

ALFRED AUGUST HOHEISEN (1878 – 1965)

Early Johannesburg Builder

Mike Bosazza

Hoheisen was born in Pforzheim in Baden, Germany on 29 September 1878. On 2 November 1902, he left Germany to settle in the United States of America. His fiancée, Clara Hedwig Goll, who was connected to the Benz family, agreed to go with him and they were married in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on 11 March 1903.



Clara Goll (Hoheisen) taken in her home town of Pforzheim

Soon after that his step-brother, Robert Kayser, who had mining interests on the Rand, wrote to him to suggest that he come to Johannesburg where he believed there would be a boom in the building trade. Hoheisen agreed that at the conclusion of the Anglo-Boer War, there would likely occur major development in the Transvaal; consequently, he moved to South Africa with his wife, landing in Cape Town in June 1903.

They found a home at 7 Biccard Street in Braamfontein, near the railway lines, and here his son Hans Otto was born on 1 March 1905. At this time Alfred's profession was given as "building contractor" and it is interesting to note that the birth certificate was signed by F L Biccard as District Registrar.

This part of Johannesburg was known as "*Little Germany*", since there were a number of German businesses and many residents in the area. The association continued for decades and Hoheisen's home stood roughly where the Siemens Building is today. The Milner Park Hotel started operating in 1898 as the HANSA BAR and HOTEL, and many will remember the Munchener House restaurant.

54 Webb Street, Yeoville, was the house designed for Hoheisen in 1911 by Theophilus Schaerer, who designed the Wolmarans Street Synagogue, the Friedenskirche in Twist Street and the extensions to Northwards after the fire in 1911 for Sir George Albu. The Schaerer drawings for 54 Webb Street have been archived.



The Yeoville house

Hoheisen was Schaerer's builder for the Wolmarans Street Synagogue, which had the largest free-spanning concrete dome in the southern hemisphere at the time. This job was executed so successfully that Hoheisen gave the congregation the brick wall surrounding the property.

As Alfred Hoheisen was a German citizen, he was interned during the First World War in the Baviaanspoort camp. This was a miserable time for him, but his wife, son and daughter were on a farm in the Hectorspruit district, and they loved the Lowveld.



The Hoheisen family in happier times

Immediately south of the Webb Street house lies 53 Saunders Street. In 1919 Hoheisen developed the vacant property, building a much smaller house, designed this time by the firm of Stucke and Harrison. These drawings have also been archived. Thus he maximized the value of the Yeoville properties, which was logical because the area was burgeoning immediately after the War.

What is curious is that the two houses west of 53 Saunders Street, numbers 51 and 49, are identical but building plans are not credited to the architects!

Before moving to Cape Town in 1923, he built the cooling towers in Pretoria.

In Cape Town he had a highly successful career, building the upper campus of the University of Cape Town, the Medical School building at Groote Schuur Hospital, the last Herbert Baker building in Cape Town - the Adderley Street branch of Barclays Bank (now FNB) - and his own very elegant home in Oranjezicht. He was also involved in the reconstruction of Groot Constantia after it had been damaged by fire.

In 1933, Alfred Hoheisen purchased the farm Kempiana in the Timbavati district, acquiring the farms Morgenzon, Birmingham, Lillydale and Spring Valley as well.

In 1938 he bought the farm Drie Sprong in the Stellenbosch district for his son. It was a most productive fruit farm, but following constant theft of the crops Hans Hoheisen decided to move to wine farming, being encouraged to try to produce a good South African wine. He removed the fruit trees and planted vines and by the late 1940's, was producing a very palatable red wine. This had to be bottled in old beer bottles as new wine bottles were unobtainable in wartime. In 1951 Hans Hoheisen brought a cousin of his wife, Del, from Austria to manage the farm. This was Spatz Sperling and the farm was renamed Delheim. Spatz Sperling pioneered the concept of the Stellenbosch wine route.

In the late 1930's Alfred Hoheisen had been offered the project of building the new docks in Cape Town, but despite the fact that he had become a naturalized South African citizen first in 1920 (under Act No 4 of 1910), and then again in 1936 (under the British Nationality in the Union and Naturalization and Status of Aliens Act of 1926), there was a feeling that a German should not be involved in building the docks. He decided to retire and kept a low profile. He died in Cape Town on 25 November 1965, his wife having predeceased him.

After inheriting the farms Kempiana, Morgenzon, Lillydale and Spring Valley from his father, Hans Hoheisen became a keen conservationist and developed these farms into a fine refuge for game. The fences between the farms and the Kruger National Park were removed and he built the Hans Hoheisen Research Centre at Orpen Gate, the first private land owner to allow University of Pretoria veterinary students to do research field work on his property. In 1992 he contributed a further R1 million to the acquisition of

the farm Ngala which he donated together with his farms to the World Wildlife Fund. This reserve is known today as Ngala Game Reserve.

Hans Hoheisen died in 2003.

Sources:

City of Johannesburg Building Plans: Stands 259 and 283 Yeoville

Govt of South Africa: Birth, marriage and death certificates A Hoheisen
Affidavit made in 1942 by A Hoheisen about his life in South Africa

Naturalisation Papers

Parktown & Westcliff Heritage Trust Data sheets for properties in Yeoville

Information from friends of the family.