Cape Town. The leader

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<sup>92</sup>*Cape Times*, 24 June 1943, p. 5. The "influential people" were E. G. Jansen, C. T. te Water, Ruth Prowse, I. D. du Plessis, Helen Burton, J. G. van der Horst, Mrs. G. B. van Zyl, and E. F. Watermeyer. [NMCCT. Signatories to Letter to HMC, 4 May 1943.] The Quarter itself was represented by S. A. Behardien and Mohamad Mustapha Jacöb [Copy of their Letters, originally in Afrikaans, in NMCCT. *Report on the Malay Quarter*, 18 June 1943].

<sup>93</sup>NMCCT. *Report* by Reg. de Smidt and Magda Sauer, 18 June 1943.

<sup>94</sup>*ibid.*

of the Malay deputation, Imam S. A. Behardien, said that the Quarter was once their "sanctuary."

"We beg that it may be restored to us, for the City Council has permitted the intrusion of natives and other people who have no relation at all with us, but who have brought crime and infamy to the place. No longer can we leave our doors open, even by day, and our children are learning evil practices from the intruders."<sup>95</sup>

Another who recalled earlier memories of Table Valley and the Quarter was C. A. Lückhoff. He described something of the demography of Cape Town during and after the Great War, when the Black African population of the Cape had been relatively small.

"As children we also met Natives, most of whom were garden boys and house boys, but there weren't many of them. Those I saw most were the friends of the Native man who worked in my father's garden. There were fishermen we used to see at the bottom of Adderley Street and at the Docks; newspaper-boys and all kinds of other people. And so as time went on and we learned to know that there were not only White people living here [in Cape Town], but also Coloured people, Malays, Indians and even some Natives."<sup>96</sup>

Somewhat older than Lückhoff, co-author I. D. Du Plessis added that senior inhabitants of Cape Town looked with nostalgia to an earlier time when life was still tinted with a romantic glow.

"Much of this has given way to the unlovely. Raucous voices and drunken

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<sup>95</sup>Cape Argus, 25 June 1943, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup>VE. Lückhoff, C. A. in foreword [p. 9] to Du Plessis, I. D. and C. A. Lückhoff, *The Malay Quarter and its People*, Cape Town & Amsterdam, 1953.

brawls disturb the peace of the evening. And these are not Malay voices, nor are the v[o]ices those of Islam, rather those of the intruders, the unwanted...."<sup>97</sup>

A question of the Quarter's actual age arose in the comments of an unidentified "leader of the Malay community."

"The old quarter, where we lived as a proud, decent and law abiding community for 250 years has become unsafe -- the haunt of drunkards and roisterers."<sup>98</sup>

By reckoning with the supposed age of the Quarter, the date 1693 was reached, close enough to the reception at the Cape of the exiled Sheikh Yusuf and his *entourage*, but not the birth date of the Malay Quarter as it stood in 1943. Having appeared from the late Company period, the Quarter had probably been reinhabited, by those of Eastern descent, during the early decades of the 19th century, while I. D. du Plessis put the date closer to 1850. The greater discrepancy would be perpetuated in the press shortly thereafter.

"This quarter is one of the most interesting survivals of the 17th and 18th centuries that exists in any part of the world. Here East and West met and here [in Cape Town] East and West still meet. Architecturally the area embraces little more than one acre, but within that acre are comprised buildings and mosques which have been the centre of the Malay community for 250 years."<sup>99</sup>

On the basis of those representations, the HMC decided to ask the City Council to defer the demolition process, thus allowing time for proposals on ways to

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<sup>97</sup>*ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>98</sup>*Cape Argus*, 25 June 1943, p. 2

<sup>99</sup>*Cape Times*, 26 June 1943, p. 6.

sustain the historic Quarter. The site needed to be defined more clearly as to its area and ownership, and while the HMC could not go beyond its own responsibilities, it was felt to be "unfortunate that the [Malay] community should have been disturbed by the native element."<sup>100</sup> A standing committee of local members would be appointed by the HMC, while Prof. van Riet Lowe [Secretary of the Cape branch, HMC] said "he had seen mosques and houses which, he felt, could be declared immediately,"<sup>101</sup> since they fulfilled certain of the requirements for proclamation. Another member added that "it was not buildings which made slums but the misuse of buildings, and it was unnecessary to remove buildings to get rid of slums."<sup>102</sup> Reasons for having initiated the demolition campaign also became more clear. The City Council had originally intended to make the Quarter into an industrial area. The rapidly changing shape of Cape Town was marked by major growth of the railway, the vast newly reclaimed Foreshore area, and the gradual shift of industry away from town towards the eastern side of Table Bay. Thus by 1943 the speculations over the Malay Quarter became "impracticable."<sup>103</sup> Chiappini Street would no longer be needed as a main road, though large-scale building in the area might begin again, it was supposed, only long after the war was over.<sup>104</sup> A bilingual brochure was published by the Group Working for the Preservation of the Malay Quarter.<sup>105</sup> By 1950 the Cape Town

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<sup>100</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>101</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>102</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>103</sup>*Cape Times*, 25 June 1943, p. 8.

<sup>104</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>105</sup>*The Malay Quarter, why it must be preserved; also as Die Slamse Buurt, waarom dit behou moet word*, Kaapstad, 1944. Mr. H. J. van Zyl, Chairman. Members: Chief Justice E. F.

City Council had already restored 17 houses in the Quarter, and further houses might be preserved under the scheme if more funds could be found.

Over a decade after the original submissions, the HMC still welcomed the suggestion to proclaim the Malay Quarter a national monument, though to some it seemed useless to proclaim a set of old buildings "if their maintenance and upkeep were uncertain."<sup>106</sup> The HMC might undertake only the declaration of monuments and see to "minor preservative measures." It could do little else while the Quarter gradually crumbled under commercial threats, and that the Group Areas Act did not specify it as being "a purely residential quarter for the Malays."<sup>107</sup>

Debates on the Malay Quarter were sustained for years. William Fehr would readily become involved in the process of saving it from the wreckers on both moral and æsthetic grounds, as well as helping to persuade local and national government to support cultural matters as being their civic and patriotic responsibility. The sustained effort on Fehr's part was second only to the creation of his Collection, which also, in its way, embraced the Malay Quarter and its inhabitants. It was as though his pictures had come to life. Fehr himself was part of the Quarter.

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Watermeyer, Prof. M. R. Drennan (HMC), Dr. E. G. Jansen, Mrs. G. B. van Zyl, Mrs. H. Burton, Miss R. Prowse, Sir Fraser Russell, Mr. Charles te Water, Dr. I. D. du Plessis, Mr. J. G. van der Horst, Mr. J. Ramsay, Mr. F. Glennie (S. A. National Society), Mr. R. Stubbs, Dr. W. Purcell, Mr. Reg. de Smidt, Miss Magda Sauer.

<sup>106</sup>*Cape Times*, 17 May 1955, p. 9.

<sup>107</sup>*ibid.*

It was late in 1956 that Fehr was brought into the complicated process<sup>108</sup> on behalf of the HMC, of which Fehr had been a member since 1954. The matter in question concerned the HMC's proposed "request to the Minister of the Interior that the Malay Quarter be proclaimed under the Group Areas Act." Such a step, it was felt, needed "a clear definition of the area to be affected."<sup>109</sup> When the HMC was certain that the Quarter "has been reserved for occupation by Malays in terms of the Group Areas Act," it became clear that the appropriate administration and town planning were matters for the City Council. A draft letter suggested that the HMC would continue with its concern for the proper administration of the Quarter,<sup>110</sup> but B. D. Malan, Secretary of the HMC, was not yet satisfied with progress concerning the Quarter, and enquired after Fehr's comments. Malan wrote that he was not satisfied with the draft. What had been needed were Fehr's incisive views, diplomatic manner and eloquent style. The quarter continued to suffer from neglect, and worse, the City Council was not implementing the appropriate degree of responsibility.<sup>111</sup> Fehr, in his reply, suggested a succinct and eloquent letter.

"At a recent meeting of the Commission it was reported that the Malay Quarter has been set aside under the Group Areas Act for the exclusive use of the Malay community.

The Commission has been given to understand that it will now

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<sup>108</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Drennan, 26 October 1956, and Letter from Drennan to HMC, 5. Nov. 1956. In both cases Fehr and Drennan were linked to Prof. J. du P. Scholtz in those consultations.

<sup>109</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Drennan, 1 August 1957. A gloss to the letter read, "Fehr reports has been proc[laimed] under Group Areas Act."

<sup>110</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Town Clerk, Cape Town. Undated draft copy [October 1957].

<sup>111</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Fehr, 31 October 1957.

be possible to consider the appointment of an official body under a Town Planner to lay out this area as a self-contained township for the use of the Malay community with appropriately situated schools and playing grounds with larger residential quarters on the outskirts and with certain blocks of the old quarter preserved together with the Mosques in the 18th century tradition.

Mention was made of the co-operation received from your Council over the years in which prominent citizens had given their time and effort to the preservation of this historical section of old Cape Town.

I was requested to convey to you the appreciation of members of the Commission and to express the hope that in the proposed planning of this quarter, those responsible would be guided by the knowledge of the desirability to preserve the traditional character and features in such measure as will safeguard the historic interest for the future."<sup>112</sup>

Fehr's version of the draft satisfied Malan and the HMC, and was sent to the Town Clerk<sup>113</sup>

Some weeks later Fehr posted to Malan in Johannesburg a modest note concerning the Quarter. Fehr's letter had been quoted in the press and the desired effect of co-operation with the HMC had been drawn out from the City Council.<sup>114</sup>

The HMC was indebted to Fehr for success of their case with the Municipality,

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<sup>112</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Fehr to HMC, 19 November 1957.

<sup>113</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Fehr, 26 November 1957.

<sup>114</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Fehr to HMC, 6 February 1958.

and Malan added his own personal thanks.<sup>115</sup> Some time later Fehr was again approached by the HMC, on that occasion to draft a letter to the Cape Provincial Council concerning the Quarter.<sup>116</sup> He did so with the result being a concise, well-paced and thorough appeal to the Administrator of the Cape, seeking his support for a thorough plan for the whole Malay Quarter.<sup>117</sup>

Fehr advised that course of action because the City Engineer (S. S. Morris) "does not seem favourably disposed to a comprehensive scheme." In that letter Fehr referred to a booklet, produced by architecture students at UCT, for which he wrote the introduction. The Head of the Department was Prof. Thornton White who had, with Fehr, been a member of The Group for the Preservation of the Malay Quarter.

Though many had enjoyed the Quarter's Oriental character in the Mother City, others evidently did not. One observer remarked before the City Council that:

"fearful conditions exist in the whole of this area. It is a disgrace to Cape Town, a festering sore."<sup>118</sup>

Another and more moderate view held that portions of the Quarter could be preserved, but certainly not the entire area. A further and extreme stance was taken by yet another who:

"thought that if the Japanese had gone ahead during the war and blotted out that area it would have been a good thing. There are

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<sup>115</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Fehr, 13 February 1958.

<sup>116</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Fehr, 16 May 1960.

<sup>117</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Fehr to HMC, 20. May. 1960.

<sup>118</sup>*Cape Argus*, 30 August 1960, p. 3.

opium dens there -- I know, I have been to them -- and brothels...  
 We should not have allowed Natives to live there. I am told that  
 40 Natives were living in one room; Natives from the docks who  
 didn't want to go back to Langa."<sup>119</sup>

It is not certain that those labourers were from Langa, as (ex-Mayor) Councillor C. O. Booth had believed. The men were possibly contract migrant-workers from different "Native Reserves" and thus not necessarily cordially disposed toward each other's different customs.

The debate had been generated by a proposal that an 18th-century house in Wale Street "be restored if the Provincial Administration and the National Housing Commission would share the cost of £1,030."<sup>120</sup> Fehr soon entered the discussion, as a member of the HMC, remarking with precision and thoroughness on the failure of the City Council to deal responsibly with the situation, for which they were at fault. He believed that,

"Approached in the right manner and with vision, the Malay Quarter is capable of growing into a model township, in which the claims for modern sanitary and civilized existence would be linked with historic, æsthetic and ethnological requirements of a traditionally self-respecting and proud people."<sup>121</sup>

It was necessary for a "new approach" to the matter, thus helping to house many Malays who were "displaced by the infiltration of other sections of the non-European community."<sup>122</sup> Fehr added that the moral, sociological and æsthetic

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<sup>119</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>120</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>121</sup>*Cape Times*, 3 September 1960, p. 17.

<sup>122</sup>*ibid.*

grounds had been set out in the report by the Malay Quarter Preservation Committee, which had been working since 1944. Should the City Engineer have been in anyway doubtful, Fehr was reassuring in that the well-being of the quarter was not in the hands of merely "a sentimental, unpractical bunch of people."<sup>123</sup>

Fehr prepared an extensive memorandum to be given to the Administrator of the Cape, but in the course of their meeting ascertained, with surprise, that the Provincial Council thought otherwise of the Quarter's restoration. They explained that "it would create a very difficult precedent in regard to other group areas and or town development schemes," and therefore the Cape Provincial Council "would have no say in the matter."<sup>124</sup> Fehr was sure that the Government must show interest in the HMC's memorandum. If the Government were confident in its Group Areas Act, then they would find a worthy place to demonstrate and implement their concern for the populace in the Malay Quarter, "in a manner which few other such townships provide."<sup>125</sup> That had not been the first occasion Fehr had applied cultural pressure on the authorities, to take up earnestly their implicit responsibilities to society.

The Quarter continued to deteriorate alarmingly, while the HMC urged immediate action, otherwise "it will very soon have lost its historical and

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<sup>123</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>124</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Fehr to HMC, 22 September 1960.

<sup>125</sup>*ibid.*

æsthetic character."<sup>126</sup> The architect D. Visser was asked if he would, with two colleagues, viz., B. E. Biermann and R. Fox, join local HMC members Fehr, Scholtz and Kotzé to collaborate on a Malay Quarter Committee. The HMC had resolved to proclaim the Quarter a national monument. Advice would be needed from experts since, after proclamation, "no alterations to the Quarter will be permitted without the prior consent of the Commission."<sup>127</sup> As soon as the Committee had been constituted, Fehr would be approached by the HMC to convene a meeting. The author of the letter, B. D. Malan, appreciated the considerable time required of Fehr, who had just passed his sixty-ninth birthday anniversary, telling him that though the Committee could make its own selection, Malan found it "difficult to envisage another convenor."<sup>128</sup>

Though "somewhat vague" about the new Committee's duties, Malan felt in general that mundane and specific jobs needed to be undertaken with an eye to costs involved.<sup>129</sup> In spite of the lengthy process, it was thought that the proclamation of the Quarter as a national monument was of benefit not only for Cape Town, but also the whole country. An officer of the Department of Coloured Affairs believed that as the earlier preservation of the Castle had earned the gratitude of many, so too the saving of the Malay Quarter would receive thanks from those of the future.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to D. Visser, 25 April 1961.

<sup>127</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>128</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Fehr, 25 April 1961.

<sup>129</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>130</sup>*Cape Argus*, 13 April 1961, p. 3.

Fehr had been actively involved in correspondence with several authorities in order to find a practical and acceptable course for the Quarter. A meeting was held with a sub-Committee of the City Council.<sup>131</sup> The rôle Fehr took up there was much the same as that of the architects, "largely a labour of love,"<sup>132</sup> though some remuneration for the architects was being negotiated. The significance of that meeting rested largely on two issues. Fehr felt that the City Council had at least tacitly recognized the long-overdue Consultative Advisory Committee, and that, based on the architects' expert advice, it might be at all possible to restore buildings in the quarter.<sup>133</sup> Fehr also noted that, when facing the over-crowded conditions of the quarter, "Councillor Booth stressed the necessity for action in clearing out large numbers of Natives, consisting mainly of dock workers..."<sup>134</sup> Fehr advised that the Group Areas Board be made aware of the matter,<sup>135</sup> in another move toward making the Government accept and implement the responsibilities it had taken upon itself. Malan again congratulated Fehr on the "good progress" then being made. The HMC had, in fact, persuaded the City Council to negotiate, as well as achieving "the active collaboration of the several Government Departments which command legislative powers."<sup>136</sup> Throughout all those negotiations to have the Quarter proclaimed, Fehr had given reason to

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<sup>131</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Fehr to HMC, 2 June 1961. W. H. Andrag was Chairman. Present were Biermann, Visser, Fox, Goosen and Fehr.

<sup>132</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>133</sup>*ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>134</sup>*ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>135</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>136</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Fehr, 6 June 1961.

show that they of the HMC did indeed "mean business."<sup>137</sup>

At the time Fehr had also informed the Secretary of Coloured Affairs, I. D. du Plessis, as to the enquiry then under way among residents of the Quarter. The City Treasurer had sent around circulars with regard to income and types of accommodation most suitable. The information would also be of assistance to the HMC, Fehr believed, since the project had to be economically realistic, based on the financial status of the quarter's inhabitants.<sup>138</sup>

The architects having already agreed to claim a reduced fee, Fehr suggested a budget of R200 which would cover two months of that part of the project. The success of the intended restorations would depend upon the survey of the economic requirements of the site itself, as well as a better understanding of the financial position of the inhabitants themselves.<sup>139</sup> The social survey would be undertaken by members of the Moslem Educational Movement and Hospital Welfare Association.<sup>140</sup> Such important information was needed, Fehr indicated, since it would show what could be done immediately and what must await future preservation.<sup>141</sup> Such seemed to be the best way to map out the Old Quarter and would also be of help to the Cape Town Engineer's Department. When submitted to the HMC the proclamation might be limited only to the

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<sup>137</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>138</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Fehr to Department of Coloured Affairs, 5 June 1961.

<sup>139</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Fehr to HMC, 5 June 1961.

<sup>140</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Fehr to HMC, 12 June 1961.

<sup>141</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Fehr to Andrag, 12 June 1961.

historic sites.<sup>142</sup>

Fehr took the matter of the architects in hand, along with the count of persons who could qualify for such assisted housing in the Malay Quarter. Fehr reported that, based on sound business understanding, the prospect was none too hopeful, or financially sound, unless costs could be met as well as under the National Housing Scheme as practised outside the quarter.<sup>143</sup>

Incidentally that correspondence provided Fehr with an opportunity to ask after the grave of Thomas Baines.<sup>144</sup> The traveller and artist had died at Durban in 1875 and was buried at West Street Cemetery. Fehr had asked Biermann to make further enquiries as to the grave's condition and that, if the site were not to be a proclaimed monument it should at least be recorded with the HMC, the Simon van der Stel Foundation and especially the National Society.<sup>145</sup> The next meeting of the HMC was scheduled for the following month in Pietermaritzburg, which would provide Fehr the opportunity to visit Baines's grave at Durban. Fehr would also receive from Biermann some welcome information on the historic Durban Post Office which, in its earlier rôle of Town Hall, was the site where the papers promulgating the Union had been signed.

At Cape Town and despite the City Council, who planned to demolish certain

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<sup>142</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>143</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Fehr to Biermann, 16 August 1961.

<sup>144</sup>[Baines own writings in the WFLG were *The Gold Regions of South Eastern Africa*, Port Elizabeth, 1877, and *The Northern Goldfields Diaries*, ed. J. P. R. Wallis, London, 1946.]

<sup>145</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Fehr to Biermann, 16 August 1961, p. 3.

houses in the Quarter as unfit and unsafe,<sup>146</sup> Fehr continued to work at championing the cause of the Quarter. With regard to the proposed demolition of two houses in Chiappini Street, H. E. Saiid, representing the Cape Malay Vigilance Committee, had been directed to Fehr by the HMC since "he will give you good advice and will take whatever steps may be possible." Saiid wrote on the planned demolition that:

"from an historical point of view this would amount to sacrilege because we consider them to be the cream of Cape Malay architecture."<sup>147</sup>

Malan of the HMC was aware of the increased burden being placed on Fehr at the time and sympathetically hoped to relieve him of it soon.<sup>148</sup> With greater awareness and interest being shown by the public for the Malay Quarter, the National Society also decided to undertake its own enquiry into the history and physical extent of the Quarter. A noted member of the Society's Council wrote an article for the use of those interested.<sup>149</sup>

The entire conservation plan developed gradually, on a solid base established by Fehr. He continued to act as the HMC's representative, keeping up correspondence and often visiting the Quarter himself. The issue was not made less demanding by announcements from the City Council that redevelopment

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<sup>146</sup>*Cape Times*, 20 June 1962, p. 6.

<sup>147</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Saiid to HMC, 20 August 1962. NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Saiid, 29 August 1962. At that time the HMC was about to move its offices from Johannesburg to Cape Town.

<sup>148</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Fehr, 29 August 1962.

<sup>149</sup>NMCCT. Notice from K. Jolly, Hon. Sec., Malay Quarter Action Committee, undated [1962] with draft of article by Dr. M. A. Cook, which presented historical data.

of the Quarter would, in fact, be hampered by its proclamation as a national monument.<sup>150</sup> While threats intensified, it was reported that some members of the City Council did not take seriously the protests being made about demolishing the Quarter. A national outcry, it was felt, would be the result of wrecking the Quarter which was important for the whole land, not merely Cape Town. If correctly restored, "the quarter could be as scenically charming as the islands of Greece and other old settlements in the Mediterranean."<sup>151</sup>

Eventually, over two decades after initial steps were taken to secure the Quarter, the process took on an air of stagnation, though not entirely so. If it were yet to be saved the matter would rest with the team of William Fehr, B. D. Malan, J. du P. Scholtz and G. J. van Zyl, all local members of the HMC, the only group who could oppose the City Council.<sup>152</sup>

The matter was presented in a memorandum, "kindly prepared by Mr. Fehr," to the Deputy Minister of Education, Arts and Science, in advance of a meeting between the HMC and the Minister himself [Senator Jan de Klerk]. Fehr gave a forceful overview of the entire deliberations from 1944, through the "Group Area" declaration of the Quarter in 1957, to the current moment when so much was at stake and while the process "has resulted in a reversion by the City Council to its original attitude of non-co-operation."<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup>*Cape Times*, 22 August 1963, p. 6.

<sup>151</sup>*Cape Argus*, 31 August 1963, p. 11.

<sup>152</sup>*Die Burger*, 2 Julie 1964, bl. 6.

<sup>153</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to All Members, 29 July 1964.

It was directly put by Fehr, at that last stage, that the object of all their labours was to inform the appropriate Minister that the HMC awaited the Government's stance in the matter. As the case had firmly and diplomatically been presented by Fehr, the HMC would be guided by those views.<sup>154</sup> Again Fehr applied pressure on the authorities to fulfil their civic and national responsibilities. The Malay Quarter was considered by some to be standing on the City's best site, "but at present it lay 'rotting' and if the [City] council did not get on with the job the Government would probably reproclaim the whole area and it would be demolished."<sup>155</sup>

It was indicative of the whole concern of housing coloured people that "some councillors...said they were rapidly losing interest," in the light of the Government's "perpetuating the sub-economic 'slum-type' dwelling."<sup>156</sup> Fehr had posted pertinent newspaper articles to the HMC, since they were:

"a very timely reminder of the intentions of the [City] Council to declare the Malay Quarter a Slum Area and do as they please."<sup>157</sup>

Fehr thought the articles would be very useful, saying that they should be "brought to the notice of the Minister when we discuss the matter."<sup>158</sup>

A letter from the Moslem Judicial Council which thanked all those concerned with the preservation of the Quarter, however pointed out that:

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<sup>154</sup>*ibid.*, Memorandum, p. 5.

<sup>155</sup>*Cape Argus*, 30 July 1964, p. 19.

<sup>156</sup>*Cape Argus*, 29 July 1964, p. 3.

<sup>157</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Fehr to HMC, 31 July 1964.

<sup>158</sup>*ibid.*

"nobody wishes to live in discomfort and without modern amenities just because the building has stood for over a 100 years. My Council [...] pleas that it [the HMC] will abandon its idea of proclaiming the area or any part of it as a monument."<sup>159</sup>

That there were numbers of people who would part in general with the old for the modern was a fact well known to Fehr, who, as with the HMC was alive to all the issues concerning the fate of the Quarter. As it happened, Government Notice No. 558 of 15 April 1966 announced that certain historic portions of the Malay Quarter had been declared a national monument. Though the area would be protected under law, it remained necessary to see to conservation.<sup>160</sup> The event nearly coincided with Fehr's seventy-fourth birthday. He had been at the very centre of debate on the Malay Quarter and was a major contributor to the processes whereby it was saved and conserved. Though well past his retirement age, Fehr still actively pursued matters of heritage and appropriate responsibility to the end of his life.

In addition to the case of the Malay Quarter, William Fehr had pursued other issues with the HMC. Justice H. S. van Zyl had been a member and chairman of the HMC since 1942. He had already made up his mind to relinquish both responsibilities late in 1954, but declining health had forced the decision upon him earlier. His many years of service had been, for him,

"of great interest, and in many ways a joy...and the collaboration of my fellow Commissioners in wresting from the dust of forgetfulness the material evidences of 'what happened before our time' was [...] often

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<sup>159</sup>NMCCT. Letter from M. S. Gamielien to HMC, 11 May 1965.

<sup>160</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to K. Jolly, 4 Aug 1967.

a pleasure and satisfaction."<sup>161</sup>

As twelve members normally constituted the HMC, the decision was open to the Minister of Education, Arts and Science whether or not to appoint someone to the vacancy. His choice was gazetted a few weeks later.<sup>162</sup> The new member was William Fehr [62], appointed until 22 Apr 1955, thus to complete the 5-year term held by Van Zyl. The latter had "strongly recommended" Fehr, adding that "he is really first class."<sup>163</sup> Fehr was posted a copy of the relevant Act governing the Commission, and some recent minutes.<sup>164</sup> He responded with characteristic precision, giving assurance that he would do his best to inform himself concerning matters under discussion.<sup>165</sup> Fehr's appointment to his first full term of office with the HMC followed in 1955, extending to 22 April 1960.<sup>166</sup>

There were occasional changes in membership owing to resignation or decease, but the procedures of the HMC remained generally consistent. The Commission normally met twice a year, after consulting members, usually about April and September. The dates were generally in line with the term-recesses of educational institutions. Each gathering lasted about four days, with the Easter

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<sup>161</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Van Zyl to Hon. Sec., HMC, 31 May 1954.

<sup>162</sup>NLSA. *Government Gazette*, CLXXVII, No. 5317, 30 July 1954, p. 26, No. 1558.

<sup>163</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Van Zyl to Van Riet Louw, 9 August 1954.

<sup>164</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Fehr, 3 Aug 1954.

<sup>165</sup>NMCCT. Letter from Fehr to HMC, 7 August 1954.

<sup>166</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Fehr, 10 June 1955. In addition to Fehr the current Commissioners were Dr. P. J. du Toit, Pretoria; Mr. C. A. Cilliers, Pretoria; Prof. M. R. Drennan, Cape Town; Dr. A. Kieser, Pretoria; Mr. B. D. Malan (Member and Hon. Sec.), Johannesburg; Dr. J. J. Oberholster, Bloemfontein; Dr. W. Punt, Pretoria; Mr. K. Roos, Pretoria; Prof. J. du P. Scholtz, Cape Town; Prof. C. van Riet Louw, Johannesburg.

session at Cape Town, and the other elsewhere in the Union. Members received no fees, but travel and subsistence allowances were offered.

"Apart from meetings, members are sometimes asked to undertake inspections or negotiations on behalf of the Commission at their own convenience. The same rates of subsistence and transport allowances apply in respect of such work."<sup>167</sup>

Thus individuals or groups of members could pursue specific projects in their own home regions, as the general membership was drawn from across the Union.

As to the better functioning of the HMC, Fehr had written to the Hon. Sec. suggesting that appointments generally should be limited to 10 years, and that a "Senior Advisory Committee," made up of some retired members, be put into effect. The Hon. Secretary replied<sup>168</sup> that the pertinent Act should not be changed, though the point of "legislation" would be brought up at the next meeting when Fehr was welcomed to put forward his suggestions. In September 1960, Fehr was reappointed to the Commission down to 22 April 1965,<sup>169</sup> by which date he was very highly regarded.

Since October 1952, Fehr had been a member of the Board of Trustees of the Michaelis Collection housed in the Old Town House in Greenmarket Square<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup>NMCCT. Letter to newly appointed member, G. A. Chadwick, of Durban, 14 September 1960.

<sup>168</sup>NMCCT. Letter from HMC to Fehr, 19 September 1960.

<sup>169</sup>NMCCT. Sec. for Education, Arts and Science, 21 September 1960.

<sup>170</sup>MC. Minutes of a Meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Michaelis Collection held on 20 October 1952.

at Cape Town. Walter Purcell had already been welcomed to the Board in May of that year. As a result of Sir Hugh Lane's visit to Cape Town in 1910, a substantial number of paintings had been purchased from him by Sir Max Michaelis. Included were Netherlands and Flemish works of the 17th and 18th centuries. Those were presented by Michaelis as a gift to the people of the Union in 1914 as an enduring mark of his gratitude.

In 1954 plans had been set in motion for a celebration, in the following year, to commemorate the Bicentenary of the Old Town House, traditional home to the Michaelis Collection. Fehr assumed responsibility for the text of a special book, to be sold at the Town House and the Castle (where Fehr's Collection continued to be displayed.) The book<sup>171</sup> characteristically went beyond being a mere typology and description of the structure itself. Fehr presented a compressed but thorough social and cultural history of the building, its ancestry, the complex of uses to which it was put, its relatives in and around the City, and its current though threatened status as one of the few remaining landmarks of both civic and national consequence. The Old Town House had been declared a national monument in 1939.

As with the Van Riebeeck Festival Historic Art Exhibition catalogue, Fehr's thorough grasp of the original sources was clearly evident, while yet striving to retain the interest of the layman. The book was significant in that it represented a substantial and continuous historical narrative, unlike the earlier VRFHE Catalogue. The Old Town House was of itself, like Castle Good Hope, a durable

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<sup>171</sup>Jointly published by the Board of Trustees of the Michaelis Collection and the Cape Town City Council, 1955, bilingual, 52pp., illus.

material presence of a collective past. The centre of old Cape Town had, by that time, already lost many of its earlier structures through neglect and the wreckers; more construction, hence demolition, was planned. Fehr's publication demonstrated that the security of valuable remains, whatever their nature, should not be left unattended, or worse, simply taken for granted. The second world war had made huge scars, with ensuing problems that continued to worsen across Asia, Europe and a large part of Africa. For Fehr and others, the present and future responsible members of the public should be appraised of the Old Town House as an artwork and hub of human activity, for such it had been, the better to understand its past functions and current value. Fehr's monograph took a leading place among others written to awaken and sustain cultural concern throughout the South African public.

Fehr presented the Old Town House in an animated historic context, as part of a city growing in fame and size, as well as being the centre of municipal and even government functions. Fehr enclosed the historical exposition with a brief passage from Sir Christopher Wren, one of England's most notable architects of the late 17th century.

“Architecture has its political uses. Public buildings being the ornament of a country, it establishes a nation, draws people and commerce, makes the people love their native country.” [*Parentalia*, 1750.]<sup>172</sup>

To make the best of a significant association, Fehr pointed to the dutiful civic rôle played by Wren as a member of Parliament, from 1685. Fehr was concerned about the relationship of people and commerce which held a nation together, be it Restoration England, the young Union or a divided Germany.

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<sup>172</sup>VE. Benham's *Book of Quotations*, London, 1929, p. 403a.

The Old Town House had been the municipal centre of young Cape Town in the mid-18th century, facing the market square and representing the diligent efforts of responsible government and commercial endeavour.

In his book on the Old Town House, Fehr emphasized the valuable and exemplary work done by the National Trust in Britain which strove to preserve a memory of national traditions.<sup>173</sup> People and commerce,<sup>174</sup> the core of the historical process, were naturally reflected in the mirror of buildings and other admired artifacts. Fehr saw the responsibility for such concern as part of the public spirit, a duty to be taken up from predecessors, willingly secured by the present, and passed on to all descendants. As Fehr suggested, the building then being celebrated had been the home, or shell, of a living organism, one that was evolutionary<sup>175</sup> in its development. Merely because municipal functions had been shifted to the new City Hall fifty years before -- in 1905 -- there was no necessity for the older edifice to meet the wreckers, or those who might wish to use the building in an unsatisfactory way. Cape Town was the Metropolis, the Mother City of a nation, a fact which Fehr confirmed by following roots deep into the Company period. He considered proportionally many notable historic turns which succeeded each other in the later Company period. Fehr continued through the brief British and subsequent Batavian Republic's administrations, and the Colonial period when more democratic parliamentary and legal systems were established in Cape Colony and beyond, during the 19th century.

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<sup>173</sup>*Old Town House*, p. 7.

<sup>174</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>175</sup>*ibid.*, p. 49.

Considering the Old Town House, Fehr considered it necessary to view the building in its physical and cultural context of past times.<sup>176</sup>

Fehr was consistent in his historical approach to the Old Town House and the Cape, as he had been with his pictures, objects and furniture during the Tercentenary Festival. Fehr had experienced in other lands that cities could also represent ideals which were reflected in buildings, simple or grand, whose associations might help to "arouse in us nostalgic memories or will exert on us a magnetic attraction to see them."<sup>177</sup> The Company's employees, *burghers*, visitors, slaves and the rest who peopled the Cape's past, could be viewed through the Town House, as the book was a guide, or an introduction, to some of that collective history.

Consistently over decades, Fehr had drawn carefully from a variety of original sources, with an even tone, well-chosen phrases and nuance. *Old Town House* included a pair of views of Greenmarket Square drawn by Johannes Rach (plates 7 & 8), one included slaves, the other *burghers*: "They might be called a tale of two pictures," p. 25. Fehr enjoyed puns. He did not include a bibliography, though his sources were often acknowledged in the text. What he succeeded at was the presentation of an enlightening work without ponderous apparatus. In an unobtrusive manner he offered a sketch of over 200 years of local and global perspectives, combining recorded verbal and pictorial fact, in a chronological and scientific narration. Even the Michaelis Gift itself, though depicting not a single Cape scene, showed work by artists who presented the

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<sup>176</sup>*ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>177</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

Netherlands and its culture in the early, golden years of the VOC.<sup>178</sup> If the Fehr Collection were to be considered as a great operatic work, filled with many characters and scenes, then the Michaelis Gift could serve as a sort of overture including the major themes of commerce and society for future evolution. Fehr thus realized his cultural and historical cycle linking Europe, Asia and Africa through people and commerce. Fehr received a complimentary letter from Mrs. Trotter, a voice from the Past. The book, she felt, was an interesting and important addition to understanding of the Cape. Thoroughly involved with his commercial interests, Fehr still had made the time to write an engaging account of history and culture in the shape of the Old Town House. Mrs. Trotter was proud of what she felt to have been “a faint connection” to the growing notion of conservation, and thanked Fehr for his having highlighted her earlier work.<sup>179</sup>

On many occasions during that period Fehr had assisted writers and others interested in historical and cultural matters. Artist and author Joy Collier recalled Fehr at their first meeting. She had arranged to meet Fehr at his offices in Riebeeck Street. When there, amid a “Dickensian” array of sacks and fragrant tea chests, she found him to be “very peremptory” and thoroughly helpful. The information he had given her found its way into a book she was writing,<sup>180</sup> and Fehr was adamant that the information be recorded accurately.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup>*Old Town House*, p. 51.

<sup>179</sup>VE. Letter from Mrs. Trotter to Fehr, 14 December 1955.

<sup>180</sup>Collier, J., *Portrait of Cape Town*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>181</sup>Millar [Collier], Joy, interview with author, 9 February 1996.

Fehr again turned to the press for public support in the pursuit of cultural matters.<sup>182</sup> As Vice-President of the National Society, Fehr wrote on a "Symposium on the Preservation and Restoration of Historic Buildings."<sup>183</sup> Its purpose was "to encourage the correct restoration of worthwhile buildings in their context." Fehr praised the "indulgent spirit" of the Institute of Architects' members who had taken to heart the layman's appreciation of a small but unique heritage of historic architecture.<sup>184</sup> In the letter, special thanks were given by Fehr to the Administrator of the Cape, Dr. H. O. du Plessis, for his support, and to Count Natale Labia "for making the proceedings available in book form designed to reach a wider public."

Fehr had not been able, to his own satisfaction, to evaluate why there was, among the concerned public, "so much apprehension in the disappearance of old, if not always historic, buildings." Prof. O. Pryce Lewis, in his concluding remarks on the Symposium,

"referred to this urge as being a desire to achieve a sense of 'wholeness' which drew its inspiration from many roots."<sup>185</sup>

Such a view was already reflected in Fehr's Collection, *i.e.*, the sense of comprehensive unity. Pryce Lewis's remark was interpreted by Fehr to mean:

"an almost subconscious awareness of the necessity to preserve the historic evidence of the road by which we have come, if we are to form

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<sup>182</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to the Editor, *Cape Times*, 29 November 1959.

<sup>183</sup>NLSA. Held at the Old Supreme Court Building, Cape Town, 16, 18, 20, 23, 25 & 27 November 1959; Organized by the Cape Provincial Inst. of Architects, in collaboration with SANC and assisted by the S. A. Museum. Programme in bi-lingual format.

<sup>184</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to the Editor, *Cape Times*, 29 November 1959.

<sup>185</sup>*ibid.*

a balanced appraisal of where we stand in the present."<sup>186</sup>

For Fehr, in the matter of preserving heritage, it should be a practical goal "to benefit from the mistakes of others." As an example, and in spite of its fame and fortune, New York City, only 26 years older than Cape Town, had "only a pitiful remnant" of their cradle days. Fehr wrote,

"we have not the wealth of America to sink tens of millions of pounds into reclamation, preservation, restoration and rebuilding of a single town in order to highlight the accomplishments of the 18th century."<sup>187</sup>

Williamsburg, Virginia, was the subject to which Fehr had referred. Millions of Rockefeller's dollars were invested in Colonial Williamsburg as a type of civic memorial and open-air historical museum, accurate in detail, providing education, entertainment and a guiding patriotic spirit.<sup>188</sup>

In commending the Symposium, Fehr wrote that it "cannot have failed to impress those in authority over the cultural destiny of our city and the country as a whole."<sup>189</sup> Municipal and national government should know, among their responsibilities, that "whatever is spent now will bear rich dividends in the future."<sup>190</sup> Fehr's broad cultural and historical base allowed him to view threats to the cultural environment, whether natural or built, before matters came to stand at the brink of neglect and decay. Fehr was one of several for whom there

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<sup>186</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>187</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>188</sup>*Vide* Bowie, B. M., "Williamsburg: Its College and Its Cinderella City," *National Geographic Magazine*, October 1954, pp. 439-486.

<sup>189</sup>*op. cit.*

<sup>190</sup>*ibid.*

seemed to be an atmosphere of enthusiasm for Cape history and architecture.<sup>191</sup>

Not only the Cape but also other regions were beneficiaries of that cultural heritage. The Tongaat Sugar Company of Natal had published annually *The Condenser*, which was issued to Shareholders, Employees and Planters of the Company. One volume in particular<sup>192</sup> was known to Fehr, recalling his connections to the sugar trade. An article<sup>193</sup> discussed briefly a collection of historical Cape, Oriental and other artwork which formed part of the firm's offices at Amanzimnyama, endeavouring to make the prospect of "living with the Collection" a reality.

The Collection had been created in 1953, incorporating many pieces given to the firm by its chairman Douglas Saunders. Other pieces were acquired later. It was believed at Tongaat, as by Fehr, that a large firm or institution can better acquire and maintain such a collection, while also preventing its dispersal. Oriental ceramics and porcelain, Delft wares, furniture made at the Cape or brought from the Netherlands and Britain, English and Cape silver, fine botanical paintings by the Victorian grandmother of the current chairman, and what was the largest private collection of Gwelo Goodman's paintings had all been bound into an harmonious unit, displayed throughout the offices of the firm. It seemed almost to be a miniature version of Fehr's Collection, then being housed at the

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<sup>191</sup>Millar [Collier], Joy, interview with author, 25 November 1996.

<sup>192</sup>WFLG. *The Condenser*, Vol. IV, No. 3, December 1960.

<sup>193</sup>Lezard, B., "Living with the Tongaat Collection," *ibid.*, pp. 21-23. "Mr. Lezard's father was a recognised authority on *objects d'art*, and the author who has himself for many years been closely associated with art and antique furniture, has inherited much of his father's genius." *ibid.*, p. 21.

Castle. Similarly, the Tongaat Collection was not intended to be a completely representative museum of typical items as a reference for collectors and antiquarians. It was to be rather a beautiful and inspiring environment in which pieces functioned as they had originally been intended, all being objects of superb craftsmanship in a South African setting that reflected the region's living traditions in all their variety. There too was the amalgam of East, West and Africa which had inspired Fehr.

The Tongaat Collection contained reflections of the historic past of South Africa. Not only the firm's offices, but also the town took on a sense of interacting with history. Even though the "Cape-Dutch" style was not indigenous to Natal, its application represented "a renaissance in all its spacious proportions in a verdant land."<sup>194</sup>

Like Fehr's Collection at the Castle, the Tongaat Collection itself gave out, it was felt, a sense of tranquillity to the modern mind by juxtaposing beautiful pieces from the related past. Paintings linked the topography of the country with old furniture, and the Orient was everywhere evident.<sup>195</sup>

While that idyll of charm and peace provided a congenial milieu for the efficient running of a large, modern and thriving commercial concern, it also lived in the growing shadow of harsh contemporary fact. In 1960 South Africa's multi-racial problems took on alarming and tragic aspects. Yet rather than being a form of artistic escape from the aggressive modern world, it was offered that the Tongaat

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<sup>194</sup>*ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>195</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

Collection, in its harmonious blending of old and new, far and near, contained a sane and calming lesson for all to see and experience. An opportunity was being provided by which the “politics and warring ideologies” of a multi-racial land could be transformed into “a national unity in which the best of every segment is blended into a harmonious whole, able to meet the violent challenges of the present age....”<sup>196</sup>

In that anxious time, while the Union was poised to become a Republic outside the Commonwealth, the Tongaat Collection represented an idea of unity, while stimulating among many different people a desire for better living.<sup>197</sup> Though the Tongaat Collection had not been informed by an overarching set of associations as had been instilled to Fehr’s Collection built up in very different circumstances, the former still encouraged an awareness of beauty in different traditions. Hopeful views such as those had not been original to Southern Africa, since a broad view of culture as a guide for life had been well appreciated by many.

“Not until cultural values are recognized for what they can contribute to the enlargement of life through meaning and value will the full extent of such impoverishment and loss be realized.”<sup>198</sup>

In the later years of Fehr’s life he had become a well-known figure in cultural concerns, and a major public acknowledgement was made. In the winter ceremony of 28 June 1963, the University of Cape Town awarded Fehr an honorary Doctorate of Laws (LL. D., *h.c.*). Some months earlier he had already

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<sup>196</sup>*ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>197</sup>*ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>198</sup>VE. Cowell, F. R., *Culture in Private and Public Life*, p. 154.

written to the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University, J. P. Duminy, to express "deep appreciation of the exceptional distinction"<sup>199</sup> being offered to him by the University Council.<sup>200</sup> Fehr had described the process of gathering together his celebrated Collection as "a labour of love,"<sup>201</sup> one made all the more pleasurable by being able to share it with his fellow-citizens. Over the past two decades, Fehr had pondered what eventually would become of the Collection. A writer again recalled that of all the collectors she had known, Fehr was the only one who definitely had been collecting for the future, for South Africa, not only for himself. That altruistic motive in collecting had been quite clearly planned.<sup>202</sup> Such altruism was itself part of Fehr's naturally generous spirit which had been appreciated by many, since:

"[...] one of the striking aspects of a life devoted to cultural values is its power to induce forgetfulness of the ordinary claims of self-interest, personal pleasure and private advantage."<sup>203</sup>

That Fehr's Collection could have found a home at UCT informed a personal admission and hope that "it might become a source of pride and inspiration to the young people of your eminent seat of learning [...]."<sup>204</sup> By that time, though, the processes were well under way by which the Collection would be purchased

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<sup>199</sup>Faculty Administration, University of Cape Town. Letter from Fehr to Duminy, 20 November 1962.

<sup>200</sup>VE. Letter from UCT's Registrar to Fehr, 7 November 1962.

<sup>201</sup>Faculty Administration, University of Cape Town. Letter from Fehr to Duminy, 20 November 1962, p. 2.

<sup>202</sup>Millar [Collier], Joy, interview with author, 9 February 1996.

<sup>203</sup>VE. Cowell, F. R., *Culture in Private and Public Life*, p. 89.

<sup>204</sup>Faculty Administration, University of Cape Town. Letter from Fehr to Duminy, 20 November 1962, p. 2.

by the State. Nevertheless, the tone of Fehr's brief thanks was one of humility and gratitude for the honour granted him. One of his "fellow-citizens" had publicly suggested<sup>205</sup> an alternative to honorary degrees, to which Fehr made a spirited reply,<sup>206</sup> and questioned whether State awards should be made in place of university honorary degrees. State awards, Fehr noted, being regarded as political in nature rather than meritorious, had been stopped. He said that he decided to accept the honorary degree as it had been offered by those who had devoted their lives to passing on the accumulation of human knowledge, what Fehr felt to be mankind's greatest task. He thought it an honour to be acknowledged, with others, on the path of human advancement.<sup>207</sup>

The formal address on the day (Appendix G.) emphasized that Fehr's ideal had been:

"to show how 'the founder nations of our country brought to it not only their legal and administrative orderliness, but endowed it with many of the great cultural virtues of their ancient homelands' and to make South African history a 'real and living experience.'<sup>208</sup>

At that time the Republic of South Africa had become successor to the Union only two years before. Further, by making his Collection available to the public, Fehr gave substance "to his sense of duty towards the nation," while it "incidentally provides a large body of indispensable material for the study of

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<sup>205</sup>*Cape Times*, 11 January 1963, p. 9.

<sup>206</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to the Editor, 11 January 1963. Published in the *Cape Times*, 14 January 1963, p. 10.

<sup>207</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>208</sup>Faculty Administration, UCT. Copy of text, p. 1. Cf. "The Fehr Collection," *Lantern*, Vol. VII, No. 3, p. 232.

important aspects of our cultural history,<sup>209</sup> a summary of the compound nature of his Collection. In speaking above of legal and administrative orderliness and great cultural virtues of founders' ancient homelands, Fehr identified himself with human endeavour as reflected in his Collection, which was at root autobiographical.

At the same graduation ceremony in Jameson Hall, another honorary doctorate was awarded to a man who had been widely praised for his tireless efforts in promoting musical performance and appreciation, especially opera and operetta, Joseph Manca. He was born in 1908 at Cape Town of Italian parents. Trained initially as an accountant, Manca made his artistic name in 1932 as composer of the operetta *San Maratto*, first performed at the Cape Town Opera House, with the Municipal Orchestra conducted by William Pickerill. Between 1940 and 1944 Manca was director of the Municipal Choir and subsequently the Eoan Group. As Fehr had been the senior guest honoured by university dignitaries invited to lunch after the ceremony, he expressed gratitude for the distinctions conferred upon himself and Dr. Manca. It was appropriate that Fehr himself had been an ardent lover of music. Fehr explained that Dr. Manca had proven by his music achievements among members of the less affluent community that culture was the focus of all people, regardless of race or colour.

"It points to the fact that the spread of knowledge and education in the attainment of a common culture is the significant approach if we are in the course of time to achieve the common brotherhood of man on our shrinking globe."<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup>*ibid.* p. 2. Some of Fehr's other cultural and historical achievements were briefly noted.

<sup>210</sup>VE. Copy of address, p. 1.

The ceremony carried great personal meaning for Fehr, since among the guests was his brother Gordon and Mrs. Fair who had journeyed from the United States. Fehr's brother had become a scientist with an international reputation,<sup>211</sup> while Fehr himself had contributed to the recording of historical and cultural traditions in the land of their birth. Science and culture were interdependent, forming pillars of civilization, and thus the brothers' work had been complimentary. Fehr acknowledged their parents' guidance toward those significant ambitions.<sup>212</sup> Those views expressed by Fehr on the improvement of the human condition invited comparison with Macaulay.

"In every experimental science there is a tendency towards perfection. In every human being there is a wish to ameliorate his own condition. These two principles have often sufficed, even when counteracted by great public calamities and by bad institutions, to carry civilization rapidly forward."<sup>213</sup>

Fehr's perspective also carried Goethe's belief that "Wer Wissenschaft und Kunst besitzt / Hat auch Religion" [Who has Science and Art / has also Religion], *Zahme Xenien* iv.<sup>214</sup>

The closing lines of Fehr's short address were given to a summing up of his own life in commerce, one of the most significant aspects having been his appreciation of the small-scale trader. Fehr explained that his æsthetic interests

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<sup>211</sup>HUA. Harvard University, the World Health Organisation, many publications, etc. Gordon Fair would leave a bequest of civil engineering books and journals to the University of Cape Town Library, in memory of his brother, in 1968.

<sup>212</sup>VE. Copy of address, p. 1.

<sup>213</sup>Macaulay, T. B., *The History of England*, Ch. 3, p. 209. Macaulay's thought helped provide a framework for G. M. Trevelyan's social history.

<sup>214</sup>VE. quoted in Cowell, F. R., *Culture in Private and Public Life*, p. 254.

had outweighed his desire to expand his commercial interests. Still he remained concerned that the plight of the small businessman was made worse by the growth of large companies. British nationalization was an outcome of that process, one he felt to be inimical to individual enterprise “and must ultimately have a communizing effect upon the countries which fail to recognize this.”<sup>215</sup>

That year of major achievements concluded with the Cape Tercentenary Foundation Award, presented to Fehr, to the accompaniment of the Cape Town Boys’ Choir, on 27 November 1963. Fehr was heartened by that extraordinary recognition, when the Foundation had decided to make an exception to their decision not to make awards to their own council-members. The Chairman wrote to Fehr that the award was being made to him because of services to Africana and a “long labour of love” for the HMC.<sup>216</sup> In his acceptance address, a model of brevity and concision, Fehr expressed his pleasure and pride at receiving that tribute.

“...When earlier this year our University [of Cape Town] so graciously bestowed the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws on me, a friend in England wrote to say he knew how pleasant it was to receive a pat on the back. I agree, and I think it is doubly nice to receive it in one’s lifetime. It is, I think, small consolation when awards are posthumously presented to one’s widow, as happened in the Monuments Commission....”<sup>217</sup>

Fehr’s remaining few years would be bound as closely as before to cultural activities, so long as his health would remain.

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<sup>215</sup>VE. Copy of address, pp. 1-2.

<sup>216</sup>VE. Letter from D. R. D’Ewes to Fehr, 25 September 1963.

<sup>217</sup>VE. Typescript of address.

## V. Last Contributions, 1963-1968.

As early as May, 1957, official interest had been expressed in preserving Fehr's Collection. Some five years before, it had been hoped that the Collection could remain on display at the Castle for the public, but there had been no suggestion of purchase. The preservation of the Old Supreme Court building was much debated while Cape Town still had no major historical museum. At the conclusion of the Van Riebeeck Festival in April 1952, Fehr had been approached by Justice H. S. van Zyl, Chairman of the HMC, to lend some works to display in the Council Chamber at the Castle.<sup>1</sup>

Col. Louis du Toit, in writing on a proposed military museum at the Castle, highlighted the importance of Fehr's Collection, the varied items of which "have very considerably enhanced the appearance of these rooms."<sup>2</sup> He believed that the Castle itself had little to offer the tourist, and that appropriate historic items shown in the large rooms would supply greater interest.<sup>3</sup>

Col. du Toit regretted that he had neither the time nor the staff to look after such valuable items. He recommended, therefore, that the S.A. National Gallery at Cape Town be responsible for the maintenance of the art works, though the

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<sup>1</sup>OP. *Proposed Draft of Constitution for Castle Art Collection*, n. p. [Cape Town], n. d. [1953].

<sup>2</sup>DDS. Letter from Officer Commanding: Cape Command to Chief of the General Staff, 23 June 1952.

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*

military would retain their authority over the rooms.<sup>4</sup>

The historical art displays from the Van Riebeeck Festival had been left at the Castle pending further decisions. The Festival Committee was prepared to leave the Long Gallery as it had been for the event, in anticipation of its being used as a museum. Arrangements would be left to government authorities to decide.<sup>5</sup>

All curtains, glass show cases, etc., had been fitted to the Long Gallery by the Tercentenary Committee. Col. du Toit pointed out to his superiors that since the Festival had showed a loss of some £70,000, the Committee could well claim for expenses. The matter of an historical museum in the Castle was felt to be an urgent consideration since the number of visitors had doubled as a result of Fehr's artwork in the Council Room.<sup>6</sup> In fact, since that time the Fehr Collection had proven to be a major attraction for visitors to the Castle, only a portion of which was open for public viewing.

Several meetings were held to assess the status of the proposed institution which, at the suggestion of the Secretary for Education, Arts and Science, would be called the *Cape Town Castle Art Collection*. Also proposed were Col. du Toit, William Fehr and Walter Purcell as the new Board of Control and awaiting Ministerial approval. At that embryo stage it was necessary to consider the necessary matters of lighting as well as the post of an attendant *cum* guide, apart

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<sup>4</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>DDS. Letter from J. C. Pauw, Org. Sec., Van Riebeeck Festival, to Col. L. du Toit, O.C., Cape Command H.Q., The Castle, 2 May 1952.

<sup>6</sup>DDS. Letter from Col. L. du Toit to Army Chief of Staff, 2 October 1952.

form the current guide for the Castle itself,<sup>7</sup> and whether such expense was actually justified. The “Peacock Room” was also being considered for further exhibits.<sup>8</sup>

In accepting his appointment to the Board of the Castle Art Collection, Fehr referred to his items, in particular since he not be bound to a specific period of time for his loan. Fehr’s Collection might be suitably supplemented, as with the old collection kept by the military, but on approval of the controlling Board on which Fehr served.<sup>9</sup>

The Castle Art Collection was thus established as a separate entity from 1 April 1953, and its Board, made up of Du Toit, Fehr and Purcell, was appointed for a term of three years. That Board was responsible for running the Collection under a policy subject to the Minister’s approval.<sup>10</sup> Fehr believed that the Collection be separate from any local museum, and that it be in the control of the Officer Commanding Cape Command, including a small grant by which to pay the attendant.<sup>11</sup> The Collection itself, it was decided,

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<sup>7</sup>Castle Guide Sgt. W. H. Lourens was succeeded in 1960 by Mr “Polly” G. W. Allen, who had been a soldier stationed at Castle Good Hope since 1922. Allen helped to shape visitors’ reveries and nightmares, instilling more a sense of the romantically *macabre*, rather than a helpful understanding of the global commerce of the VOC who had built the Castle, and their successors who maintained it. *Vide Cape Argus*, 12 March 1966, Magazine, pp. 1 & 4; *Cape Times*, 2 November 1966, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup>DDS. Letter from Col. L. du Toit to Sec. for Education, Arts and Science, 4 May 1953.

<sup>9</sup>NAR. Letter from Fehr to Sec. for Education, Arts and Science, 30 June 1953.

<sup>10</sup>NAR. Letter from Sec. for Education, Arts and Science to Col. L. du Toit, 26 June 1953.

<sup>11</sup>NAR. Memorandum [Dept. of Education, Arts and Science, March 1953].

“should consist chiefly of art characteristic of South Africa or having a historical relationship to South Africa, in other words it should be an Africana art collection.”<sup>12</sup>

The Board was at liberty to find funds from other sources, since the Department of Education had only limited amounts available. A grant of £320 was made for the financial year 1953/54.<sup>13</sup>

The first meeting of the newly constituted Board was held at Fehr’s home. It was there decided to send a copy of the Minutes to the Secretary for Education, Arts and Science, as well as the figures of public attendance at the Collection. The grant-in-aid “only made provision for the salary of the Curator (Mrs. [Naomi ] Kingsley) and Insurance expenses,”<sup>14</sup> as at similar institutions. The Defence Department was “quite happy about the situation” and official functions “for the Prime Minister or on Cabinet Level” would be enhanced by those artistic surroundings.<sup>15</sup> It was added that Fehr’s property was secure, and if the entire Castle were ever required by the Military, the Collection could be removed, “as that right always existed, it being a condition under which Mr. Fehr had lent his Works of Art.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>NAR. Letter from Sec. for Education, Arts and Science to Fehr, 19 March 1953.

<sup>13</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>VE. Minutes of Board of Control, Castle Art Collection, 16 July 1953, p. 1. Mrs. Kingsley’s years of service to the Collection, since 1953, were appreciated by Fehr. “She loves and cares for each precious piece [...] as if it were a personal family heirloom.” *Cape Argus*, 14 August 1965, Magazine, p. 8.

<sup>15</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>16</sup>*ibid.*, p. 2.

With sound business foresight, Fehr indicated that extra funds would be necessary to establish and develop an historical military museum. The eventual site could be much enhanced, explained Fehr and Purcell, “by the arrangement therein of appropriate Works of Art.” Fehr went on to suggest that with the likely growth of displays that the name “The Castle Art and Historical Military Museum” be adopted.<sup>17</sup>

While the draft constitution of the Castle Art Collection was being drawn up, it was decided to display a suitable acknowledgement to Fehr.<sup>18</sup> Further, no items were to be put into or taken from the Collection without the committee’s consent.<sup>19</sup> Fehr did not wish to have either the government or the military intrude into his Collection or the physically and historically balanced representations it made. Neither did he view it as a lending source, nor as a repository for others’ pieces, however well intended. That Fehr could blend good and pertinent pieces from the older Castle Art Collection, maintained by the UDF, along with his own items was an application of thoughtful choices made by himself in consultation with Purcell. In later years Fehr would add or exchange a few of his own pieces, while they were always related to his motives and maintained his standards of artistic quality and historic significance. Often what appeared to be humble items of daily existence offered insights into what became Fehr’s own historical and artistic life’s work and masterpiece, his Collection. Some of those small items of great human interest were often the

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<sup>17</sup>*ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup>OP. *Proposed Draft of Constitution for Castle Art Collection*, n. p. [Cape Town], n. d. [1953], p. 1.

<sup>19</sup>*ibid.*, p. 2.

most difficult to find, as he had said. They were not merely objects gathered as being typical of their sort as in museums, but items with particular and valuable links to life at the Cape and Southern Africa. There had survived only a few references to such small but important pieces among the Fehr Papers. Items such as those were acquired during Fehr's walks about town, following his sharp eye and imaginative grasp of history.

The matter of fitting out the reception rooms in the Castle with appropriate furniture for practical use was taken in hand by Col. du Toit. An historically appropriate design for dining-chairs was sought and the right sort of timber was considered.<sup>20</sup> The dining tables and chairs were eventually designed by Helen Holt, of the PWD, who assisted Fehr at the Castle and later at "Rust-en-Vreugd." The Minister for Defence had been pleased with the rooms' enhanced appearance and felt them appropriate for entertaining foreign dignitaries. Col. du Toit wrote that the UDF's old Castle Art Collection in those rooms was "extremely mediocre" when compared with Fehr's Collection. Before any expense was to be incurred, the Colonel suggested that it should be ascertained what Fehr might see as the future of his Collection, and whether he was prepared to sell or lend any of it. Fehr, who was then sixty-two, had no doubt made provision for his Collection already, and Du Toit was concerned that he might eventually reclaim his property.<sup>21</sup>

Thus the originator of the suggestion to acquire the Collection had been Col. du

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<sup>20</sup>DDS. Letter from Col. du Toit to Quartermaster-General, 19 August 1954.

<sup>21</sup>DDS. Letter from Col. L. du Toit to Quartermaster-General, [n.d.] October 1954.

Toit. Fehr continued to ponder the possibility of an Africana museum in the Old Supreme Court building, while the military discussed Fehr's Collection. Fehr, it was reported, had already been approached concerning the loan of his artwork to a new Africana exhibition in the Old Supreme Court building. However, he might consider the sale of his Collection in the light of planned improvements for the Castle. Du Toit thought it better that such a transaction be undertaken at ministerial level.<sup>22</sup>

After their initial term of service, Fehr and Purcell were again appointed to the Board. Col. L. du Toit had retired in 1955, to be succeeded by Col. P. S. de Lange<sup>23</sup> (Officer Commanding 1955-1956), who was in turn followed by Col. L. J. Klootwyk<sup>24</sup> (OC 1956-1958). Fehr and Purcell were themselves reappointed from 1959.<sup>25</sup> Several Officers Commanding, and thereby Chairmen of the Board, followed during the remainder of Fehr's life. The course of surviving Minutes and other documents reflected problems related to staff, the military and the Collection. Fehr's requests as to the care of the Collection had been, on occasion, disregarded by the military leading to damage of items.<sup>26</sup> Fehr had written to J. J. P. Op't Hof, Secretary for Education, Arts and Science, in relation to the hours of opening at the Castle, and the reply suggested a disruption in

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<sup>22</sup>DDS. Brief van Kol. L. du Toit aan Kol. H. J. Martin, Verdedigingshoofkwartier, [?]. November 1954.

<sup>23</sup>DDS. Letter from Fehr to Sec. for Education, Arts and Science, 24 May 1955.

<sup>24</sup>DDS. Letter from Sec., Board of Control: Castle Art Collection to Sec. for Education, Arts and Science, 13 December 1956.

<sup>25</sup>DDS. Memorandum [Dept. of Education, Arts and Science], [?] January 1959.

<sup>26</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Col. G. N. Nauhaus, 5 March 1959.

dealings between authorities at the Castle and the Collection. Co-operation seemed to be waning.

"I am afraid we will have to review the whole position of the Fehr Collection at the Castle in the near future as it would appear that we are not enjoying the measure of co-operation under the present regime at the Castle that we previously enjoyed. Such a position can lead to many complications and unpleasantnesses and I feel that the whole issue should be placed on a satisfactory basis, possibly at Cabinet level."<sup>27</sup>

Throughout that period Fehr had been able to rely on Purcell for assistance. A particular short-term exhibition of art had been planned by the Simon van der Stel Foundation for the Long Gallery in the Castle. Fehr, "because of pressure of work and because of the short time available,"<sup>28</sup> withdrew as a co-opted member of the Exhibition Sub-Committee.<sup>29</sup> As Purcell had already left, Fehr "could not contemplate undertaking the work without his assistance."<sup>30</sup> There appeared to have been some conflict of opinion, Fehr wrote,

"between the Defence Department and the Education Department as to the future use of that [Long] Gallery [...]. I certainly could not contemplate proceeding with our original idea without Dr. Purcell's assistance, who had worked with me in a previous exhibition [VRF, 1952] in the Long Gallery for fifteen hours a day over a period of three weeks."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>VE. Letter from Op'tHof, Sec. for Education, Arts and Science, to Fehr, 29 December 1964.

<sup>28</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to W. E. G. Louw, 20 March 1959, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup>Fehr continued on the Steering Committee as the representative of the Historical Monuments Committee [Council], *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>31</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

In time Fehr would enjoy co-operation, as well as frustrations, in relations with authorities at the Castle. Fehr acknowledged gratitude to Purcell for “his most valuable assistance and guidance”<sup>32</sup> during the Van Riebeeck Festival and the Rhodes Centenary at Bulawayo in 1953. In 1955 Fehr and Purcell had together “completely re-housed the entire Collection at the Michaelis Gallery”<sup>33</sup> for the Bicentenary Commemoration of the Old Town House, Cape Town.

By mid-1961 an offer had come from the Secretary of Education, Arts and Science to purchase Fehr’s Collection. The sum of £150,000 had been named by Fehr.<sup>34</sup> The monetary unit was changed in advance of the move from Union to Republic in 1961. Pounds sterling (£) were succeeded by the decimal Rand (R) from February of that year. As a result the purchase price became R300,000. The final steps had yet to be taken by the Minister, based on the outcome of three valuations made by external experts. Those were Walter Purcell, on the grounds of his collector’s expertise and close links with the South African National Society, the Koopmans-de Wet House, the Michaelis Collection and Groot Constantia; F. L. Alexander, a lecturer on art, a past dealer in antiques and current art critic for *Die Burger*; R. F. Kennedy, previously Director and Chief Librarian of the Africana Museum and Johannesburg Public Library.<sup>35</sup> The valuations were R300,000 by Purcell, R150,000 by Alexander, and Kennedy calculated a total of R144,000 but recommended R200,000. It was pointed out

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<sup>32</sup>DDS. Letter from Fehr to H. S. van der Walt, Sec. for Education, Arts and Science, 23 September 1955, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>34</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to R. P. Gain, 27 March 1963.

<sup>35</sup>(Hansard), *Assembly Debates*, Vol. 10, 3748-3752, 7 April 1964.

at the time that subsequent to the valuations having been made, around mid-1961,<sup>36</sup> several further pieces had entered the Collection.<sup>37</sup> The original offer and valuations were based on an inventory, supplied by Fehr to Alexander, of items at the Castle,

“and which excludes in particular all the water-colours other than those of the Caldwell series of animals and the flower pictures [by Ethel Dixie], I remind you that this was subject to acceptance by my co-trustees, who would not lightly oppose my decision.”<sup>38</sup>

The Trustees of the Fehr Trust, as of 7 September 1951, had been William Fehr, Henriette Fehr (*née* Nankin) and R. P. Gain of the Board of Executors, Cape Town. Fehr had been concerned that financial devaluation abroad might affect South Africa’s money adversely, and he proposed that the purchase price be adjusted to offset possible reductions in the value of South African currency.<sup>39</sup>

With regard to the purchase price offered, Fehr viewed it as being modest:

“for a whole collection of irreplaceable items, many of which are unique and for the most part incomparably superior to anything in any private or public collection of a similar nature.”<sup>40</sup>

Fehr did not view the monetary figure as a basis for negotiations. A potential purchaser should have regard for the true worth of his Collection.

“What began as a hobby became a serious work of national importance to which the time and money that has been devoted over many years

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<sup>36</sup>Purcell and Alexander in June 1961; Kennedy in August 1961. *ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>37</sup>(Hansard), *Assembly Debates*, Vol. 10, 3751, 7 April 1964.

<sup>38</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Sec. for Education, Arts and Science, Op’t Hof, 21 June 1961, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>40</sup>*ibid.*, p. 2.

far exceeds the benefits that might have accrued from the application of the same time and money to the development of business interests. I, therefore, trust that in making this offer [of acceptance] to the Government it will be appreciated that it is inspired by a desire to ensure its future for the benefit of our people."<sup>41</sup>

Consistently Fehr believed that the government should take up responsibility in the support of cultural matters.

As he continued to travel on business matters, Fehr always enjoyed the occasion of an ocean voyage to Durban from Cape Town aboard Union-Castle liners. On return from such a visit to Durban, Fehr had received a letter from Op't Hof. Fehr replied that he was not surprised to find that one of the assessors of the Collection, in advance of purchase, had approached it rather like its being a stamp-collection, *i.e.*, merely representing the monetary sum of its components. In being dissatisfied with the approach to the subject Fehr believed that the Collection "stands or falls on its merits as a 'creative whole' as distinct from its constituent parts."<sup>42</sup> While some of the items were very costly, others, often more illusive, were all assembled in a plan "to play their assigned place in presenting the story of the past, as I consider it might be most grippingly and romantically told."<sup>43</sup> Therefore Fehr believed conclusively that:

"the whole must be seen as one large canvas, because that is what I strove to do, and is also what I feel I accomplished, and it is to that,

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<sup>41</sup>*ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>42</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Op't Hof, Dept. of Education, Arts and Science, 7 August 1961, pp. 1-2.

<sup>43</sup>*ibid.*

I believe, that it owes its success."<sup>44</sup>

In view of that cohesive nature which he had given it, he believed that "the Collection would look as well in any modern office block."<sup>45</sup> Though the Castle itself was rich in historical associations, the rooms being used for displays were "exceedingly difficult and unrewarding for the purposes of a satisfactory arrangement, both of objects, furniture and pictures, in contrast to what they are generally thought to be."<sup>46</sup>

With regard to the proper maintenance of the Collection subsequent to its purchase, Fehr sought confirmation of his position in future as Curator,<sup>47</sup> though Fehr had only later and briefly kept an office in the Castle. In response to an inquiry by Fehr, he was informed that the purchase of the Collection was to receive attention by the Cabinet only after the current Parliamentary session. The proposed purchase would take time and deliberation, since it involved a "considerable amount of public funds."<sup>48</sup>

The Cape Provincial Administration had earlier offered to the Central Government the 18<sup>th</sup>-century mansion and national monument "Rust-en-

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<sup>44</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>45</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>47</sup>*ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>48</sup>VE. Letter from Sec. for Education, Arts and Science to Fehr, 28 February 1962.

Vreugd."<sup>49</sup> The building and the surviving fragment of its grounds stood in the Buitenkant. It had early been the residence of VOC Fiskal Willem Cornelis Boers and later variously a private residence and site of educational institutions. The house had been proclaimed a national monument in 1940.

Later, with negotiations under way for the purchase by the State of Fehr's Collection, the Executive Committee of the Cape Provincial Administration (the owners of "Rust-en-Vreugd") decided to repair the building "so that it can be used to accommodate an art collection."<sup>50</sup> Fehr described the process by which the house became available. The HMC had approached the Administrator of the Cape, Dr. O. du Plessis, with the idea of restoring the house. The Administrator in turn asked Fehr if he would lend his watercolours for display there, and the collector agreed. After Du Plessis' untimely death, the succeeding Administrator agreed that the work should continue.<sup>51</sup> Fehr thus applied himself to the preservation of the house while using his Collection as a lever on the Government to fulfil its charges concerning heritage and education.

As soon as the transfer of "Rust-en-Vreugd" had been completed, Fehr was advised so as to take occupation. Further, to enable the Castle Art Collection Board to meet further costs and "occasional new purchases for the Museum,"

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<sup>49</sup> Vide Hogsett, N., "Rust-en-Vreugd," *ANN/AAN*, vol. XI, no. 8, September 1955, pp. 291-296, with plates.

<sup>50</sup> VE. Letter from Provincial Sec., Provincial Administration of the Cape of Good Hope, to Fehr, 3 February 1960.

<sup>51</sup> VE. Typed draft of opening address, with alterations in Fehr's own hand, 16 March 1965, p. 1.

the state increased its contribution to R3,600.<sup>52</sup>

Fehr, in response, made it clear that the Government's offer to purchase was to be kept distinct from any offer on his part to sell the Collection.<sup>53</sup> It remained for the Fehr Family Trust to accept the Government's offer to purchase. In addition, Fehr was pleased that the Government had taken over "Rust-en-Vreugd" for the loan of his water-colours and prints, on the same conditions as prevailed at the Castle, *i.e.*, with six months' notice on either side.<sup>54</sup>

The added annual grant was also acknowledged, and Fehr was keen to get on with mounting the art works and installing the appropriate lighting at "Rust-en-Vreugd," asking at the same time what funds were available for the equipment. That again was an appropriate step toward clearly defined ownership, correct procedure and responsibility. It also highlighted Fehr's concern for the physical conservation of art works, especially because of the fugitive nature of watercolours. The house did not provide ideal circumstances for display. Miss Esmonde-White had herself not been in favour of the works being shown there due to the risk of theft, in addition to a damaging excess of sunlight.<sup>55</sup>

Exposure to natural or artificial light, the atmosphere and invasive organisms necessitated Fehr's contact with leading authorities abroad, most especially the

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<sup>52</sup>VE. Letter from Sec. for Education, Arts and Science to Fehr, 28 February 1962.

<sup>53</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Op't Hof, Dept. of Education, Arts and Science, 27 April 1962, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup>*ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup>Esmonde-White, Eleanor, interview with author, 7 September 1998.

Victoria & Albert Museum at London. He was also provided with articles from specialist journals, thus keeping himself informed of the most advanced technical developments in gallery lighting and art conservation abroad. Fehr wrote to the Victoria & Albert Museum a detailed letter concerning lighting, framing and glazing. He also gave a frank description of his paintings.

“Over period of many years I formed what is probably the largest and most important collection of early South African pictures, executed in both oils and watercolours.<sup>56</sup>

While then considering the permanent loan of his over six hundred watercolours, Fehr undertook to have them correctly mounted, in terms of conservation, at the British Museum. He felt it necessary to contact acknowledged authorities on the subject, since local museums had not the degree of experience needed to deal with such an unprecedented exhibition as he contemplated. Not to accept such advice lightly, Fehr offered to pay the Museum.<sup>57</sup>

There had been considerable delay in the process of the purchase, and Fehr, who did not haggle or chase bargains, expressed his firm position to a member of the Fehr Trust. Fehr reiterated his refusal to accept the pair of low valuations, or to make an offer to sell to the Government, or to bargain in any way.<sup>58</sup> The valuation as it stood had already gone out of date, and Fehr was aware of

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<sup>56</sup> WFCCGH. Letter from Fehr to Victoria & Albert Museum, 5 January 1961, pp. 1-3. A reply from J. H. Mayne, Deputy Keeper of the Dept. of Paintings, also recommended consultation with Dr. H. J. Plenderleith, a recognised authority on conservation, with whom Fehr later corresponded. WFCCGH. Letter from Mayne to Fehr, 27 January 1961, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> VE. Letter from Fehr to R. P. Gain, 27 March 1963, pp. 1-2.

dealers' prices having doubled in England during that intervening year. "Africana was unobtainable at any price," he wrote.<sup>59</sup> He intended to discuss the matter with his brother Gordon who would be in South Africa in June of that year to attend the ceremony of Fehr's honorary doctorate. The Fehr family was "definitely against denuding itself of all further interest in what has been my life's work, he wrote.<sup>60</sup> Fehr intended to accept only the initially agreed sum, and then place his watercolours on loan at "Rust-en-Vreugd," with a subscription of R50,000 [sic] towards equipment and maintenance. Included was the condition that a member of the family "shall be Trustee and be entitled to exercise complete jurisdiction over that part of the Collection,"<sup>61</sup> while Fehr continued as Curator at the Castle under the previously arranged terms. He wished that the same terms would apply "to the member of the family who succeeded me in the supervision of either or both the Collections referred to."<sup>62</sup>

Thus the future of the Collection, Fehr's greatest cultural achievement, remained unresolved. Fehr believed then, as before, that when the government purchased his Collection, it should be done in the spirit of acquiring it for the benefit of the nation as an educational asset. Toward mid-1963 Fehr had received the Deed of Sale "for scrutiny and/or approval," to which he gave his rigorous attention.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>60</sup>*ibid.* "He [Fehr] considered, and rightly I think, that he had done something exceptional in that Collection, and for that reason he was an exceptional person and he would like to have it publicised." Millar [Collier], Joy, interview with author, 9 February 1996.

<sup>61</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>62</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>63</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to R. P. Gain, 6 June 1963. The Deed of Sale (WFCCGH) was signed on 25 March 1964, *vide* Appendix H for the text. After the death of William Fehr in 1968 a further

In 1963 had appeared a major publication<sup>64</sup> which Fehr had intended not only as a memento of one's visit to Castle Good Hope, but also as a guide to its art collection framed as an historical overview in a world context. The title of the book recalled the magazine article, entitled "Treasure Trove," on Fehr's Collection which had appeared in *The Pictorial* of November 1936. For the public it was a commonplace that "treasures" were expected to be found in castles, while "torture chambers" and "dungeons" and the like were deemed by fanciful visitors to be part of all castles' standard characteristics, whether or not scientifically verifiable. Fehr's book was presented in large folio format, with bi-lingual text, and profusely illustrated with monochrome and colour photography mostly by Arthur English, who had often collaborated with Fehr. The new book was dedicated to Fehr's old friend, fellow connoisseur and collector Walter Purcell. For just over a decade, in the Mother City's most important surviving historic structure, Fehr had displayed a large number of important pieces from his Collection, incorporating many items already housed in the Castle. There he had tried consciously:

"to avoid giving the rooms a museum-like appearance and therefore to avoid crowding them or doing anything that would detract from this object."<sup>65</sup>

Throughout his childhood and youth, Fehr had enjoyed items of great beauty and historic worth, but the treasures of Europe and the Orient appeared sterile

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document concerning the Collection, drawn up by members of the family, was signed on 15 October 1970 (WFCCGH). As the document was not concluded in Fehr's lifetime it is not assessed in the present work.

<sup>64</sup>*Treasures at the Castle of Good Hope / Skatte in die Kasteel de Goede Hoop*, Cape Town, 1963, large 4to., 140 pp. [WFLG]. Second ed. 1966. Posthumous editions 1969, 1973, 1978.

<sup>65</sup>DDS. Letter from Fehr to Sec. for Education, Arts and Science, 23 September 1955, p. 1.

and artificial in a cluttered museum, isolated from their historic context, or their often modest domestic origins. Yet he was not averse to emphasizing the antiquity – in Cape terms – of the Castle and its eminently romantic spirit. *Treasures* offered the reader (whether through English or Afrikaans,) Fehr's enthusiasm for art, culture and history as mirrors of human endeavour. There were some inaccuracies in the first edition, e.g., the attribution of the so-called Lady Anne Barnard piano, pl. 83, (which had been, like several other pieces, part of the Castle Art Collection, in place before Fehr's Collection appeared), or, in the same caption, that Lt.-Governor George Darling was not "Lord" Darling; or knowledge of the true nature of the large painted porcelain platter and its heraldry, pl.157. Those were small points in comparison with the projected appreciation of the entire display, the majority of which was his own Collection. Through that book he engaged indirectly a fundamental question as to "whether history has any important relation to the reading public at all."<sup>66</sup> The book was intended to supplement visitors' impressions and memories, in that none of the items shown were annotated in a manner generally followed in current displays overseas. The Collection in the Castle had been presented in a way that was different from other "educational institutions," and by that phrase Fehr identified his own position as a mediator in the passing on of knowledge. The Castle Art Collection had earlier received a small annual grant of £570 for adult education from the Ministry, for salaries, insurance, relief, printing of catalogue, etc....<sup>67</sup>

*Treasures*, Fehr hoped, would be followed by another publication which

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<sup>66</sup>Trevelyan, G., from the 1945 lecture "History and the Reader," in *An Autobiography & Other Essays*, p. 52.

<sup>67</sup>VE. Letter from Dept. of Education, Arts & Science, Pretoria, 28 July 1955.

considered the many watercolours and prints that had been, of necessity, omitted so as to keep the current work available at a modest price while retaining his high standards of presentation and content. In the book Fehr succeeded in creating a panorama of the periods, principal characters and events which enlivened the burgeoning settlement and its neighbours at the Cape and beyond. He presented as well the historical significance of the Castle, and its predecessor Fort Good Hope, embraced by Table Valley, its Mountain and the all-encompassing Sea. In what had been a sketch for a visitors' guide to the Collection in advance of *Treasures*, Fehr wrote that:

“the pictures tell the story of the changing years and events and customs of their day. In this historical environment we share the hazards of the early navigators and for a fleeting moment become partners in the adventure and romance of the cradle days of our country.”<sup>68</sup>

Those were sentiments which surrounded his gathering, as a hobby, of artifacts and pictures already in the 1920's and 30's, which then reflected some of his ancestors' commercial and maritime involvements, as much as his own. Thereby was also explained further the quest after art for history's sake. The text of *Treasures* evolved in the sequence through which a visitor would move through the displays in the Castle. Each room presented a generally cohesive reflection of people and events, but Fehr had himself been less than satisfied with the impositions placed by the building on his attempt at co-ordinated displays. As already noted, he had felt that the Collection would be better off in any modern building of quality, and thus offer less difficulty in terms of lighting, humidity and the other problems encountered in an ancient landmark.

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<sup>68</sup>VE. “Particulars concerning the William Fehr (pronounced Fair) Loan Collection at The Castle, Cape Town,” 11 November 1957.

As it was, Fehr had arranged the Collection in such a sympathetic and hospitable way as to echo a comfortable and sociable house – much like his own. Fehr could transport the viewer back to earlier times and circumstances while contrast with a viewer's present experience of life could be great. Fehr's choices for the Collection were not purely for the picturesque, though that quality was often present. He looked for the historical moment and its associations, some of which are described below in Chapter VI.

In the period following the Second World War, history and patriotism were increasingly regarded more as being closely linked to commerce. The example of the United States had been viewed with some interest in South Africa, particularly during the 1950's. An unidentified newspaper article,<sup>69</sup> found among the Fehr Papers, had it that the current "Buy South Africa" campaign of the 1950's depended on patriotism for its success. Its author proposed that South Africa could learn a good lesson from the Americans' "widespread interest in history."<sup>70</sup> They were a nation of many races and nationalities, bound together by their almost religious patriotism. The article continued that in their country history was being rewritten, "not in matter but in form of presentation."<sup>71</sup> Rather than the public's dealing with works written in an academic "Ph.D. manner," the Americans looked for good writers who could present the stories of the past "with dramatic vividness."<sup>72</sup> Surely, the writer felt, South Africans could do the

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<sup>69</sup>VE. "History and Patriotism," unidentified, undated [1950's] newspaper [Cape Times?] cutting.

<sup>70</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>71</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>72</sup>*ibid.*

same since “the present will not be greatly honoured by those who are ignorant of the rich heritage of the past.”<sup>73</sup>

In a similar vein, Fehr had already by the 1950's been presenting his Collection as a vivid view of history, in a similarly young and multi-racial country, which in the current state of South Africa was not necessarily a simple undertaking. A private collection reflected its maker. When Fehr's Collection became public it could reflect the nation, like the illustrations in a book. The many reproductions made after items in the Collection were a method of communication which had helped bring it to notice abroad. There the increasingly popular medium of television and its vast educational potential were increasingly appreciated. A cinematic approach to the past, which was suggested in the Collection by shifting between long perspectives and closely detailed highlights, could not yet benefit from the possibilities of television, which would appear generally in South Africa only some years after Fehr's death.

During the same years, Fehr had contemplated the possibility of another tour of his Africana in the United States,<sup>74</sup> including “a well chosen selection of originals, combined with reproductions and photographs, together with coloured slides or films.”<sup>75</sup> An officer of the South African Embassy in America's capital

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<sup>73</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>74</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Elisabeth Meyer, Cultural Attaché, Embassy of the Union of South Africa, Washington, D. C., 23 May 1958. Fehr and his Collection had recently been featured in the South African cultural magazine *Lantern*, vol. 7., no. 3, pp. 230-237, illustrated.

<sup>75</sup>*ibid.*, p. 1. The second tour did not take place.

had suggested to Fehr the possibility of showing some of his Africana at the prestigious and well-endowed Smithsonian Institution and in the much respected Library of Congress. Fehr offered that a selection of pictures might reflect a chronological and comparative approach to the history of both nations, who were of similar age and origins. In terms of heritage, South African, *i.e.* Cape architecture was, he felt, more individual than the parallel American Colonial Style, and that Cape furniture of the same time was “superior in originality, character and quality,” to the American.<sup>76</sup> Fehr was thus able to demonstrate his concern that others beyond South Africa could know its history and culture, while exercising his own ability to work fruitfully on a broadly integrated cultural basis. Fehr naturally had been aware of numerous cultural and historical links between South Africa and the United States, the more obvious being through the Collection’s pictures of the Confederate raider *Alabama* in Table Bay. In addition his brother, on the academic staff of Harvard University, shared the family presence across the Atlantic Ocean.

In 1963 Fehr had corresponded with a representative of the publishers of *Horizon* in an effort to find, in the United States, useful material from what was viewed as a parallel cultural development. Many in South Africa, wrote Fehr,

“would be very interested to acquire books on Americana so far as these deal with the cultural history of the early days, particularly relating to topographical pictures and the furnishing of more important buildings such as that described by me in the case of the Castle in Cape Town.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>*ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>77</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Miss L. Davidson, 2 April 1963, p. 2.

Fehr thus acknowledged receipt of *Exploration of Africa*,<sup>78</sup> "containing excellent reproductions of early impressions of different parts of the African continent."<sup>79</sup> Fehr's assistance was acknowledged as two works from his Collection had been copied in the book, though they were published with inaccurate captions. Johannes Poortermans' *Kaffirs [Xhosas] attacking farmer's wagons on the Fish River*, water-colour, 1846 [VRFHE 421], appeared unidentified on pp. 72-73, with the caption "Dutch settlers fight off a Bantu raid during their arduous trek beyond the Orange River. Their wagons are similar to those used by American pioneers." The work itself bore the unusually worded inscription 'Attac of a Kaffir tribe Macomo, marauders at fish-River, Kaffir Land, on two farmer waggons, Cape of Good Hope, 1846,'<sup>80</sup> The other Fehr picture, a detail of Alexander Reid's *Jan van Riebeeck*, woodcut, 1829 [VRFHE 422], also not identified, was printed on p. 75 above the caption "Jan van Riebeeck, who appears in this seventeenth-century woodcut, founded the Cape colony in 1652."<sup>81</sup> Though Fehr had often granted permission to reproduce works from his Collection, it could not be assured that an accurate description would be applied by the user. No detailed catalogue of the Collection had been produced and published for scholarly reference. What Fehr had thought of those inaccuracies is not known. He continued from his own viewpoint.

"South Africa<sup>82</sup> was the only part [of the African continent] which was

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<sup>78</sup>Sterling, T., *Exploration of Africa*.

<sup>79</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Miss L. Davidson, 2 April 1963, p. 2.

<sup>80</sup>Oliver, H. G., "The William Fehr Collection," *ANN / AAN*, Vol. 5, No. 3, June 1948, p. 61.

<sup>81</sup>On Reid's woodcut and its sources *vide ANN / AAN*, Vol. 3, No. 1, December 1945 pp. 6-7.

<sup>82</sup>Not the nation but the geographical region, as with "East Africa" or "North Africa."

settled by Europeans, and developed under European guidance over more than three centuries, whilst the rest of Africa continued under the rule of the original inhabitants.

Until the advent of modern medicine and hygiene to combat tropical diseases, the greater part of Africa was not similarly suitable for European settlement."<sup>83</sup>

Fehr's brother at Harvard had been internationally acknowledged as an expert in the field of water purification, especially when applied in the poorer and more densely populated regions of the world, thus science and culture were closely associated in Fehr's view of history.

Parts of the African continent, Fehr continued, were not comparable with other areas which had been more thoroughly understood.

The conception of Africa as one entity and treated as a unit has led to many misconceptions, and it is regrettable that, in spite of modern communication and educational facilities, it still takes a long time for people of one part of this small world to get a balanced view of conditions in another part.<sup>84</sup>

Fehr hoped that his *Treasures at the Castle* might find a place on the shelves of readers interested in books like *Exploration of Africa*. South Africa and the United States had numerous historical similarities, yet the former's treasure-house of diamonds, precious metals and other natural wealth had been tapped only some seventy-five years before the moment of Fehr's letter. It was then only recently that farming was being augmented by commercial industry in South Africa, which, Fehr thought, was "becoming as self-sufficient as the United

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<sup>83</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Miss L. Davidson, 2 April 1963, pp. 1-2.

<sup>84</sup>*ibid.*

States.”<sup>85</sup> Fehr continued to believe that success in commerce gave support to the wider appreciation of education and culture, and thereby social understanding.

Fehr’s own library, in addition to literary and reference works, had also been well-stocked with rare and valuable original editions or reprints of travellers’ records of having passed around or through Southern Africa. A selection of individuals of note included Alberti, Baines, Barnard, Barrow, Burchell, Churchill, Dalrymple, Dapper, Harris, Herbert, Kolbe, Latrobe, Le Vaillant, Lichtenstein, Livingstone, Moffat, Nieuhoff, Sparrman, Thompson, Thunberg, Trollope, and 49 volumes of the Van Riebeeck Society’s publications. All of those essential and rare reference works, with many others, became part of the William Fehr Library Bequest. They had helped to form part of Fehr’s own cosmopolitan view within an increasingly isolated society.

In the winter of 1963 Fehr felt himself to be “tied down” by his many cultural interests, as well as business. Fehr & Co. by that stage was managed in part by members of the family, though the firm in Riebeeck Street, Cape Town, would be sold in 1966. His brother Gordon had returned to the United States following attendance at Fehr’s doctoral ceremony. Fehr’s Collection at “Rust-en-Vreugd” had also claimed much personal attention. Fehr wrote to a fellow collector and friend in England, describing a system of protective mounts for the pictures at “Rust-en-Vreugd,” thereby hoping to achieve “a quiet display,” in different colours, which followed around the walls of the rooms “to form small

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<sup>85</sup>*ibid.*

cabinets on the corners."<sup>86</sup> The display he imagined was not unlike that created for his Collection in the Long Gallery at the Castle over a decade before. It remained, though, "to find out whether this somewhat complicated way of showing the pictures can be put into practical effect."<sup>87</sup>

Another reason Fehr had felt "tied down" was the commitment to an article on collecting for the half-yearly magazine of the University of Cape Town.<sup>88</sup> "I do not find it an easy subject,"<sup>89</sup> he wrote concerning collectors and collections. The subject had a substantial literature, though his own collecting and connoisseurship were largely pioneering efforts at a distance from traditions and artwork abroad. The nature and scale of Fehr's collecting had neither precedents nor competitors, as no other collector or institution in the Union had undertaken to present a coherent epic of social history through art. Fehr's life-work also presented the rise and growth of genuinely South African art, over against the products of itinerants or the importation of items produced abroad. Particularly in relation to the pictorial aspect of the Collection, Fehr on occasion referred to "the history of painting" and "the painting of history"<sup>90</sup> in South Africa to be seen in his displays. The Collection was also a novelty in South African art and academic circles, steeped as they were in art-for-art's-sake and its critical apparatus. The collector of general Africana had been an amateur *par*

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<sup>86</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to W. M. S. Winand, 14 August 1963, p. 1.

<sup>87</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>88</sup>Fehr, Wm., "Collectors and Collections," in *UCT*, vol. II, no. 6, December 1963, pp. 16-23.

<sup>89</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to W. M. S. Winand, 14 August 1963, p. 2.

<sup>90</sup>*Rust en Vreugd*, 1965, p. 6.

*excellence*. In contrast, the impassioned collector, like Fehr, of superb old paintings, graphics and quality furniture and domestic items was extremely rare, in terms of experienced discernment and personal involvement. His rigorous pursuit of art for history's sake set Fehr outside the routine course of collecting in South Africa. That he was free of the contemporary art-world's clichés added to the fundamental intellectual strength and empirical precision of his opinions. He worked at his writing on art, connoisseurship and collecting not as isolated phenomena but which were, for him, parts of an organic and evolutionary process. Fehr's collecting carried with it his own inherited pioneer spirit.

"A collection, in the true sense, whether large or small, will reflect its owner, and will have something which will be absent in a public gallery."<sup>91</sup>

Fehr also understood the worth of the private collector in relation to public collections. The collector can, if fortunate, make a relevant decision more quickly than a public institution with all its apparatus, he believed. Without the private collector, "the backbone of the country,"<sup>92</sup> museums would have little meaning. Those should indeed try "to acquire examples of the representative things,"<sup>93</sup> but such institutions must also encourage a lively interest in culture. That, in turn, would stimulate the private collector who then becomes part of the cultural and educational process. Items privately owned will, in time, change hands, unlike in the public institutions, who should be more than mere repositories. A good means to measure "the beneficial influence exerted by our

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<sup>91</sup>Fehr, Wm., "Collectors and Collections," in *UCT*, vol. II, no. 6, December 1963, p. 21.

<sup>92</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Mrs. K. Roodt-Coetzee, Old Transvaal Museum, Pretoria, 8 March 1961, pp. 1-2.

<sup>93</sup>*ibid.* p. 2.

public collections," Fehr believed, was to be seen in "the rivalry in the acquisition of æsthetic objects."<sup>94</sup>

The displays of Africana at Castle Good Hope and "Rust-en-Vreugd" had not copies of something done before. They were modern adaptations of historic materials to contemporary historical sites. While artifacts often carried dynamic associations, the pictorial representation of people, places and things, were especially immediate and vivid, thus animating the displays of neighbouring objects. Rather than the highly trained professionals, it had been, for Fehr, the "amateurs and self-taught artists" whose work, "full of honesty and enthusiasm," gained "an immortal quality, to which time has added a romantic halo."<sup>95</sup> Fehr concluded that "Truth in art has survived the ages; the spurious has fallen by the wayside."<sup>96</sup> Said in another way, what had been seen, felt and recorded by those artists in their own times stood outside the imposition of later theories. Art as historical documents benefited from being viewed in their own context.

Through the Collection the viewer could contemplate aspects of past achievements of the West, the East and Africa as related to Southern Africa. The collector himself could enjoy some still higher pleasures, concerning which an informed opinion had it that:

"They rather resemble religion, and it is impossible to enjoy them without trying to hand them on. The appreciator of an æsthetic achievement becomes in his minor way an artist; he cannot rest

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<sup>94</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>95</sup>Fehr, Wm., "Collectors and Collections," in *UCT*, vol. II, no. 6, December 1963, p. 16.

<sup>96</sup>*ibid.*

without communicating what has been communicated to him. This 'passing on' impulse takes various forms, some of them merely educational, others merely critical; but it is essentially a glow from the central fire, and to extinguish it is to forbid the spread of the Gospel.

It is therefore impossible to sit alone with one's books and prints, or sit only with friends like oneself, and never testify outside.

Dogmatism is of course a mistake, and even tolerance and tact have too much of the missionary spirit to work satisfactorily. What is needed in the cultural Gospel is to let one's light shine so that men's curiosity is aroused [...]."<sup>97</sup>

Fehr kept himself informed of literary and other cultural activity abroad. Journals such as *The Listener* were included among his reading. BBC broadcast programmes were also enjoyed, among them "The Brains Trust," which featured Prof. C. E. M. Joad. By that time Fehr had already made important assessments of his own relation to collecting.

"During more than a quarter of a century I have purchased very little at auction sales, and even less from private individuals.

The fact that I was spending so much time on what my friends were pleased to regard as my hobby, called for a great deal of heart-searching. Was it right and was it rational and justifiable to continue to do so? I could, of course, sympathize with the view that one might be interested in these things, but that one did not necessarily have to possess them.

But I could not expect everybody else to realize that each successive item was filling a vital gap, and that if it were not secured, the gap might never be filled.

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<sup>97</sup>Forster, E. M., "Does culture matter?" (1940) in *Two Cheers for Democracy*, London, 1951, p. 115.

In fact, the greatest number of my pictures actually were brought back from oversea, where they were becoming dispersed. How also could I bring myself to admit even to my closest associates that I had a feeling of missionary zeal to complete the work I had commenced?"<sup>98</sup>

By "filling a vital gap" through his collecting, Fehr indicated a plan, a programme, by which he navigated the past. A sense of compulsion and fidelity, like that of many artist-explorers, heightened the fact for him that if a particular object were not secured, "the gap might never be filled," thus leaving the full picture he wished to represent incomplete. Feeling personal involvement and inspiration in the endeavour, his "missionary zeal" would carry him to his destination and fulfilment. Fehr thus described several reasons which sustained his quest for visual records of the historical past which were integral to his own life and consistent with cultural values of the individual and the family in society.

"What we are here defining as the true nature of culture is nothing less than a substitute for religion, where the absence of faith, in a modern person's being, has rendered religion unattainable."<sup>99</sup>

A reflection of that humanistic view was applied by Fehr in his own approach to art and history since:

"...humanism is a religion of reason, inspired by the example of antiquity, which has grown richer in shades, which has become universal, and, in short, human. It teaches a belief in the human

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<sup>98</sup>Godfrey, D., *The Enchanted Door*, Cape Town, 1963, pp. 101-102. Godfrey had relied on Fehr's commentary in "The Fehr Collection," *Lantern*, March 1958, pp. 230-237. Fehr had that article reprinted (with acknowledgements) and bound for his own use in a decorative paper cover. On it was printed a larger version of his own bookplate. [WFLG.] That process had been another step toward a major guide to the Collection which was still being displayed at Castle Good Hope.

<sup>99</sup>Powys, J. C., *The Meaning of Culture*, 1930, London, p. 95, quoted in [VE.] Cowell, F. R., *Culture in Private and Public Life*, p. 254.

spirit, submitted afresh to an ever-renewed inspection and increasing criticism."<sup>100</sup>

In the late winter of 1963 Fehr had become more pleased with progress at "Rust-en-Vreugd."

"We are at last making a start and I hope that we may complete this very big job by March next year."<sup>101</sup>

Fehr continued to feel weighed down by his commitments, and he had been suffering with asthma. In the past, of an evening, he would entertain himself at the piano, walk with the dogs, or by day enjoy a round of golf. He wrote to a friend who could travel at will enjoying good health.<sup>102</sup> In fact, when Fehr later learned that his correspondent and wife were journeying to the Orient, he wrote,

"I wish I was going with you – I could also do with a complete break. Furnishing a Gallery when one has so many other things to do, and with the difficulties of obtaining the necessary labour has been a very trying experience, especially as we have not made much progress, and I cannot expect to finish before the end of March at the very earliest. During December things are at a standstill [with the builders' holidays] and I will have to be busy during the [Cape's] hottest months of the year. I do not wish to labour the many other troubles that have had to receive attention...."<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Fehr, Wm., "Collectors and Collections," in *UCT*, vol. II, no. 6, December 1963, p. 21, quote from Verne, H., *Introduction to the Louvre*, [n.p.] [n.d.]

<sup>101</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Winand, 27 August 1963.

<sup>102</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>103</sup>VE. Letter form Fehr to Winand, 2 December 1963, p. 1.

In addition Fehr regretted the inflated prices, and devalued currency, that made serious collecting unlike what it had been earlier. "Quite recently," he wrote,

"the Government have gone into opposition and bid £7,500 for a collection of drawings by the French traveller [François] Le Vaillant. I am looking forward to seeing them, but I need hardly say that could not have happened in the past."<sup>104</sup>

Even when the market for quality Africana became highly competitive over dwindling supplies, both in South Africa and abroad, Fehr continued to gather together works depicting regions and peoples beyond the Cape. Those works sometimes represented the stark materialism, like the rush for diamonds and gold, which contrasted with Fehr's beloved and older Cape history. It was there that he found reflected in art a life of simpler virtues, not yet overwhelmed by commercialization, the point at which the Collection terminated.

Winand was of a sort whose friendship and expertise Fehr valued highly. The Fehrs had gathered numerous friends over the years, and William was attached to those who, like Hiller, Purcell, Gordon-Brown and others, appreciated his historic Collection and insights. Winand had been after "modern paintings" and sculpture. Though hampered by failing eyesight and years, he had been involved in the current English art world.<sup>105</sup> Fehr and his wife acknowledged their friendship with the Winands, since they had shared many views on life and culture.<sup>106</sup> Fehr's attainments had not been selfish. His contributions were often

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<sup>104</sup>*ibid.*, pp. 1-2. [Le Vaillant was represented in WFLG in the editions of Leroy, Paris, 1790; Jansen & Perroueau, Paris, 1790; G. & J. Robinson, London, 1790.]

<sup>105</sup> VE. Letter from Winand to Fehr, 23 August 1963.

<sup>106</sup> VE. Letter from Fehr to Winand, 2 December 1963, p. 2.



of a collective nature, undertaken with the encouragement and reliable advice of others. Yet he maintained his artistic integrity and individuality to the end.

Fehr was not a model correspondent, hence his surviving letters in those matters were of particular value. He wrote again to the Winands, in the hope that they could visit “Rust-en-Vreugd” in the coming year. Again he described his being “tied down” to creating the displays there, with the plan of opening its Collection to the public early in 1965.<sup>107</sup> He was pleased with the method of hanging his pictures at “Rust-en-Vreugd” against a textile background,<sup>108</sup> in fact of hessian, a coarse cloth itself long associated with bundles of commercial wares. That the Gallery would be “a particular attraction” seemed doubtful to Fehr, “because of its specialized field,” thinking it more suited to modern art, like in his correspondent’s collection, in an atmosphere quite new to Cape Town.<sup>109</sup>

With the purchase of the William Fehr Collection at the Castle, Fehr and his wife (*vide opposite*<sup>110</sup>) presented the works at “Rust-en-Vreugd” as a gift to the people of South Africa.<sup>111</sup> Fehr was conscious of his Collection as being historically

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<sup>107</sup>Letter from Fehr to Winand, 9 December 1964. VE.

<sup>108</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>109</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>110</sup>VE. Photograph by Arthur English of Dr. and Mrs. Fehr, “Rust-en-Vreugd,” 1 April 1965.

<sup>111</sup>The composition of the Collection (Inv.), including items of the old Castle Art Collection, was as follows. Numbers refer to quantities in the Castle and at “Rust-en-Vreugd” respectively: oils 98/5; watercolours 32/361; graphics 47/296; ceramics 232/24; glass 67/3; silver 28/0; copper or brass 146/5; furniture 94/18; other (rugs, weapons, etc.) 94/10.

comprehensive and culturally coherent.<sup>112</sup> Yet he had much earlier considered placing the Collection under family supervision, at a place in the country “on the lines of the National [Trust] Homes in Britain.”<sup>113</sup> Fehr wrote to Winand that the Collection at the Castle had been purchased for, as the latter agreed, “quite a nominal consideration.”<sup>114</sup> Fehr would have preferred that his family should administer the Collection, but he felt it “a mistake to try and regulate the lives of others according to your particular likes.”<sup>115</sup> He also thought the exhibition at “Rust-en-Vreugd” to be “unexciting,” separated as they were from their complimentary works at the Castle.<sup>116</sup> Bringing items up to the house “would have left the Castle without the material which could not be replaced so satisfactorily.”<sup>117</sup>

Fehr wrote and published a guide-book to “Rust-en-Vreugd” and the Collection there,<sup>118</sup> in the same year that The William Fehr Collection was declared a state-aided institution.<sup>119</sup> He acknowledged the assistance received from the Secretary

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<sup>112</sup>VE. Millar [Collier], Joy, interview with author, 9 February 1996. Cf. “Let the members of all races therefore devote their energies in self-forgetfulness to the pursuit of cultural meanings and values and racial differences will cease to be a source of bitterness and strife.” [VE.] Cowell, F. R., *Culture in Private and Public Life*, p. 155.

<sup>113</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Winand, 19 May 1965, p. 1.

<sup>114</sup>VE. Letter from Fehr to Winand, 5 January 1965, p. 1.

<sup>115</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>116</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>117</sup>*ibid.*

<sup>118</sup>*Rust-en-Vreugd*, Cape Town, 1965 [WFLG].

<sup>119</sup>NAR. Letter from Op’t Hof, Sec. for Education, Arts and Science to Fehr, 5 November 1965, p. 1.

for Education, Arts and Science, Dr. Op't Hof, and "his sympathetic and delicately persuasive approach to the many problems we faced."<sup>120</sup> Fehr also had the "excellent advice and unfailing co-operation of the architect, Mr. T. Rohn and the very competent technical assistance of Mr. Walter Weimar."<sup>121</sup> Fehr most especially recorded thanks to Mrs. Fehr.

"Wives usually bear the brunt of their husband's idiosyncrasies and I am happy to acknowledge my gratitude to my wife for her indulgent understanding and staunch support to make my dreams come true."<sup>122</sup>

Yet in less than a year of the Collection's début at "Rust-en-Vreugd" Fehr was disappointed at the small number of people who visited "Rust-en-Vreugd," which was felt by those in the centre of town to be out of the way. Fehr hoped that "a more suitable site may be obtained at a later stage."<sup>123</sup> A suggestion was put forward to use the house as a mess for military units linked to Castle Good Hope but the authorities declined, since "Rust-en-Vreugd" had been put aside specifically for Fehr's Collection.<sup>124</sup> If it were to have been a question of shifting the Collection at the house down to the Castle, display area was severely limited in any case, since most rooms there were occupied by military administration. Fehr was again disappointed since the exhaustive and comparative nature of the Collection called for display, and study, as a unit. He had also been further burdened by matters of staff in the Collection, the general disposition of the military in relation to the Collection and himself, the maintenance of "Rust-en-

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<sup>120</sup>*Rust-en-Vreugd*, p. 8.

<sup>121</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>122</sup>*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

<sup>123</sup>WFCCGH. Minutes of a [WFC] Board meeting, 27 January 1966.

<sup>124</sup>WFCCGH. Minutes of a [WFC] Board meeting, 25 September 1966, p. 1.

Vreugd" and its garden by the PWD, and damages which had occurred to items in the Collection through negligence.

Fehr had already written and published in 1961 *Caldwell's Animals*<sup>125</sup> [WFLG], which featured watercolours of Edmund Caldwell. In that book South African wildlife and art were presented in the hope of encouraging the appreciation of the cultural and natural heritage as being contiguous. T. V. Bulpin had been involved with the book and was enthusiastic. He had himself been a well-known travel and adventure writer and publisher concerned with understanding and conserving African wildlife. Dr. Douglas Hey, Director of Nature Conservation for the Cape Province, provided a preface to the book, while Bulpin, who appreciated Caldwell's work, wrote on the various animals illustrated. The watercolours used were from among those acquired by Fehr through Jordan at Sandover in 1948. Hey wrote of the seriously diminished state of wildlife in South Africa, in some cases already driven to extinction, through the rise of agriculture, industry and the wanton slaughter as depicted in Thomas Baines's oil of *The Greatest Hunt in History* [1860] [Inv. CG 7], also one of Fehr's pictures illustrated in the book.

Bulpin had spoken of Fehr as being "a great conservationist, not only for paintings or buildings but also for the environment generally."<sup>126</sup> The latter had given an exposition, drawn from original sources, upon the Great Hunt which had been arranged for the benefit of the young Prince Alfred on his visit to the

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<sup>125</sup>Fehr, William & T. V. Bulpin, *Caldwell's Animals*. Also in Afrikaans as *Caldwell se Diere*.

<sup>126</sup>Bulpin, T. V., interview with author, 26 May 1999.

Free State Republic. Baines's monochrome [*grisaille*] matched the lurid details of the graphically written contemporary text.

"The tragedy of this account, from which the more bloody details have been omitted, is heightened by the enthusiasm which inspired its narration. We turn with relief to admire the dignified and sympathetic studies of Caldwell which remind us that animals were placed in our care and not at our mercy."<sup>127</sup>

Thus Fehr and his Collection embraced and reflected the belief that humankind were responsible as custodians for the well-being of the earth and all its inhabitants, to conserve wisely for the future. As important a contribution to conservation as the book had been, *Caldwell's Animals* was not viewed as a success at the time "as the demand is too small, and sales are poor."<sup>128</sup>

Fehr contributed to a chapter on old wine glasses in a volume commissioned and published to commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the K.W.V. [Koöperatiewe Wynmakers Vereniging] at Stellenbosch.<sup>129</sup> Fehr's own hospitality at "Aboyne" had been fondly remembered by many. That chapter on wine glasses had been enriched by many cultural references, including another personal reflection.

"We take special pride in the glasses that have come down to us as worthy symbols of our fine wines. But glass is brittle and we are conscious of the delicate compliment paid to us by our host when he honours us by setting out his best glasses for our enjoyment. The ceremony of drinking a glass of wine and proposing a friendly

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<sup>127</sup>*op. cit.* [p. 2.]

<sup>128</sup>NAR. Minutes of a [WFC] Board meeting, 2 November 1967.

<sup>129</sup>VE. Opperman, D. J., ed., *Spirit of the Vine*.

toast, is hallowed by ancient custom. In this way the wineglass has come to symbolise its dignified purpose and become a very personal object on the dinner table. There the glasses arranged in the order in which the wine will be poured create an air of warm and gracious hospitality."<sup>130</sup>

The closing pages of Fehr's life were devoted to a rare book and the African people it had described. Though record of the acquisition had not survived, in about 1966 Fehr acquired from a London dealer the original MS [WFLG] of a major first-hand study of life among the Xhosa. Its author had been a well-travelled German military officer employed at the Cape during the brief Batavian Republic's administration. Ludwig Alberti recorded his observations made among the Xhosa in the eastern border region of the Cape. The MS had been a pioneering monograph on the subject. Fehr recognized the great importance of the work and set about translating the text into English so as to reach a broader readership with that first-hand account. Alberti's text had been published previously in Dutch, French and German editions, only in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hence Fehr's accurate translation filled a significant place in the history of the Xhosa people, and also complimented numerous pictures and objects in the Collection. Though eventually incapacitated through illness, Fehr had completed the translation which was taken through the press by Frank Bradlow.<sup>131</sup> Fehr's ultimate achievement had been attained through a language of his childhood and youth, translating into English the work of an enlightened German, who

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<sup>130</sup>VE. "Wine Glasses and Old Glass at the Cape, William Fehr LL.D. (Hon.) U.C.T.," [1967] p. 1. MS of chapter in *Spirit of the Vine*.

<sup>131</sup>Ludwig Alberti's *Account of the Tribal Life & Customs of the Xhosa in 1807*, translated by Dr. William Fehr from the original German manuscript. Preface by F. R. Bradlow & Biographical Sketch by Dr. W. J. de Kock. [WFLG.]

would himself travel the old commercial routes from Europe to Asia via the Cape, recording the life and customs of Black Africans as he had experienced them. Fehr's cultural and historical contributions would conclude where his own life had begun, on the rugged Eastern Cape frontier.

While at work on the Alberti translation, Fehr painted a picture of the past that had been his immediate heritage at the Cape, in much the spirit of his *Collection* as it was recorded early in 1936. Though writing the foreword to a book on Thomas Bowler and his artwork, Fehr presented his own epitome of that earlier era, viewed as he approached his seventy-fifth birthday.

"It was then that the streets of Cape Town were first lit by gas [1847]; the first mail steamer arrived in the Cape [1851]; the first train ran to the country [1863]; and the first sod was turned by Prince Alfred to inaugurate the building of our docks [1860]. The attempt to land convicts agitated our citizens [1849]; the Kafir Wars swept through the 1820 Settlers' country and the Voortrekkers occupied Port Natal [...]. The great sailing ships which furnished Table Bay, in all their glory, were destined to vanish from the scene forever – as were the old coaches and ox-wagons [...].

The ladies are depicted in their crinolines, a shawl covering their shoulders, a lace and ribbon bonnet and frilly sunshade; the men are clad in frock coats and black or grey toppers. The Malays in their picturesque garb ply their trades everywhere. Windmills dot the landscape along the vleis and waterways of the Cape Flats [...]. Nothing, not even moonbeams glistening on the calm waters of False Bay, escaped his watchful eye [...].<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup>Fehr's foreword, signed at "Aboyne," Kenilworth, 15 March 1967, in Bradlow, F. R., *Thomas Bowler, His Life and Work*, Cape Town & Amsterdam, 1967, p. 9.

What Fehr had written was part of a history of commerce, as well as his own history in South Africa, even to the sharpness of "his watchful eye." Those scenes were integral to his cultural and historical autobiography. Some were already represented when Fehr had taken up his hobby some forty years earlier. All of them were depicted in some paintings by Bowler first seen collectively by the public at the Van Riebeeck Festival. The complete environment and man's rôle in it was then much appreciated in the mirror of his Collection. That historical view was also preserved in the records of all the historical and cultural organisations in which Fehr had served. Art, like music, offered Fehr and others alike a potent reminder of triumph in adversity, a numinous sense of strength and sympathy when confronting the frail human condition.

Fehr suffered a major stroke in October 1967, and was then no longer able to pursue the cultural matters to which he had dedicated most of his life. In recognition of those efforts the HMC had decided to award him a medal. The award was made posthumously as William Fehr had died at his home "Aboyne" on 2 April 1968. The Gold Medal of the Historic Monuments Commission, inscribed *For Long and Distinguished Service*, was accepted at the ceremony at Pretoria, 9 October 1968, on behalf of his widow by his daughter. The Alberti translation made with such care by Fehr had been published only at the time of his death.

Fehr's library of Africana books, associated material and printed music, and a portrait by Frans Oerder of Gen. Louis Botha, were given by his widow and

daughter in his memory to the University of Cape Town Library.<sup>133</sup> The William Fehr Library Gift (WFLG) represented the greatest part Fehr's own historic reference works, since he had not collected Africana books *per se*. The WFLG had been an indispensable asset for the appreciation and study of the land and people which inspired the Collection, and was linked to all of Fehr's historical and cultural interests.

William Fehr's remains were interred with those of his parents at Maitland Cemetery, Cape Town.

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<sup>133</sup>VE. Letter from Immelman, University Librarian, to Mrs. Henriette Fehr, 10 December 1968.

## VI. Fehr reflected in the Collection.

The pictures described as Africana by Fehr himself and recorded in the list of 7 January 1936 (Appendix A.), all represented historic scenes of Cape Town and its environs, including coastal and eastern regions of Cape Colony. Though not all of the 21 paintings and 14 prints in the list had been described in detail, the majority of the total, *i.e.* 28 of the 35 items, found their way into the subsequent Collection's holdings. After 1936 Fehr may have replaced certain prints with more desirable versions, but those graphic works and the paintings formed the nucleus of what became the pictorial or two-dimensional aspect of the Collection. Some of the works would be sent for viewing to England, Canada, the United States, Rhodesia and Natal. Fehr had returned from his 1934 grand tour apprised of the availability of significant pictorial Africana in London. He had also allowed his own interests in art to be encouraged in the pursuit of Africana while in contact with Hiller, Purcell and Gordon-Brown.

All the Africana works in the list of 1936 depicted scenes of human endeavour and commerce in varying degrees. That they had often shown views of great beauty, presented through the spirited craftsmanship of several professional artists (S. Daniell, Huggins, Bowler, Baines,) as well as gifted amateurs (Eyre, Darrell), was indicative of Fehr's own æsthetic appreciation and insistence on quality. He had invested not only money but also time in the process, even though he had described it then as being merely an agreeable hobby.

Several of the other pictures have remained with the family. The reputations of

artists like Gwelo Goodman and Nita Spilhaus in particular were recognized in Fehr's time. Spilhaus' study in oils of the Malay Quarter at Cape Town was itself an example of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Africana and an artistic historical document, but beyond Fehr's chronological limit. Photographs of that painting were among Fehr's papers. Other works in the list had to be noted according to the artists and titles alone, while most were beyond the realm of Africana as defined by Fehr's interests and his clear indications as to the chronological, material and artistic framework within which he had collected.

The Africana portion of the 1936 list represented not only an overview of aspects of art and history at the Cape but also an autobiographical sketch by Fehr. An important notion common to the Africana works had been commerce, a process of human communication, trade and improvement run on a local, regional or worldwide scale. Not necessarily direct or immediate, such subject matter became more apparent when the idea was followed of psychological association, acknowledged by Fehr, in addition to acknowledging the broad outline of his own life. There were no items in the Collection, as chosen and acquired by Fehr himself, which could not be related to the comprehensive overview pursued by the collector. That applied alike to unadorned and anonymous rural domestic furnishings, ingenuous watercolours and oils, as well as to sophisticated Oriental porcelain, elegant cabinetry of stylistically mixed ancestry, silverware and Western topographical painting of world repute, as in the cases of the Royal Academicians William Hodges, Thomas and William Daniell, or William Huggins who had been a marine painter to George IV and William IV. The three-dimensional works at the Castle acquired by Fehr were original period pieces, as were the oil paintings, watercolours and graphics. The

last two media were also housed at “Rust-en-Vreugd” as being from or related to historic periods and identifiable circumstances, though, as with works at the Castle, not as art for its own sake. Thus Fehr’s Collection was and had remained distinctive. Its monetary value, as has been noted, did not match the vastly higher cultural and educational value it represented. The Collection rendered aspects of all those who shaped the South African past, rather than being representative in museum terms of complete series of items valued for their own sake. Unlike any other collection of Africana, that of Fehr was a large and cohesive unit, consciously built up by him as an artwork itself, composed of many diverse but interrelated components. Its display was also entirely individual, since in both historic venues, whether themselves optimally efficient or not, Fehr tried to avoid the sometimes artificial and constricting atmosphere seen in museums of that time in South Africa and abroad. The collector himself had said that museums had a much larger rôle in society than being merely warehouses. Fehr’s own illustrated guides, published for both portions of the Collection, provided a major educational contribution which was unmatched in scope and depth by any other works of similar intent in South Africa. The books and the items were narrative and complimentary thus creating an even larger and solidly constructed unit.

As a native of the Cape Colony, Fehr’s earliest experiences involved commerce in his father’s house and business, and the genial humane warmth of his mother and family. Those roots, transplanted with the Fehr family in Europe during the Anglo-Boer War, supported the heroic quest of his later collecting in the Union as a compound of Southern Africa and its oceans, commerce and society at large. Those characteristics in turn were linked to distant lands, as his own life

had been informed by experiences abroad, in the associations of East, West and Africa in an historical context which commenced in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Without knowing which the first acquisition on Fehr's 1936 list may have been, the maps of Africa by N. Visscher I [b. 1587] [Inv. RSC4?] and Blaeuw [Inv. RSC3?] can be taken as the formulation of a more scientific overview of the continent and its oceans as known in the earlier 17<sup>th</sup> century. The latter cartographer's work had been scrupulously built up from many contributions of various travellers and chart-makers. It also had been presented in an artistic fashion, befitting the Golden Century of the Netherlands, setting a standard of excellence in cartography as art appreciated by collectors in its own time. Such printed rather than drawn and painted maps reflected also the expanding knowledge of the world as stimulated by voyages down the Atlantic and across the Indian Oceans. Willem Blaeuw had been appointed chart-maker to the VOC in 1633-34, and that association provided Fehr with a link to the Company's world commerce within the microcosm of his pictures. The Huguenot Jacques Therond had been an ancestor of the collector's by ascent through the wife of Thomas Maskew. Since Therond had been employed by the VOC and made his home at the Cape in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, Fehr could find historical associations through Blaeuw's map. The achievements reflected in it also recalled earlier pioneering contributions made by Portuguese navigators, missionaries and merchants. Fehr had discovered F. Benda's impression [Inv. CD15] of religious fervour which in part inspired the voyage of Diaz around the Cape. While that small picture recalled the promise of a path to the Indies which would soon be opened, Fehr himself had circumnavigated Africa in the 1934 voyage, outward-bound from the Cape via Suez, and returning down the

West Coast. He had come home with the promise of pictorial treasures returning to their sources or earlier homes in and around Southern Africa.

Though they had not been the only callers at the Cape, the VOC were initiators there of a focus of maritime connections. In the nature of strategically positioned seaports, Cape Town took shape as a cosmopolitan if not wealthy centre of commerce, as depicted by William Hodges [Inv. CA7]. Several VOC warehouses had stood at the water's edge, while spires and belfries proclaimed religious faith and the great mountain identified that desirable African station. As one of several highly skilled specialists among Captain Cook's crew, Hodges recorded a moment of expanding knowledge, based on the outward growth of British science and industry. Hodges was typical of professional artists in transit and with the specific commission of recording their voyages to augment verbal records of a scientific, social and commercial nature.

At that time some inhabitants of the Cape were little concerned, even hostile, to VOC restrictions matched by growing dissent further inland. War in Europe among old commercial rivals precipitated reactions at the Cape which called for British intervention in anticipation of French aggression. The demise of the VOC, the Netherlands' capitulation to France, and the subsequent re-occupation of the Cape by Britain made her commerce with the Cape an intimate actuality. Therewith began an era of more regular visits by trained artists of skill who were either gainfully employed or romantically inclined to view and record the expanding Empire at first hand. The Orient had become an extension of the Occident, with the Cape in between. Samuel Daniell's study of a Boer and his party returning to a rustic home from the hunt [Inv. RD17]

provided Fehr with a path to the Cape interior, toward regions and people yet unknown. The insular heritage of the VOC was still evident, and a rugged rural life saw commerce of new sorts taking shape.

Samuel Daniell had an uncle and a brother, also professional artists, who were making their fame in India, where Britain and France had fought over commercial hegemony. Britain had won and, while war continued in Europe, she took up the new Colony which the Cape had become. William Huggins' two portraits of mighty ships-of-the-line and less imposing East-Indiamen [Inv. CB16 & CG36] represented the important position of commerce in war or peace. Huggins in his early years had been a seaman with the East India Company, thus his knowledge of shipping had been at first hand. The smaller vessels were, as ever before, well armed and they always meant business. Those two paintings also reflected the British and maritime origins of Fehr's own 19<sup>th</sup>-century family history.

In the interests of lucrative trade considerations across the Indian Ocean, two young Maskew brothers in turn had sailed from England to meet again at the Cape in the promise of a fresh life beyond Europe. Those ancestors of Fehr had at least been free agents, unburdened by family and poverty. Others in Britain had not been so fortunate and a great migration to new homes abroad was undertaken by thousands with little more security than hope, faith and each other. The unknown painter who had captured Cape Town and Table Bay in 1820 [Inv. RA29?] offered a further work by which to recall the building of Fehr's English heritage at the Cape. The Trollops and the Leppans, along with many other families, had sailed on from Cape Town along the southern coast

which Abraham de Smidt had painted as it appeared some years later [Inv. RB4]. When the emigrants' ships had arrived at Algoa Bay in 1820 their hopeful passengers were greeted by the stark shore of their new home. It was unlike anything that many had been promised. A naïve and honest record was made of the scene by Chas. van der Berg [Inv. CB17], one of several gifted amateurs of history at the Cape. Thomas Bowler's later view of Graham's Town [1864?] still suggested the hard times and harder fate which had awaited some of those British subjects. Though the details of precise subject matter were not recorded in the list, F. T. l'Ons' depiction of some of the inhabitants of Griqualand represented components of historic disputes along the Border regions of the Eastern Cape. l'Ons had been another of the professional artists from England who had settled at the Cape. In addition to his work in the Border region, l'Ons also supported himself by teaching. As is well known, other practitioners also taught, thereby adding to the numbers of amateur artists at the Cape.

The Imperial soldiery in the Border area had been recorded at their occupations by talented officers like Lt.-Col. C. C. Michell and Capt. H. Butler. Fehr's 1936 list showed that he owned prints of Sir Henry Darrell's fleeting scenes captured both while on duty [Inv. RF4 & RF5] and at ease [Inv. RF9] during the Frontier Wars. Either way soldiers and those who accompanied them required food and other items of trade, whether supplied locally or from abroad. By means of Darrell's lively watercolours Fehr was approaching, through pictures, the rise of his own immediate family in the Eastern Cape. Complex issues on the Border had led to the murders of two men of the Trollop family in 1851. As already discussed above, the widow of the elder man was later married to W. W. Maskew, a son of Thomas. That new Maskew family settled ultimately at

Burgersdorp in the Eastern Cape, and among their children would be William Fehr's mother Maria.

At the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century a French portrayal by Sabatier, Lauvergne and Bayot [Inv. CA66] showed that Cape Town had grown considerably. It also recalled an important connection with France, not only to Fehr's ancestor Jacques Therond, but also to the *Compagnie des Indes* which was founded in 1664 to develop Eastern commercial ties for Louis XIV. In the later 18<sup>th</sup> century the Cape became even more closely in contact with the French and with their centre at Pondicherry. Their *Compagnie* was supported by the Crown, unlike the VOC which had been created by and for merchants. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the Cape, increased commercial traffic had demanded better harbour facilities. The picture showed in juxtaposition the improvement of commerce by water. Like whalers, the oarsmen plied their boat over the swell of the Bay, while they approached a brig whose sails needed to be set. In the distance a small paddle steamer rode into the wind undisturbed by the effort and trailed a plume of black smoke, very unlike the tall masts of the sailing ships. While steamers retained their masts, or suggestions of them, down to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the skills of seafaring practised for millennia had been altered with startling rapidity. No longer were ships and their commerce entirely dependant on vagaries of climate. Consistent speed and accurate schedules became more common practice at the Cape and other mercantile centres like Port Elizabeth, East London and Durban, the first of which [RF 11?] had been represented on the list by a print after Bowler.

In Lady Eyre's vast watercolour panorama of Cape Town [Inv. RB7], its

mountains and shore were viewed around 1850 from the major commercial avenue of the port, the old jetty near the Castle, which had then been the centre of British military command. Again the spires of the Calvinist and Anglican churches announced their unifying presence while the mountains' clouds give warning of the disruptive wind. Lady Eyre also showed another important maritime aspect of the Cape, that of Simon's Bay backed by the rich farms and vineyards of Constantia [Inv. RC13]. At Simon's Town the British naval station bespoke a need to protect commercial contact between Britain and the Orient. Near Constantia was Wynberg, a traditional resting place for those of the East India Company and the Indian military who recuperated in the Cape's temperate and healthful climate, while enriching Cape Town trade, in which the senior Maskew brothers had still been involved. In those decades a few artists with Indian or Company associations had made records of daily life at the Cape.

Bowler's several pictures on the list all reflected maritime links, again in the knowledge that shipping was fundamental to commerce, and that the ships themselves, if well tended, were embodiments of efficiency and beauty. Hence their being appreciated by Fehr as one who himself enjoyed ocean travel. The Simon's Town Dockyard [Inv. RC24] was again highlighted for Fehr as an important naval coaling station on the shipping lanes then increasingly occupied by steamers. Mail contracts had also been awarded to steam-ship companies, so that communication and transport over the seas became more speedy and reliable. Yet danger was never far away. The old light house at Green Point [Inv. RC40], the first on the South African coast, gave warning to passing ships. The weather remained a continuous threat to goods and people, as witnessed in Bowler's picture of wreckage after the Great Gale of 1857 [Inv. RC32]. Those

often tragic circumstances incidentally supplied the substance of the Cape's well-attended auction sales of salvaged goods, a sturdy old maritime trade.

Less spectacular, though widely plied at the Cape, were the small fishermen's boats supplying their own needs, as well as those of the town and its visitors [Inv. RCB45 & RC38]. The latter picture also showed the Military Hospital near the Castle. The Cape throughout its history had been renowned for its hospitals, since the well being of mariners was of commercial concern to the VOC. Somerset Hospital near the old Docks continued to be of service in the British Colonial Period.

One of the ships portrayed by Bowler [Inv. RC29] had been the *St. Lawrence*, which Fehr identified as the vessel which had brought Lady Duff Gordon, and her evocative letter-writing, to visit the Cape. As to Cape Town's diverse and colourful population, C. Schott's oil painting of the old Fish Market at Rogge Bay [Inv. CA56] was a vibrant example. The fishmongers and their children were themselves related to the men out on the boats, often courageous characters from what was then becoming the Malay Quarter. It also showed a portion of the town which would be swallowed up by commercial expansion in the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century. That painting preserved for Fehr a vanishing portion of life in Cape Town, one which had linked it directly to the sea. Indeed huge projects were then in progress to increase harbour area by filling up the shoreline, thus drastically and permanently altering the face of historic Cape Town. Commerce would benefit, yet history suffered unless active measures were taken to preserve it through documents of art as history, as Fehr had realized.

The interaction and rivalry among Malays and Indians at the Cape, in all the variety of their own costumes, was part of Ritter's watercolour of *Snoek and Rice* [Inv. CC 135]. The Muslim's conical *toering* hat and characteristic wooden *kaparing* sandals were recorded by the amateur artist who had been a bookkeeper at Cape Town. Again commerce, art and history were linked to an everyday encounter. Shops and peddlers were never distant from the centres of business in Adderley Street in which the Commercial Exchange had stood. Since a print after Bowler in Fehr's list had shown that busy street, Fehr was afforded rich associations through the many grand structures there, as well as the quaint telegraph office for rapid communication, and several other signs of Victorian prosperity, order and faith, watched over by the Mountain. Both of the Maskew brothers were engaged in business at mid-century in central town, hence Fehr's relation to the picture had also been a family matter. Adderley Street had been the site of agitation against Britain's decision to transport convicts to the Cape (RC 72). The well-appointed citizenry were adamant in their stand against the plan, and one could imagine the Maskew brothers listening to speeches made in the driving rain. Commerce also represented there an effective lever by which those merchants who co-operated in the plan would be isolated from the economic community.

Another print after Bowler on the list showed the entrance to the Castle, providing Fehr with an epitome of the currents which had flowed around the Cape to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The acquisition of desirable commodities had been the VOC's principle task. Private commerce, the backbone of democracy for Fehr, had grown out of an earlier era of strict monopoly. The Castle without the VOC was merely a fortress. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the merchant, great or small,

had come to practice openly what a century before had to be done quietly, in the shadow of the mighty VOC. Britain's presence at the Castle enforced her rôle at the Cape and guarded the progress of commerce, while Napoleon himself had acknowledged the British to be "a nation of shopkeepers." The Cape too was becoming more like its British foster parent.

The time was also upon Fehr in the late 1930's, with his recently established and well-supplied contacts in London, to gather together the original works, created at the Cape and beyond, after which prints had been made. Within twenty years of compiling that list of pictorial Africana, Fehr had gathered together his comprehensive Collection. It had already become an important facet of culture and history in South Africa and abroad, and Fehr occasionally added items, since he continued contact with Jordan at Sandover and other firms. The essentially autobiographical nature of the Collection remained discernable.

*Treasures at the Castle* (1963) had displayed some of those close relationships. The keynote of the text and the Collection was couched in a quotation from an account of 1611 which described the Mountain, hence the Cape, as "a terrestrial Paradise" (p. 25). Fehr's own childhood at Burgersdorp had been a similarly ideal place, but he was well enough rooted in the practicalities of life so as not to dwell constantly among dreams. Fehr had seen much of the Collection as supplementary to the exciting narratives of adventurous travels in the past (p. 25). By not referring exclusively to the written word, as literacy was not global, Fehr also viewed his pictures as narratives. All that which was in its infancy in the 1936 list had grown to maturity with the publication of *Treasures at the Castle* nearly thirty years later.

An apt description (p. 59) of Thomas Baines in 1876 presented him thus.

“He was a man of marked individuality of character, a born artist and explorer, a lover of wild life, and skilled in all the shifts and resources of an explorer’s career.”

The passage was equally appropriate to Fehr who went exploring via his library of historical narratives (WFLG) and his collecting.

Items so fragile and rare as the Cape glass in the Collection were complimented by the inclusion (p. 21) of a Mr. G. Jones in the narrative. Jones represented a direct and personal link back to the days of Cape glass manufacture, who had arrived at the Colony at almost the same time as Carl Fehr. The delicate epergne (p. 28) was similar to one which stood on the dining table in the Fehr’s house at Burgersdorp, according to a photograph which included portraits of William and Maria Maskew. At the Castle, in a display case opposite the epergne were a pair of Edwardian pale green glass dishes [Inv. CA 128 & CA 137] which had belonged to Maria Fehr.

In another room were to be seen lavers [Inv. CC 116, CC 145, CC155], for ritual washing of hands before meals, and a utensil for koshering meat [CE 69]. All were reflections of Jewish associations with the Cape. The magnificent Westerwald stoneware vessel (p. 56) from the ancient and thriving commercial town of Cologne on the Rhine embodied some of the Rhenish connections of Carl Fehr and his ancestors. Glittering silver (p. 40) also helped William Fehr to recall that before English smiths had arrived at the Cape, most of the early craftsmen had been Germans. The second Commander of the Cape station, Zacharias Wagenaar, had been a German from Dresden. It was he who had

originated standards of quality in Cape silverware. The remarkable set of hoofed silver spoons (p. 51), made for an official of the VOC, mirrored Fehr's own splendid hospitality, and recalled his French antecedent at the Cape in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Some of the comfortable and elegantly simple furnishing displayed at the Castle – whether they were Fehr's own items or had been blended by him and Purcell with items of the Castle Art Collection – were of the sort that the Maskew ancestors had known and enjoyed at the Cape (p. 114). Fehr's memory of the more rustic area around Burgersdorp, with rumbling ox-wagons (pp. 118-119), were equally at home among the more self-conscious grace in the Collection. The sincerely carved oxen and wagon [p. 118] were also powerful reminders of the Boer War and the indomitable spirit of its local combatants.

Commerce as shown in the Collection continued to be a fundamental note. Beautiful ships (p. 139) carrying it forward, were balanced with scenes of wreckage (p. 105), as in the case of the *Grosvenor*, or of human intervention in land transport as with Chief Makoma (p. 39). The efficiency and grace of ships was accented for Fehr in the anonymous portrait of the RMS *Scot* (p. 82), specially built for the Cape run. The speed records she had set were known to Fehr since childhood, as Carl Fehr had also been the Castle Line agent at Burgersdorp. While preserving reminders of people and commerce through art, and recording historic events, the *Scot* picture was also a family link for Fehr.

Pictures of the Frontier Wars (pp. 38-39) called up the fatal involvement of Fehr's own ancestors in 1851. Thomas Baines had produced intense, eye-

witnessed pictures of many Border engagements, demonstrating that for frontiersmen the daily realities of war or peace demanded nerve and marksmanship (p. 43). Yet domesticity, whether rustic or urban, had at its heart the family (p. 115) and the related and comforting sense of community.

With an appreciation of worthy home values went a respect for the natural environment of which Fehr had been constantly reminded in his Collection. Caldwell's animal studies and Ethyl Dixie's botanical drawings, presented along the staircase, complimented other pictures – from whaling (p. 103) to hunting rhino (pp. 126-127) – which warned of human depredation in a terrestrial paradise. With the presence of yet unspoilt nature went a pervading sense of the spiritual (p. 65) which stood over every aspect of life in Cape Town, with its highly diverse population. Not far from St. George's Cathedral was the Malay Quarter and its mosques, recalled by a straw *toering* hat (p. 24) and ceremonial brazen *kaparing* sandals. Over a century before, Thomas Maskew had lived in Roze Street, before it was absorbed into the Malay Quarter, establishing for Fehr another family association in the Collection. Fehr had also contributed so much of his interest and energy to preserving traditions and houses in the Malay Quarter. One of the many pieces of which the *provenance* had not been recorded was the extraordinary early Ming candlestick (p. 90, top shelf, left). Of fine blue and white ware [Inv. CD 29.], such quality porcelain had been exported from China to the Near East, while the model for the candlestick was clearly Mamluk. Whether the porcelain or its wrought metal original were considered, such large and ornate pieces were not for domestic use but rather religious or ceremonial occasions, hence the fine condition of Fehr's valuable piece. He appreciated the complex Oriental and Muslim associations reflected

in it, not the least of which had been the arrival at the Cape of Sheikh Yussuf and his *entourage* in 1694, fifty years after the close of the Ming Dynasty. The candlestick became one of the Collection's greatest treasures, despite there being no information as to where Fehr found the piece, or how it had originally come to the Cape.

Each piece of furniture in the Collection, whether reflecting urban elegance (p. 52) or rural simplicity (pp. 120-121), was appreciated by Fehr for its own beauty and its true nature as a component of family life. The pieces were practical and always well-made of beautiful materials and intended to give years of practical service. Many items were of Eastern origins (p. 101), and were good examples of Western styles as interpreted through Eastern eyes and hands, eventually having become part of daily life at the Cape and beyond. Their exotic flavour permeated the Collection with their stately grace and unusual woods. The "Raffles" chair (p. 106), with its suggestions of the East India Company and early 19<sup>th</sup>-century commerce in the Orient, had provided another link to the young Maskew brothers' mercantile associations at Cape Town.

As Fehr had no more space available to him in the Castle for further display, the gracious old house "Rust-en-Vreugd" became a focus largely of pictorial Africana other than oils. Fehr's book (1965) on the house and Collection there had been, in part, a guide as well to his own familial presence among the works.

Of the 28 identified works of the 1936 list, 20 became part of the Collection at "Rust-en-Vreugd" (p. 28) incorporating their autobiographical links. They formed there the core around which hundreds of other works were placed.

Much of that part of the Collection would be dismantled and put into storage from 1992-93 at the time the house was renovated. Severe financial restraints, as well as considerations of conservation, subsequently prevented the complete return of the Collection. Examples previously shown at the house were also related to associations of identical scenes represented in different media. The 1936 list recorded Hodges' aquatint view of the Bay (Inv. RA 7), and eventually appeared the watercolour after which it was made (Inv. RA 5) while the original oil painting had been shown at the Castle (Inv. CD 21).

Commerce and society had been fundamental notions throughout the Collection at "Rust-en-Vreugd." William Daniell's terrifying portraits of ships battling Cape storms materialized vividly the dangers every one of Fehr's travelling antecedents had to face in the pursuit of business and communication. The process of earning a living was thus at times a path to disaster, the fear of which rigorous faith could help allay.

Fehr had been aware of the educational value of his Collection and reminded visitors of the numbers of his works reproduced in a variety of publications (p. 26). Education had also been important in the lives both of Magistrate William Maskew, Fehr's grandfather, and Frederick Maskew of the South African Library. Many artistic travellers around Southern Africa had hoped to have their works reproduced by the technically most advanced methods available to them. Informing others about the many different people of Southern Africa was as culturally important and artistically satisfying as the depiction of nature in all its variety. The commercial implications of both aspects of life also gave support to potential mercantile undertakings. In particular the works of George French

Angas (Inv. RC 15, RC 45, RD 27, RD 46 to 72) captured a comprehensive understanding and appreciation, especially of Zulus at their daily activities and social relations in splendid detail at a time of greater British contact with the region.

The scenes of diamond mining at Kimberley (p. 39) reflected a major driving force of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century commerce and rising industry in Southern Africa, as well as Carl Fehr's own interests in mining in the Eastern Cape, linked by the spreading railways across the Orange Free State and Transvaal. Thomas Baines's works depicting the expedition to the Zambesi (p. 68) were not done merely in the spirit of adventure, but included the pursuit of science and commerce.

The drawings of Mrs. Trotter were, for Fehr, artistically engaging records of Cape scenes and humanity as they had been at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Those sketches carried all the more significance, since personal contact with the artist, a voice from the past, allowed Fehr to view his Collection as a living entity in which he and his Cape ancestors had participated.

Fehr's love for the sea and ships had helped form the natural choice of a bookplate for use in his library. In the Collection [Inv. CA 98] was a presentation notebook with a silver pencil which had been made for the VOC, ca. 1750. On the cover was mounted a silver crest on which had been represented a full-sailed, starboard-quarter view of a departing East-Indiaman. That image of maritime world commerce had been printed at the centre of Fehr's bookplate. It represented the essence of commercial endeavour, not merely the exchange of trade goods and money. As an aspect of culture from the 15<sup>th</sup> century

onward, the age of commerce was borne forward by the improvement both of navigational instruments, and the great new ships themselves. Adventure and the attendant courage required by the mariners were part of Fehr's romantic own quest.

## VII. Conclusion.

Since the time of his death there had been no attempt to assess William Fehr's collecting and many cultural interests in relation to his life, while of necessity drawing on his own ancestral heritage which spanned centuries and continents. His Collection was fundamentally an historical mosaic, and all of Fehr's many interests and undertakings, in cultural and historical terms, were reflected within that imposing physical presence which was distinctly South African in content, while being worldwide in concept.

Through decades of sustained and systematic labour, quite apart from his busy life in commerce, Fehr had assembled what he designated a collection, largely of pictorial and three-dimensional art, which reflected events and scenes from over 400 years of the region's history, both on land and sea. Within his own lifetime Fehr had gathered together an educational and artistically refined visual history of a young nation and its peoples viewed from his own informed and balanced perspective.

His membership of numerous historical and cultural organisations provided insights helpful in viewing Fehr's own society. In regarding the past not only the Cape but also the whole region was seen as being appropriately represented in his understanding of culture and history. His correspondence provided important material on his process of collecting, enlivened by his enthusiasm and rigour. He helped to provide material – where before there was none or little – to a wide variety of individuals and organisations looking toward enjoyment and

enrichment. From pupils' school projects to matters of national and international consequence, Fehr was able and equipped to help by enlivening the educational worth of historic remains from many traditions. Through his direct intervention some major cultural assets were kept from destruction. They were revitalised by him and associates and again placed before the interested public. Fehr was also personally responsible for the import of a number of notable pictures at a time when the Union was concerned about the historically and culturally debilitating export of Africana.

Fehr was part of a small, informed and dedicated group concerned with the appreciation, preservation and study not only of the historic human legacy of Southern Africa and its Oceans, but also the region's fauna and flora. Within Fehr's lifetime all of those matters grew from infancy to maturity. Many people had learned to value more than previously the history and culture of the region. Fehr's ideas often appeared in newspapers. His incomparable Collection helped to illustrate a great number of publications both abroad and local. Many visitors to Castle Good Hope and "Rust-en-Vreugd" had shared his ideas of romance and adventure, commerce and industry, disappointment and triumph. Nearly all of his published writings were highly appreciated by their contemporaries. Those works have gone out of print and in their turn have become valued pieces of Africana.

Fehr's sympathetic understanding and appreciation of the human condition imbued his interests with compassion, while his æsthetic and commercial concerns were indicative of a balanced judgement. Natural sensibilities and a childhood developed within a closely bound family enabled Fehr to draw for

decades on his own cultural legacy. His experiences in major world capitals had enhanced the broad education set in place by his parents. Though contemporary with the rise of aggressive individualism, William Fehr did not view culture as an isolated phenomenon. He had inherited and valued the idea as an entire way of life, while appreciating what history offered as a record of fortitude against uncertainty.

The questions of Fehr's cultural inheritance and historical awareness were central to the work. He was viewed also as part of a large and well established international social order. As an educated *bourgeois* Fehr had been guided largely, but not exclusively, by the achievements of that social stratum. He recognised and acknowledged the often difficult path followed to worthy attainments. He also believed that the guidance and enjoyment to be realised by the appreciation and study of those achievements was of creative use to the growing South African nation and all who lived there.

The habits and associations of family, as related to the late Victorian era and its cognates, were significant in the shaping of Fehr's own world view. His commercial involvements were also influenced accordingly. Fehr was a participant in and contributor to an informal cosmopolitan association of individuals keen to conserve something of the heritage of Southern African history and culture which also reflected those beliefs, while yet being aware of contemporary needs. He was also a long-standing member of numerous formal organisations dedicated to similar goals.

Fehr had been a pioneer in many aspects of South African cultural life, and was

highly regarded by many of his contemporaries. While being a determined man who knew the worth of his efforts, he never allowed himself to be the centre of a coterie. Though charitable by nature, Fehr could assert his reasoned views with little compromise. Viewed by some as being stern and formidable, others fondly remembered him for his generosity, polished manner, and lively imagination.

His several references to the psychological and associative worth attached to words, images and objects identified an appreciation of the abstract which remained the cornerstone of his Collection, based as it was upon social endeavour and commerce. The fervour in conserving and imparting such values was inherent to his character. Some had remembered him as a devoted, obsessed, even fanatic collector, all terms regularly associated with religious, spiritual or numinous values. His compassion both in deed and thought, was also related to characteristics often associated with missionary enthusiasm, yet without formal religious associations. Material considerations were a practical fact, as were economy and charity. Fehr's distinctly individual and integrated views were based upon many years of study, both on his own and guided by reliable authorities and trusted friends.

Like a revivalist who stirred up fading memories, Fehr helped to animate a broad appreciation of significant values and the art applied to give them lasting material form. Though he had written the following passage in 1955 about Thomas Bowler, it applied equally well to William Fehr himself as having been

“one who gave so much of himself to create a love for, and appreciation of, art and thus helped to stimulate the cultural activities of the community.”

## VIII. Appendices.

### A.

"7.1.1936

#### List of Pictures.

#### Africana

#### Original Oils and Watercolours

[Where relevant, a number [ ] added after an artist's name refers to Fehr's later compilation for his own Collection in the Catalogue of the VRF Historical Exhibition of Arts, The Castle, Cape Town, 1952. A further number ( ) refers to the Revised Inventories, 1977.]

<u>"Artist</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Value</u>
T. W. Bowler [285] (RC32)	<i>Gale in Table Bay</i> <u>Description</u> A very large Original Water Colour depicting the Great Gale of the 10 <sup>th</sup> June, 1857, with ships wrecked on the foreshore at the Castle.	10.6.1857	£50. 0. 0.
T. W. Bowler (RC24)	<i>Dockyard Simonstown</i> A very fine Water Colour of Simonstown overlooking the Dockyard, showing a great many figures and general activity around the ships in the Dockyard.	ca. 1860	£25. 0. 0.
T. W. Bowler (RC26)	<i>Table Bay from Blauwberg</i> A very artistic Water Colour drawing of Table Bay.	1859	£15. 0. 0.
T. W. Bowler [290] (RC29)	<i>Sailing Ship entering Table Bay</i> Large Water Colour of outstanding merit.	1861	£50. 0. 0.
T. W. Bowler [20] (CB45)	<i>Scene in Table Bay</i> A rare Oil of Bowler on canvas of Table Bay Scene from the shore around Blauwberg, with Fishermen pulling up a boat in the foreground.	ca. 1855	£30. 0. 0.
T. W. Bowler [288] (RC38)	<i>Near Military Hospital</i> <i>Woodstock Beach</i> Water Colour depicting Fishermen in boats and on the shore hauling in the net.	1853	£20. 0. 0.
T. W. Bowler [287] (RC40)	<i>Old Lighthouse Green Point</i> Water Colour showing the Old Lighthouse and Green Point Common with figures in foreground.	ca. 1850	£20. 0. 0.

- Samuel Daniel  
1775-1811  
[333] (RD17) *Boer returning from hunting* 1800-1803 £75. 0. 0.  
Water Colour in mint condition. This Picture was later engraved by the Artist and published in 1804.
- Thomas Baines  
1822-1875  
[9] (CG34) *South Easter in Table Bay* 5.11.1842 £45. 0. 0.  
Large Oil. One of the first Paintings by Baines on his arrival at the Cape in [Nov.] 1842. Companion Picture to the one presented by the Earl of Clarendon to South Africa House [London] in 1934.
- Thomas Baines  
[13] (CA1) *A Loyal Fingo Warrior* 14.6.1851 £35. 0. 0.  
Oil on canvas. Very well-known Picture painted at Grahamstown during the Kaffir Wars.
- W. J. Huggins  
1781-1845  
[26] (CB16) *Man of War and East Indiaman in Table Bay* 1810-1820 £60. 0. 0.  
Oil on canvas. This Picture was afterwards engraved by Sutherland and presented by Huggins to Lord [Charles] Somerset, being published in 1824.
- W. J. Huggins  
[28] (CG36) *Man of War and East Indiaman in Table Bay* 1810-1820 £75. 0. 0.  
This is a large Oil showing East Indiaman with Man of War in mid-distance and bum-boat in foreground.
- Lady G. L. B. Eyre  
[379] (RC13) *Constantia Valley from Wynberg Hill overlooking False Bay* 1850 £30. 0. 0.  
Water Colour of exceptional artistic merit with figures in foreground.
- Lady G. L. B. Eyre  
[381] (RB7) *Panorama of Cape Town and Table Bay* 1848-1850 £150. 0. 0.  
Water Colour painted on four boards 11 ft. long, depicting the whole of the foreshore as seen from the end of the Castle Jetty from the Simonsberg to Mouille Point. Probably the most unique Picture of its kind in existence.
- A. de Smidt  
[361] (RB4) *Coastal Scene* £10. 0. 0.  
Water Colour of scene between Mossel Bay and Knysna.
- Chas. Van der Berg  
[435] (CB17) *Settlers landing at Algoa Bay* 1820 £30. 0. 0.  
Oil on board depicting Settlers landing from the ships lying in the Bay with kaffir huts on the beach and ox wagons.

F. Benda [18] (CD15)	<i>Planting of the Cross in Table Bay by Bartholomew Diaz</i>		£25. 0. 0.
	Very old Oil on wood panel showing religious ceremony. A unique Picture showing the uniforms and dress of the period.		
F. l'Ons 1802-1889 [ ? ] ( ? )	<i>Scene in Griqualand</i>		£15. 0. 0.
	Oil on board. Very typical and fine example of l'Ons Native Studies.		
C. Schott (CA56)	<i>Cape Town Fish Market</i>	1898	£25. 0. 0.
	Large Oil depicting Cape Town Fish Market with many figures.		
W. Ritter [423] (RCC135)	<i>Snoek versus Rice</i>	1895	£ 5. 0. 0.
	Very interesting small Water Colour drawing of Cape Malay and Indian Pedlar.		
unknown [461?] (A29?)	<i>Cape Town and Table Bay</i>	ca. 1820	£25. 0. 0.
	Exceptionally fine Water Colour with shipping in the Bay.		

### Africana

#### Prints and Lithos

W. Hodges (RA7)	<i>Cape Town and Table Mountain</i>	1785	£20. 0. 0.
	Very fine impression with full margins.		
T. W. Bowler (RC72)	<i>Anti Convict Gathering</i>	1849	£15. 0. 0.
	Very fine impression in unusually good condition with full margins.		
T. W. Bowler ( ? )	<i>Shipping in Table Bay</i>		£ 6. 0. 0.
	Very fine impression in excellent condition with full margins.		
T. W. Bowler [cf. 298]	<i>Entrance to the Castle</i>		£ 3. 0. 0.
	In fine old frame.		
T. W. Bowler ( ? )	<i>Adderley Street</i>		£ 3. 0. 0.
	In fine old frame.		
T. W. Bowler ( ? )	<i>Grahamstown</i>		£ 2.10. 0.
	In fine old frame.		
T. W. Bowler ( ? )	<i>Port Elizabeth</i>		£ 2.10. 0.
	In fine old frame.		
Sir Henry Darrell [346] (RF4)	<i>Governor Hare's interview with Kaffir Chiefs Bloks Drift</i>	1846	£ 5. 0. 0.
Sir Henry Darrell [345] (RF9)	<i>Hunt with the 7<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Fox Hounds in Kaffir Land.</i>		£ 5. 0. 0.

Sir Henry Darrell (RF5)	<i>Troops crossing Great Fish River</i>	1851	£ 3. 0. 0.
Samuel Daniell [341] (RD3)	<i>Halt of a Boer Family</i>	1805	£ 7.10. 0
L. Sabatier & Lauvergne, Figures by Bayot [409] (RA51)	<i>Cap de Bonne Esperance</i>	ca. 1840	£20. 0. 0.
Visscher (RSC4?)	Map of Africa		£ 3. 0. 0.
Guiljelmo Bleauw (RSC3?)	Map of Africa		£ 3. 0. 0.

### List of General Paintings

J. Fabius [VE]	<i>Dutch School</i>	1854	£50. 0. 0.
Sir Wm. Orpen [VE]	<i>The Bather</i>	1910	£10. 0. 0.
Sir Wm. Orpen [VE]	<i>The Draftsman and his Model</i>	1910	£15. 0. 0.
H. W. Mc Kinney	<i>Louis Botha</i>	1910	£10. 0. 0.
Nita Spilhaus	<i>Malay Quarter Cape Town</i>	Catalogued	£31.10. 0.
R. Gwelo Goodman	<i>Still Life of Roses</i>		£15.15. 0.
R. Gwelo Goodman	<i>Hout Bay</i>		£23. 0. 0.
Francis Drake [VE]	<i>Interior Groot Constantia</i>		£10.10. 0.
A. Villemans	<i>Amsterdam</i>	1876	£20. 0. 0.
Sydney Carter	<i>Willow and Cosmos</i>		£ 5. 0. 0.
Gregoire Boonzair	<i>Chrysanthemums</i>	Catalogued	£15.15. 0.
G. W. Pilkington	<i>Cape Point at Dawn</i>	Catalogued	£31.10. 0.
A. W. Overbeck [VE]	<i>Walzes of Vienna</i>	Bought at Auction	£21. 0. 0.

B. Hezell	<i>Nasturtiums</i> Oil.	£ 5. 5. 0.
Warne Brown [VE]	<i>Breakers off St James</i> Bought at Auction (Cape) Oil on wooden panel.	£ 5. 0. 0.
Tinus de Jongh	<i>Cape Town and Table Mountain</i>	£12. 0. 0.
H. van Thurn 1736-1811	<i>River Scene</i> Oil.	£ 5. 0. 0.
Carl Nonn	<i>Glacier Stream</i> Oil.	£10. 0. 0.
F. Bartolozzi [VE]	<i>The Lady Vaux</i> Original Print 1700 [?]	£ 3. 0. 0.
F. Bartolozzi	<i>Duchess of Suffolk</i> Original Print.	£ 3. 0. 0.
V. Naldi	2 Water Colours of Rome	£ 6. 0. 0.
Desnoyer	<i>Madonna of Alba</i> Engraving.	£ 5. 0. 0.
Madame Gardelli [VE]	9 Miniatures in Venetian Glass Display Box. Value £3. 0. 0. Each. Total Value £50. 0. 0."	

B.

**Draft typescript of Letter from Fehr to  
Africana Museum, Johannesburg, Dec. 1947. VE.**

"AFRICANA[,] The strangely fascinating story of the conquest and development of Africa and, as interpreted by us [in the Union], of Southern Africa in particular. The Africana Museum by gathering together a variety of ever-growing importance of rare documents, literature, pictorial records, typical examples of early colonial furniture and china and the craft of silver and coppersmiths etc., has become not a mere repository for these things but a friend and guide to all who treasure our grand heritage. To the amateur the information so willingly afforded his is invaluable, serving both to stimulate his interest and to protect him from acquiring things of little or doubtful merit, and in general to educate him to a better estimation of our engrossing social history and its relevant importance in shaping our future, more particularly in the social and cultural spheres.

In these circumstances I feel it to be not only an honour but also a duty to afford the editors of 'Africana Notes and News' every facility for publishing such particulars of my bits and pieces as are thought to be of interest to those who, like myself, enjoy reflecting upon what Dorothea Fairbridge has called "That Which Hath Been." I have frequently been asked what led me to take so much interest in these things. I attribute it in no small measure to the reminiscences of an older generation which had tales to tell of different days and different ways, tales to which these tangible relics bear eloquent witness. The exquisite taste in Architecture and the excellence of design in furniture and household utensils testify to a more gracious way of living on the one hand and on the other our rich literature records tales of high endeavour and of individual effort and achievement by the early navigators, the great naturalists, fearless travellers and inspired Missionaries, concerning whose endurance Mrs. A. F. Trotter so aptly remarks "[...]One marvels unceasingly at the love of adventure forever inspiring one set of men to risk their lives for the gain of another."[\*] Last but not least must be added the work [/p. 2.] by artists and gifted amateurs alike in the pre-photographic era who left us the pictorial records executed with such obvious sincerity and astonishing competence.

I am naturally proud to feel that my family history has been linked with many of the eventful happenings over the latter span of the rise of South Africa to its present-day sophisticated state. My late father must be counted

among those to whom 'pioneer' could still be rightfully applied. In his early days South Africa had reached only a primitive stage in its development. Graaff-Reinet was then the outpost of rail-road enterprise and the great hinterland to which he made his way to become a Free State burgher depended upon transport drivers and the ox wagon. Kaffir wars were still being fought [*sic*] and my own earliest recollections, in fact, are of the small town of Burgersdorp around which the last of the gentleman wars, as I often think of the Boer War, churned with varying fortunes. On my mother's side my great-grandfather and his brother (Thomas and William Maskew) came to the Cape in 1817 on a special mission for an uncle of theirs, a ship owner with interests in the East India trade, and finally made the Cape their permanent home. The early Cape Almanacs give their addresses as at No. 2, Heerengracht and 31, Longmarket Street, respectively. The names of the two brothers are found in the list of original subscribers (in the possession of Mr. L. S. Sloman of Constantia) to the building fund for St. George's Cathedral and for the purchase of the Organ.

My great-grandfather married Christina Wilhelmina Berning, a descendant of the earliest Huguenots. Records reveal two publications by William Maskew printed by G. J. Pike of St. George's Street. The titles of these are "The Philosophy of Astronomy" and "The Philosophy of Banking" respectively. Both booklets were listed in the catalogue of books in the South African Public Library which was compiled by Frederick Maskew. That first official bibliography of South Africa's premier library (published in England in 1881) remains a monument to his services as Assistant Librarian 1845-1850 [and] Chief Librarian from 1850 to 1890. A rare pamphlet of unusual [/p. 3.] interest published during his secretaryship, of which I am glad to own a copy, is an address at the annual meeting of the Library by Lord [J. H.] de Villiers entitled "The future of the dual languages in South Africa" published in 18[76].

To return to the booklets by William Maskew I was unable to trace a copy of the one recorded in the catalogue on Astronomy. The booklet on Banking was published in the year 1848 and is interesting chiefly for its significant plea for the establishment of what has come to be termed a Reserve Bank. On page 19 the author remarks: "These facts among a number of others that might be adduced prove the necessity of establishing a Bank of Control." It is interesting to reflect that nearly a hundred years were to elapse before such a bank materialised and it is sad also to reflect that in its absence much misfortune which was to befall the family in the crash of the Cape of Good Hope Bank in 18[....] might have been averted.

My grandfather William Wilson Maskew, who was a Magistrate and Civil Commissioner in various parts of the Cape following his appointment in 1859, was a keen Bible student. I have in my possession a fine bound manuscript of 332 foolscap pages (being the third volume of a commentary on Genesis intended to serve as a textbook for the use of Sabbath schools.) The title is "The History and Religion of the Patriarch Abraham" and many interesting references occur therein to Bishop Grey, the state of education, the number and pay of teachers during that period, etc. Another of his books was published by Saul Solomon & Company, Longmarket Street [Cape Town], in 1859 entitled 'The History of Joseph with an Appendix on the analogy existing between the subjugation of the Egyptians to the sway of the Hycsos and the Kaffirs to the British dominion in South Africa.'

To my late uncle, Advocate William Henry Maskew, we owe the collection of verses entitled "'n Jolly Hotnot en andere snaakse versies" published in Cape Town in 1890; now a very scarce and much sought-after Africana item. (The South African Public Library has a copy.)

Finally I should like to be permitted to conclude [/p. 4.] this personal account with some general observations on Collectors and Museums. At the outset I took the liberty to congratulate the authorities of the Africana Museum for the helpful interest shown to amateurs. I feel this to be the essential function of all cultural institutions. For the same reason I greatly favour the present trend towards the establishment of numbers of small museums throughout the country in preference to over-loaded metropolitan Collections. There is, in my opinion, much to commend in the conclusions of Edmond de Goncourt who is quoted in that delightful book on collecting by D. & E. Rigby entitled "Lock, Stock and Barrel"[\*] as having written on his Collection:

'My wish is that my drawings, my prints, my curiosities, my books – in a word, these things of art which have been the joy of my life – shall not be consigned to the cold tomb of a museum, and subjected to the stupid glance of the careless passer-by, but I require that they shall all be dispersed under the hammer of the auctioneer, so that the pleasure which the acquiring of each one of them has given me shall be given again, in each case, to some inheritor of my tastes.'

The Rigby's go on to comment that:

'Goncourt wished his treasures to go to those who would best understand and love them; these objects he had preserved for a little while, and he wanted others to find in them what he found. In this, he and his kind are fortunate in being less troubled, less anxious, in a way, about their status among men, than those who take steps to leave more concrete monuments.'

This is only one aspect of the matter and cannot be pursued further lest the intention be imputed to me of wishing to emulate my forebears by writing a "Philosophy of Collecting." It is mentioned by me to emphasise the role played by amateurs in furthering our cultural interests. They constitute a kind of free masonry of friendly rivals in their respective fields, who share with one another the common desire to perpetuate for others, whether inside or outside of museums, such things as they themselves have treasured as the most worthy and uplifting achievements of mankind in all ages.

It remains for me to add my very respectful thanks [/p. 5.] to the Curator and Staff of the Africana Museum for the trouble they have taken in carrying out much valuable research work connected with some of the items, and to Miss [H. G.] Oliver in particular for the pains she has taken in her selection and compilation of this account.

William Fehr  
'Aboyne'  
Kenilworth, Cape.  
December, 1947."

[\*Trotter, A. F., *Old Cape Colony*, p. 17. VE.]

[\*\*Rigby, Douglas & Elizabeth, *Lock, Stock and Barrel*, pp. 50-51. VE.]

C.

**Copy of a Letter from William Fehr, Cape Town,  
to Alys Fane Trotter, Teffont, Salisbury, England,  
per Airmail, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 1948. VE.**

"Dear Mrs. Trotter,

I count it as a great honour and pleasure to be addressing you. Your books on *Old Cape Colony* and *Old Colonial Houses* have been regarded by me and, I think, are ever more widely recognised as amongst the very best things that have been done. I was recently asked to write an Introduction to my Collection and I quote from my remarks as follows:--

'The exquisite taste in Architecture and the excellence of design in furniture and household utensils testify to a more gracious way of living on the one hand and on the other our rich literature records tales of high endeavour and of individual effort and achievement by the early navigators, the great naturalists, fearless travellers and inspired missionaries, concerning whose endurance Mrs. A. F. Trotter so aptly remarks 'One marvels unceasingly at the love of adventure forever inspiring one set of men to risk their lives for the gain of another.'

I had no idea then that I should have the good fortune to trace the author of books which I so greatly value.

I, of course, already possess your books and am merely desiring to obtain further copies for friends who I know would greatly value them. If you would be good enough to autograph the two books I should greatly appreciate this and would keep these as my own copies. I am also delighted to think that you have some fine drawings left because I am not really a Book Collector. My interest is in the pictorial records from the earliest times to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. I am therefore most anxious to add original examples of your work to a Collection which the Authorities of the Africana Museum describe as second only to their own in this country. My Collection is being written up in the Africana Museum's official publication and when ready I should like to send you a copy.

With regard to your Drawings, you may charge what you would think fit for anything that you may be able to let me have. I am grateful to you for mentioning where your drawings are but I am afraid that I should not have much success in getting them from any Institutions that may have them here. If

you could ask Miss Wilman to give me an opportunity to acquire any that may be available that might be helpful. The only place I saw a few of your drawings was at the Old Huguenot Parsonage which is so charmingly illustrated on the cover of your *Old Cape Colony* and which is now a delightful small Museum but with as yet very few but, fortunately, choice pieces.

You may possibly know Miss Prowse of the Michaelis Collection who is also well acquainted with my collection of pictures.

With many thanks for your kind interest.

Yours truly,...."

D.

**Memorandum  
Relative to the Preservation of the Old Supreme  
Court [Building] presented on behalf of the Historical and  
Museums Society, Cape Town, 15. May. 1952, p. 4. VE.**

"To summarise our representations therefore we contend

1. That there is a popular awakening to the importance, the value and appeal of our national heirlooms and this feeling is evidenced by the establishment of small museums in country districts through the effort of individuals and by local patriotism.
2. That we should be guided by the wisdom and experience of older countries who have preserved and maintained their national monuments through good and bad times.
3. That the available material in South Africa is extremely negligible and that we cannot afford to part with the few remaining examples of our tradition.
4. That we would appear to have much to thank the Old Colonial Government for in its efforts to establish what still are the leading museums at a time of great financial stringency and that our cultural activities do not appear to have been in keeping with the great material prosperity since the Union.
5. That museums in general symbolise in the mind of all educated people the status of the towns and countries in which they are situated and that there is a particular need in the Cape a good museum of national culture, *i. e.* A Volks Museum.
6. That the Old Supreme Court building is eminently suitable for the purpose of a museum and that its situation is of the greatest importance in this connection.

Finally concerning the costs that may be involved we respectfully remind this Commission and through it the Government, of the old collectors['] saying, 'You get over the cost but you never get over the regret of a lost opportunity.'"

E.

**Letter from William Fehr to Secretary for Commerce  
and Industries, Pretoria, 12. May. 1953. NAR.**

"EXHIBITION BULAWAYO.

I refer to my telephonic conversation with you and my subsequent telegram concerning the necessity for having Dr. Purcell to assist me in the matter of furnishing the Reception Room for the Old Cape Homestead. I have not at the time of writing received your reply to my request.

I cannot say what your arrangements with Dr. [M.] Bockhorst are, but it is clear to me that there is a misunderstanding somewhere. Your first communication was dated the 30<sup>th</sup> December last and on the 5<sup>th</sup> January I intimated that I felt the risk of lending pictures too great. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of January your Department wrote expressing regret that I did not see my way clear to lending the various art objects for display purposes. Thereafter I considered the matter closed so far as I was concerned as I was indeed more than reluctant to take the risks involved with my possessions, apart from the immense amount of work involved.

It is on the latter point I am now convinced, that the delay in your reply to my request is based. To anyone who has not undertaken this class of work, it is impossible to realise what the immense amount of work and responsibility there is involved and which I have accepted as an act of patriotism on my part and with the utmost reluctance.

Dr. Bockhorst approached me a week ago and it was only the fact that I realised his extreme predicament that finally induced me to agree to undertake this work. It has meant that for the last week I have had to set aside all my business at considerable inconvenience to myself and have had to cancel an important private business conference in Durban in order to complete the work against time. I enclose a Draft of the Catalogue which I have compiled and which may give you, I hope, some [p.2.] idea of what such an undertaking involves.

Concerning the attention to matters in Bulawayo you should be able to appreciate that I owe both to myself and to the Insurance Company to be on the spot to unpack a Collection involving a value of over £12,000. I have had

personally to attend to the selection, the collection, the packing and the negotiations with the Railways to get the exhibits away in time. My efforts to contact Dr. Bockhorst by telephone have been mostly futile as he is in the same predicament as myself. I have had practically no personal contact with him whatsoever, from the time that I agreed to undertake the work.

In all this Dr. Purcell has been a valuable collaborator and we both know only too well from the gigantic task we faced during the [1952] Tercentenary, the many snags and difficulties that still lie ahead at the other end of the journey, if the Room is to be ready in time. To anyone not initiated it may seem a small matter. I can assure you from long experience that on an average it takes a minimum of one hour to hang each Picture, provided all the necessary labour is laid on. In this case each Picture carries its own lighting which has to be connected and for which I am assured facilities exist. The placing and moving of Furniture, the arranging of the various objects, etc. take an immense amount of time. Dr. Purcell and I will have our hands full and if there is any hitch in obtaining the necessary assistance on the spot when we arrive, the work will not be ready in time. This may make strange reading to anyone who is not initiated in this class of work and I should give much to be relieved of the responsibility involved, as I vowed after the immense task I undertook during the Tercentenary that nothing would induce me to do it again.

The idea of including in our booking the opening date and a day or two after, is to enable us to see some of the balance of the exhibits, as we will have seen nothing of it beforehand. We will both wish to get back to work as soon as possible.

I am bound to remark that in the absence of a reply from you the position concerning Dr. Purcell is very discourteous. As a professional man he has his engagements to make and has felt himself very put out and I hope that in the light of my explanation you will be good enough to do everything to lighten the burden that both of us have undertaken with no other object than to do the work in a manner that will give the South African Government pride and pleasure. We have worked early and late to achieve this and with your assistance, we will succeed. In looking over a small printed catalogue it is not realised the amount of work involved in their description and the accuracy required in giving correct historical data of events.

Yours faithfully, William Fehr."

F.

**Fehr's Foreword to a book proposed by  
Mrs. M. M. Jansen on Old Cape Furniture,  
1957. VE.**

[The two new paragraphs of the revised draft  
are marked with asterisks.]

“ Whatever withdraws us from the power of our senses,  
whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future  
predominate over the present, advances us in the  
dignity of thinking beings.’

Samuel Johnson.

Our early Cape furniture imparts a paradoxically regal splendour to the bare, white-washed rooms of an old Cape Homestead. These grand pieces in the rich hues of colour and grain of our famed indigenous hardwoods would almost seem to have been designed to fill the want of sumptuous tapestries, draperies and upholstery. Such trappings would merely detract from rather than enhance their splendour. Indeed, our lovely furniture asks nothing better than to stand against a clean white-washed wall, squarely planted on the wide yellow-wood flooring-boards or the polished surface of the large red-brown Batavian tiles. All that their dignified elegance demands is the glow of a brass chandelier suspended from the dark rafters, with some household utensils in copper, brass or white Batavian metal to heighten the effect of silver handles and escutcheons on the more important pieces and the engraved brasses on the kists and lesser articles. The sparkling freshness of some blue and white Nankin or Delft china [*sic*] in the wall-cupboard and – so as to add a touch of colour – a polychrome Imari jar on the gleaming table top, completes a spectacle so immensely vital and of such immeasurable charm, that it will for long linger in one's memory.

Whence was this artistry and taste derived? – The furniture designs are as fancy free as the variety of gables and pediments on the buildings; sometimes they evince a brooding earnestness of almost classical severity; sometimes they display highly decorative and festive adornments. At no time, however, do they depart from what Le Vaillant, during his stay at the Cape in 1781-1784 described as ‘a simple and noble taste.’ This sureness of touch and [/p. 2.] homogeneity in spite of infinite variety bespeaks a master hand, school of thought and directing force whose origin and being is shrouded in anonymity. It is against this complex background, demanding so much contemplation and speculative thought, that

Her Excellency Mrs. Jansen has had to approach her task; and the successful completion of it is the measure of the interest and pains devoted to its accomplishment.

Her Excellency rightly remarks that 'furniture is not haphazardly created, but is inspired by the intimate and consummate artistic inclinations of man.' Admittedly its first purpose was functional, but, as she remarks, 'furniture is withal a product of an era, bearing the imprint of its time and testifying to the particular circumstances and requirements of its period. It conjures up the life of those who created or first owned the particular pieces which, in turn, must be considered in relation to their historical background. Otherwise the beholder will lose much that is vital to his enjoyment of them.'

Her Excellency has reminded us of the way in which Van Riebeeck and his wife set up house in a wooden shack on the shores of Table Bay, aided by sail cloth to protect them from the wet Cape winter, with possibly the luxury of a ship's lantern to brighten the dark interior. Maria de la Quellerie, she says, probably never saw a window pane during her ten years' stay at the Cape. The riches in gold and diamonds, coal and other base metals were to lie concealed for centuries. Prosperity was the fruit of hard toil on the land, involving many dangers which called for tenacity and great faith. Much time had to elapse before adornments to dwellings could displace mere basic utility and before greater luxury could be thought of in the making of furniture and other household articles. That the desire for things cultural and beautiful should have asserted itself so strongly testifies to the truth of the saying that 'man does not live by bread alone,' and is equally a tribute to the stock from which these pioneers came.

[/p. 3.]Special interest is lent to the study of Cape Dutch Furniture from the fact that it developed distinctive and forthright characteristics of its own, and one is reminded of Theal's description of the country at the end of the Dutch East India Company's rule, when he says that 'it brought into existence in South Africa a people to a large extent different from all others, with a language, and habits, and ideas of their own.' The later immigrants from Britain, whose invaluable contribution lay mainly in the graphic arts, found delight and pride in these earlier artistic achievements and it is to their credit that so many of them devoted themselves with unstinted enthusiasm to the preservation of some of our loveliest possessions.

\*Many have deplored the hitherto all too fragmentary information

available on this subject. Those whom this apparent neglect has surprised and vexed will now be enabled better to appreciate why it should for so long have defied authorship. To present this narrative not merely demands a balanced appreciation of history in its wider sense, but requires a specialised knowledge of the political and social implications of the age of discovery – the consequent impact of Western and Eastern cultures upon each other in their respective spheres – and their ultimate bearing upon the artistic achievements in our own country in the years that followed.

\*The fact that Her Excellency has chosen to write this major work in our young and virile Afrikaans language is a compliment to our country and, whilst recognising the considerable task involved in adding an English edition, one may hope in the interests of many both here and abroad that Her Excellency may yet find it possible to do this and thus earn the gratitude of an even wider circle of readers.

[/p. 4.]This book, which justly pays homage to the beauty and excellence after which the first South Africans so passionately strove, is at the same time a reminder to us who live in days of material well being that we should gain greater spiritual strength and inspiration from things of lasting cultural worth. G[erman] Arciniegas, in his address on “Culture – a Human Right” wrote that in a certain sense, culture is the only thing we leave behind to testify to our pilgrimage on this earth, “and when culture has struck deep roots, has acquired a consciousness of its own, it becomes immortal[....] In guarding culture, we are guarding that foretaste of immortality to which alone man by his own works can aspire. And it is an immortality worthy of the name, for it represents enrichment of the spirit, increase in stature.”[†]

[† Arciniegas, G., “Culture – a human right,” in UNESCO (compiler) *Freedom and Culture*, p. 24. VE.]

G.

**Address given at Graduation Ceremony,  
Jamison Hall, 28. June. 1963. [Faculty Admin., UCT]**

“Mr. Chancellor,

I have the honour to present to you William Fehr.

William Fehr was born at Burgersdorp as the son of an Immigrant from the Rhineland and a descendent of the Maskew family. He attended the Albert Academy in his birthplace and later went to Europe for further education and business training. While in Europe, his parents took him round art galleries and museums in Germany, France, Italy and England – thus sowing the seed which later was to bear so much fruit. After an absence of 15 years, Fehr returned to South Africa and founded the business which bears his name. He played an important part in the commercial life of our country and he still takes an active part in the running of his firm.

Before mentioning the specific grounds, Mr. Chancellor, upon which my request that an honorary degree be conferred upon William Fehr is based, I wish to point out that in him four main streams of European civilization and tradition converge: through his father, there is the German background, while his mother provides the link with England and, further back, Holland and France: his great-grandfather on his mother’s side married a descendent of early Dutch and Huguenot stock; her earliest Cape ancestor was Jacques Therond, who had come out in 1688 in the service of the Dutch East India Company.

Thus firmly rooted in our common traditions, William Fehr has made it his aim to collect and conserve the objects in which our particular South African history, craftsmanship and artistic inspiration express themselves. To quote his own words, it was his ideal to show how “the founder nations of our country brought to it not only their legal and administrative orderliness, but endowed it with many of the great cultural virtues of their ancient homelands” and to make South African history a “Real and living experience.” It was with this in view that William Fehr built up, over a period of many years, his outstanding collection of Africana, and his decision to make it available to the public bears witness to his sense of duty towards the nation. Cape Town, the Gate to South Africa, is fortunate indeed in being allowed to present the Fehr Collection to the visitor – most appropriately in the Castle, our oldest and most

historic building. The Fehr Collection incidentally provides a large body of indispensable material for the study of important aspects of our cultural history. In this connection, Mr. Chancellor, I wish to refer to the splendid publication "Treasures at the Castle of Good Hope" which appeared at the beginning of this year and for which William Fehr is responsible. This is not his first publication, for already in 1955 he had brought out the very interesting "History of the Old Town House" to commemorate the bicentenary of that fine example of early Cape Dutch architecture.

In addition, Mr. Fehr enables other institutions to profit by his long experience and wide knowledge. He serves on the Board of Trustees of the Michaelis Collection and of Groot Constantia, and on the Committee of the Koopmans-de Wet House; he is Honorary Vice-President of the Simonstown Historical Society, Vice-President of the South African National Society, and a member of the Historical Monuments Commission.

It is on these grounds, Mr. Chancellor, that it is my privilege to request you to confer the degree of Doctor of Laws, Honoris Causa, on William Fehr."

H.

**Copy of Deed of Sale,  
The William Fehr Collection, 1963 [VE]**

THIS AGREEMENT made and entered into by and between:-

1. WILLIAM FEHR, 2. HENRIETTE FEHR, born Nankin, and 3. REGINALD PERCY GAIN, in his capacity as Secretary for the time being of THE BOARD OF EXECUTORS, CAPE TOWN, in their capacity as the Trustees of the FEHR TRUST, constituted by Notarial Deed entered into at CAPE TOWN on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1951, (hereinafter called the Sellers) and duly authorised thereto by THE HON. JOHANNES DE KLERK, in his capacity as Minister of Education, Arts and Science, acting herein for and on behalf of THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, hereinafter called the Purchaser.

Witnesseth. Subject to the conditions hereinafter contained the Sellers hereby sell to the Purchaser, which hereby buys, the collection of Paintings, Pictures, Prints, Engravings, Books, Furniture, China, Ornaments and other Objects d'Art known together as the "FEHR COLLECTION" as present housed on loan a THE CASTLE, CAPE TOWN.

1. SUBJECT OF SALE. The "FEHR COLLECTION" the subject of this Deed of Sale consists of the various items detailed in Inventory A annexed hereto.

2. PURCHASE PRICE. The Purchase Price is the sum of THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND RAND (R300,000) to be paid by the Purchaser free of any deduction whatsoever to the Sellers on or before the 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1964.

3. SPECIAL CONDITIONS OF SALE.

(1) The Sellers acting under the instructions of WILLIAM FEHR and HENRIETTE FEHR, born Nankin, will as a corollary to this Sale, present to the Purchaser their collection of Water Colours consisting of the various items detailed in Inventory B hereto to be housed at "RUST-EN-VREUGD", BUITENKANT STREET, CAPE TOWN. This undertaking is subject to the proviso that the said WILLIAM FEHR and HENRIETTE FEHR shall have the right to retain twenty (20) of the Water Colours as pointed out to the Purchaser's representative, but which may be lent to the Purchaser should they so decide.

(2) The Water Colours referred to in Subclause (1) above together with the principal subject of the sale referred to in Clause (1) above shall together be

known for all time as "THE WILLIAM FEHR COLLECTION" and shall not be known or referred to by any other name in any advertisement, notice, letterhead or publication of any nature or kind whatsoever.

(3) A suitable plaque with reference to the collection in a form to be agreed upon by and between the parties hereto shall be placed and retained permanently at the entrance to each of the places at which the collection or any part thereof is housed.

(4) The Purchaser agrees that the said WILLIAM FEHR during his lifetime shall be and remain Curator of "THE FEHR COLLECTION" wherever housed, and he shall continue to receive the sum of FOUR THOUSAND RAND (R4000) per annum payable quarterly in arrear.

(5) Upon the death or resignation of the said WILLIAM FEHR the Purchaser may appoint to the Committee of Control of the Collection any member of the said WILLIAM FEHR'S family who is willing and able to serve on the Committee.

(6) The remuneration of the said WILLIAM FEHR shall not be affected or diminished by reason of any temporary absence from CAPE TOWN and his attention to or attendance in connection with his Curatorship shall as hitherto remain in his sole discretion.

(7) All and any costs, not exceeding R10,000, of framing the Water Colours hereinbefore mentioned and equipping "RUST-EN-VREUGD" shall be borne by the Purchaser.

4. TAXATION. In as much as the Water Colours contributed with the approval of WILLIAM FEHR and HENRIETTE FEHR as a Corollary to this Agreement might be construed as a gift to the State the Purchaser hereby undertakes that any Donation Tax, Estate Duty or other taxation whatsoever applicable to such gift shall be waived or if not waived shall be borne by the Purchaser. The purchase price referred to in Clause 2 hereof shall likewise be exempt from any Income Tax that may be capable of being levied thereon.

5. CONSENT BY W. AND H. FEHR. WILLIAM FEHR and HENRIETTE FEHR by their signatures hereto consent to the terms of this Agreement in so far as concerns:- (a) The Appointment of WILLIAM FEHR as Curator and the conditions relative thereto as set forth in subclauses (4), (5) and (6) of Clause 3 herein

above, and (b) The incorporation of the Water Colours referred to in Subclause (1) of Clause 3 herein above in "THE FEHR COLLECTION"....

[Entered into at Cape Town, 25<sup>th</sup> March 1964.]

## IX. List of Sources.

### A. Primary Sources, unpublished:

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## X. Illustrations

- Frontispiece William Fehr ca. 1925. (VE.)  
 facing p. 12 Baines, T., *The new village of Burgher's Dorp....*  
 (Mr. R. Levitt, England.)  
 facing p. 34 Rowles, S. E., *A Small Tribute...*, 1852.  
 (Mrs. B. Lindhorst.)  
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 facing p. 45 Gordon, Bertha and William Fehr, Wiesbaden,  
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 facing p. 55 William, Maria and Bertha Fehr at Weggis,  
 Switzerland, 1914. (VE.)  
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 facing p. 137 The Long Gallery. (Miss E. Esmonde-White.)  
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 Bulawayo, 1953. (VE.)  
 facing p. 157 Council Chamber with Fehr's Collection,  
 Castle Good Hope ca. 1955. (VE.)  
 facing p. 226 Dr. and Mrs. Fehr, 1 April 1965. (VE.)