

The development of a gardening culture in Batho (Mangaung) from c. 1918 to 1939

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Abstract

When Mangaung's old Waaihoek location was gradually demolished between 1918 and 1941 and its residents were relocated to the new Batho location, an embryonic gardening culture was also transferred there. The Municipality of Bloemfontein's mostly English-speaking officials envisaged Batho as a "model location" with an "exemplary" layout which provided for individual stands big enough to lay out gardens. Batho became known as a "garden location" because of the English-style gardens that were subsequently laid out and the gardening culture that emerged among mostly middle-class residents. During the period 1918 to 1939, Batho's gardening culture developed, became established, and then flourished due to the residents' own efforts, as well as initiatives taken by key municipal officials and councillors. These initiatives include: the allocation of allotments for laying out market-gardens; the establishment of a fresh-produce market; the establishment of a Garden Committee; and the appointment of a permanent black horticulturist. When Batho's gardening culture became stagnant, garden and tree-planting competitions were used as a means of revival. Despite the relative "success" of the municipality's initiatives, they were undermined by, among others, drought conditions; inadequate water supply to gardeners; general apathy among location residents; the absence of title deeds for location stands; segregation policies; and suspected ulterior motives of white officials and councillors. In actual fact, some of these seemingly well-meaning initiatives served white interests; they were meant to soften the effects of territorial segregation and they were motivated by personal prestige. Because of deteriorating socio-economic conditions and other social ills that beset Batho towards the late 1930s, its gardening "golden age" came to an end with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

Keywords: Batho, gardens, gardening culture, garden competitions, locations, Mangaung, tree-planting

INTRODUCTION

The history of black¹ people's gardens and gardening culture is a neglected genre in South African historiography. This may be attributed to the misconception that black people are not interested in gardening and that they consequently lack a gardening culture. In truth, the garden history and gardening culture of black people – particularly the residents of South Africa's urban townships² – have a long history, which deserves the same attention as white people's garden history.³ Sadly, the history of black people's

gardening culture and how it has developed over time, has remained neglected and therefore, hidden. The majority of academic studies conducted on South African garden history and gardening culture focuses on white people's gardens.⁴ The reasons for this oversight could be ascribed to a lack of interest in this topic among historians and to the scarcity of historical sources. As a result, the few studies, which either focus entirely on the subject⁵ or which refer to the subject,⁶ are exploratory, including this one. Gardens only receive scant attention in studies that focus primarily on the history of black housing and

1 In this article, the terms "black(s)" or "black people" refer to all people of colour who were legally and socially discriminated against on the basis of race. However, a distinction is made between black people (of African origin) and coloured people (of "mixed race") on the basis of either their self-identification or institutionalised categorisation.

2 In the present South African context, the term "township" refers to a designated living area that was historically reserved for people of colour.

3 For a historical overview of South African black and coloured people's (including township residents) gardens and gardening culture, see D. du Bruyn, *Gardens, gardening culture and the development of a semi-vernacular garden style in Batho, Mangaung, 1918–1939: A historical perspective*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, pp. 125–154.

4 Recently published research on the subject includes A.C. van Vollenhoven, 'n Ondersoek na die voetpaadjies in die tuin van die Melrose-huismuseum, Pretoria, *South African Journal of Cultural History* 33(2), December 2019, pp. 99–120; S. le Roux & G. Breedlove, Die tuin wat Pierneef gemaak het, *South African Journal of Cultural History* 18(1), June 2004, pp. 10–33; R.J. Balfour, Gardening in 'Other Countries': Schoeman, Coetzee, Conrad, *Alternation* 4(2), January 1997, pp. 123–135.

5 For example, see D. du Bruyn, British influence on houses, gardens, and the gardening culture in Waaihoek (Mangaung) from the late 1800s to 1917, *South African Journal of Cultural History* 35(2), December 2021, pp. 92–122.

6 For example, see S.-A. Murray, The idea of gardening: Plants, bewilderment, and indigenous identity in South Africa, *English in Africa* 33(2), October 2006, pp. 45–65.

township planning.⁷ This article is positioned in the genre of garden and landscape history as an academic field of study.

The main objective is to address the void in black people's history by exploring the historical development of a gardening culture among residents of Batho, Mangaung's (Bloemfontein's) oldest existing township (Fig. 1). The name *Mangaung*,⁸ a Sesotho word which means "place of the cheetah", has historically referred to Bloemfontein's black "locations".⁹ This article explores the development of a gardening culture in Batho from a cultural-historical perspective. The reason for this approach is because gardens and gardening are considered expressions of culture. A garden is essentially a work of culture, that is, a human construct brought about by a form of cultural labour called "gardening".¹⁰ Thus, a close relationship exists between a garden, gardening, and culture. Because gardening is a cultural activity the term "gardening culture" may then be defined as "the culture related to the cultivating of gardens". Sociologist Michel Conan's definition of a garden underscores this argument: "the garden is an artificially maintained biotope that depends upon the social culture of its gardeners for survival over time."¹¹ A garden is the end product of gardening as cultural labour; therefore, a garden and its related gardening culture are studied in the context of cultural history.¹²

This article focuses on the period from 1918 to 1939, starting with the year when Batho was officially established by the Municipality of Bloemfontein (hereafter referred to as "the municipality") and ending with the outbreak of the Second World War (hereafter referred to as "the War"; 1939–1945). This period covers the cultural-historical timeframe in which this article is placed. The development of Batho's gardening culture between 1918 and 1939 is broadly divided into two stages, namely from the early 1920s to the late 1920s and from the late 1920s to the late 1930s, respectively. The year 1939 is significant because the start of the War signalled the end of Batho's "golden age"¹³ as both a "model location" and "garden location"¹⁴ due to the War-time socio-economic decline that affected Batho and other

locations in the Union of South Africa (1910–1961; hereafter referred to as "the Union"). This trend had a detrimental effect on the state of gardens in Batho and, by implication, on the location's gardening culture.

Concerning the sources used for this article, it must be stressed that documentary evidence was crucial because very few historical visual depictions of Batho have survived. In addition to reliable secondary sources written by Paul Maylam, Nicholas Coetzer, Maynard Swanson, R.V. Selope-Thema, and Sol Plaatje, this article relies heavily on archival sources dating from the period in question. The records of the municipality, including mayors' minutes, minutes of committee meetings, and the Location Superintendents' reports, provided most of the primary sources that were used to research the historical development of Batho's gardening culture. Oral history interviews conducted with Batho gardeners presented additional primary evidence.

BATHO AS A "MODEL LOCATION" AND "GARDEN LOCATION"

Batho was established in 1918 as a new location for Bloemfontein's black and coloured people. The municipality decided to demolish the old Waaihoek location and between 1918 and 1941 Waaihoek's residents were resettled in a new location situated further away from the "white town". The most important reason¹⁵ for this decision was rooted in racial prejudice, namely the fact that Waaihoek was deemed to be situated too close to Bloemfontein's business centre and the adjacent white residential areas. The majority of Bloemfontein's whites did not consider people of colour to be true citizens of the town but merely "servants of the townspeople".¹⁶ As a result, the majority of Batho's residents – most of whom were of Sotho-Tswana, San (/Xam), or Khoekhoe descent – were former Waaihoek residents who were relocated.¹⁷ Importantly, the embryonic gardening culture which had already existed in Waaihoek was also transferred to Batho.

Similar to other locations that were established in the Union during the period in question, Batho was founded to appease Bloemfontein's white electorate and to implement the Union government's policy of race-

7 For example, see N. Coetzer, Langa township in the 1920s – an (extra)ordinary garden suburb, *South African Journal of Art History* 24(1), 2009, pp. 1-19; R. Ginsburg, "Now I stay in a house": Renovating the matchbox in apartheid-era Soweto, *African Studies* 55(2), 1996, pp. 127-139; D.M. Calderwood, *Native housing in South Africa*, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, pp. 1-202.

8 Bloemfontein's municipality is known as the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality.

9 In the historical South African context, the term "location" meant a segregated living area for people of colour. Locations were usually situated on the fringes of white towns and cities. Today locations are known as townships.

10 P. Lewis, The making of vernacular taste: The case of Sunset and Southern Living, in J.D. Hunt & J. Wolschke-Bulmahn (eds), *The vernacular garden*, p. 107; C.T. Kimber, Gardens and dwelling: People in vernacular gardens, *Geographical Review* 94(3), July 2004, p. 265.

11 M. Conan, *The hortillonnages: Reflections on a vanishing gardeners' culture*, in J.D. Hunt & J. Wolschke-Bulmahn (eds), *The vernacular garden*, p. 19.

12 P.G. Nel *et al.*, Kultuurgeskiedenis as wetenskap, *Handhaaf* 19(2), November 1981, p. 7; D. Strauss, Skakeringe van die berip *kultuur* – in historiese en sistematiese perspektief, *Journal of Humanities* 51(4), December 2011, p. 650.

13 The term is used in the context of garden history.

14 These two terms will be explained and discussed in the next section.

15 For a detailed discussion on the other reasons for Batho's establishment, see Du Bruyn, *Gardens, gardening culture and...*, pp. 281-287.

16 Free State Provincial Archives (hereafter FSPA): MBL 3/1/19, Mayor's minute 1924–1925, p. 5.

17 Du Bruyn, *Gardens, gardening culture and...*, pp. 263-264.

based spatial segregation. Segregation was a racist and discriminatory socio-political system which preceded the apartheid system (1948–1994).¹⁸ Law no. 8 of 1893 first authorised town councils in the Orange Free State republic (1854–1899) to enforce statutory segregation; subsequently, additional ordinances¹⁹ issued during the Orange River Colony (1900–1910) further entrenched segregation until 1923 when new legislation²⁰ was passed. Although not mandatory at that time, “general segregation principles”²¹ and segregationist town planning regulations stipulated that locations such as Batho had to be laid out on the outskirts of white towns and cities, preferably with a physical barrier or open space between the location and the white area. In Batho’s case, the Cape Town-Johannesburg railway track and the empty buffer strips on both sides of the track served as a barrier (Fig. 1).²²

The municipality envisaged Batho not only as a “model location”²³ laid out according to “the best town-planning lines”²⁴ but also as a “garden location”.²⁵ The fact that South Africa had been a British colony until 1910 and then a dominion of the British Empire until 1961, meant that local town planning ideas and policies were strongly influenced by developments in Britain. The Garden City Movement of British town planning visionary Ebenezer Howard (1850–1928) was particularly influential.²⁶ Some key municipal officials and councillors, most of whom were English-speaking and born and bred in Britain, took an active interest in developing Batho as a garden location.²⁷ To achieve this objective, steps were taken in terms of the Model Location Regulations²⁸ (hereafter referred to as “the Regulations”) which made



Figure 1: A recent map of Batho showing the Cape Town-Johannesburg railway track. (Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM Map Batho 7)

provision for better houses²⁹ and individual stands to be “not less than 50 feet by 50 feet”³⁰ so as to provide enough space for the laying out of front gardens. Furthermore, the Regulations stipulated the duties of the municipality and the Superintendent of Locations³¹ about the general maintenance of a model location and also of “standholders”³² to keep their “site [stand] in good condition”.³³

- 18 D.S. Krige, Bloemfontein, in A. Lemon (ed.), *Homes apart: South Africa's segregated cities*, pp. 104-107; P. Maylam, The rise and decline of urban apartheid in South Africa, *African Affairs* 89(354), January 1990, pp. 58-63.
- 19 Ordinance No. 35 of 1903; No. 6 of 1904; No. 12 of 1904; No. 14 of 1905 and No. 19 of 1905. *Statutes of the Union of South Africa 1923 with tables of contents (alphabetical and chronological) and tables of laws, etc., repealed and amended by these statutes: Natives (Urban Areas) Act (no. 21 of 1923)*, p. 194.
- 20 Natives (Urban Areas) Act (no. 21 of 1923). *Statutes of the Union of South Africa 1923 with tables of contents (alphabetical and chronological) and tables of laws, etc., repealed and amended by these statutes: Natives (Urban Areas) Act (no. 21 of 1923)*, p. 140. The Act was amended in 1930 and 1937.
- 21 FSPA: MBL 3/1/19, Mayor's minute 1926–1927, p. 12.
- 22 P. Maylam, Explaining the apartheid city: 20 years of South African urban historiography, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21(1), March 1995, pp. 22-23; A.J. Christopher, From Flint to Soweto: Reflections on the colonial origins of the apartheid city, *Area* 15(2), 1983, pp. 145-149; A. Mabin, Origins of segregatory town planning in South Africa, c. 1900–1940, *Planning History* 13(3), 1991, pp. 8-10; D.S. Krige, *Afsonderlike ontwikkeling as ruimtelike beplanningstrategie: 'n Toepassing op die Bloemfontein – Botshabelo – Thaba Nchu-streek*, unpublished D.Phil. thesis, pp. 154-156; W.F.S. Senekal, *Gedifferensieerde woonbuurtvorming binne die Munisipaliteit van Bloemfontein: 'n Faktorekologiese toepassingstudie*, Research report 2: Part 1, ISEN, p. 108.
- 23 The term “model location” and similar terms used by municipal administrations should be seen in the context of the segregationist policies enforced during the period under discussion. It is not the authors' intention to glorify or justify segregationist ideologies and constructs by using historical terminology.
- 24 *The Friend*, 6.1.1919, p. 4.
- 25 A term coined by the authors to refer to Batho as a location characterised by gardens and gardening culture. D. du Bruyn & M. Oelofse, “The idea of beautifying the surroundings”: Bloemfontein's (Mangaung) Batho location a “garden location”? (c. 1918–1939), *New Contree* 84, July 2020, pp. 30-56.
- 26 E. Howard, *Garden cities of to-morrow*, pp. vi-viii; Mabin, pp. 8-11; Du Bruyn & Oelofse, p. 31.
- 27 K. Schoeman, *Bloemfontein: Die ontstaan van 'n stad, 1846–1946*, pp. 158-160, 170, 183; S.F. Malan, Die Britse besetting van Bloemfontein, 13 Maart 1900, *Historia* 20(1), May 1975, pp. 40-43; D. du Bruyn, ‘Township Topiary’: The history of the English-style gardens of Batho, Mangaung (1846–1948), *Navorsing van die Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein* 27(3), December 2011, pp. 49-50.
- 28 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/6, Location Regulations 1924, pp. 1-8.
- 29 For a discussion of the houses and criticism levelled against them, see D. du Bruyn & M. Oelofse, “A hygienic Native township shall be developed”: The founding and development of Batho as Bloemfontein's “model location” (c. 1918–1939), *Historia* 64(2), November 2019, pp. 67-69.
- 30 Appr. 16.5 x 16.5 metres. H. Rogers, *Native administration in the Union of South Africa being a brief survey of the organisation, functions and activities of the Department of Native Affairs of the Union of South Africa*, pp. 309-312.
- 31 Initially known as the Inspector of Native Locations, the Superintendent of Locations was the municipal officer responsible for managing the locations and also served as chairperson of the Native Advisory Board. The superintendent was also the manager of the Department of Native Affairs (later Native Administration). C. le Roux, Openbare gesondheidsorg in die swart woonbuurte van Bloemfontein, 1900–1945, *Acta Academica* 29(2), August 1997, p. 67.
- 32 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/3, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 17.6.1918, p. 6.
- 33 Rogers, p. 307.

The Regulations, which included the “complements of a model location”³⁴ that emphasised the importance of aesthetics (read as proper housing, gardens, and tree-planting), significantly shaped the appearance of Batho’s man-made landscape³⁵ until the end of the 1930s. One of the important side-effects of this intervention was the laying out of ornamental front gardens and, importantly, the emergence of a distinctive garden style and a gardening culture that showed British or English³⁶ cultural influences. Cottage-style gardens³⁷ were mostly symmetrical with a garden path leading from the garden gate straight to the front door. The garden path divided the front garden into two symmetrical halves in which circular, rectangular, or square flowerbeds edged with overlapping bricks or stones were typically laid out (Fig. 2).³⁸ In addition to the contributions made by municipal officers and councillors, the important role played by Batho’s garden labourers, who worked in white people’s gardens in town, must also be stressed. These labourers were directly exposed to the garden styles and practices in their employers’ gardens. Maria Marumo (born 1938), whose father Geelbooi Mofokeng worked as a gardener for whites during the 1930s and 1940s, was convinced that “the white [people’s] gardens were an influence”³⁹ on the style and layout of location gardens. Most garden labourers maintained their own gardens in Batho; consequently, elements of the white people’s garden styles such as the preference for a formal layout, symmetry, and clipped hedges and edges, were transferred to Batho.⁴⁰

THE DEVELOPMENT OF BATHO’S GARDENING CULTURE I: THE EARLY TO LATE 1920s

“Much healthy competition in building and gardening”:⁴¹ Batho’s emerging gardening culture

An eloquent historical description of Batho’s gardens is contained in a piece written by Emilie Solomon for *The Cape Times*. Solomon, who attended a trade union convention in Bloemfontein in 1922, wrote



Figure 2: A typical Batho house in Jabavu Street with remnants of its original symmetrical garden layout still visible, c. 2012. Note the straight garden path leading to the front door and overlapping brick edges. (Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM Photo Batho 397)

that she saw “little orchards and gardens surround the houses” in “this splendid location”.⁴² In addition, she noticed “much healthy competition in building and gardening” and everyone “seemed happy and contented.”⁴³ Solomon’s impressions, which were also published in *Umteteli wa Bantu*⁴⁴ in that same year, not only revealed the mostly middle-class residents’ enthusiasm for gardening but it also underscored the existence of an emerging gardening culture in Batho. Significantly, Solomon’s reference to “much healthy competition” supports the argument that an underlying gardening culture had developed to such an extent that it had reached the point where gardeners were confident to “compete” with one another. This competitive spirit, so to speak, was already evident barely four years after Batho’s founding; this serves as proof that the gardening culture which had already existed in Waaihoek, was successfully transferred to Batho when Waaihoek’s residents were relocated there.⁴⁵

Documentary evidence supporting the existence of an emerging gardening culture in Batho during its early years was found in municipal records. In the annual 1922–1923 report, Bloemfontein’s mayor, Mr W.M. Barnes,⁴⁶ noted that he was struck by the fact that “our natives have a keen civic pride in their

34 *The Friend*, 15.2.1922, p. 7.

35 Refer in this regard to the term “man-made landscape” by G.E. Fagan, *An introduction to the man-made landscape at the Cape from the 17th to the 19th centuries* (vols. 1 & 2), unpublished D.Phil. thesis, *passim*.

36 In this article the terms “British” and “English” are used interchangeably. In the context of the period in question the terms are not considered mutually exclusive. For more information, see P. Rich, The quest for Englishness, in G. Marsden (ed.), *Victorian values: Personalities and perspectives in nineteenth century society*, pp. 213-225; K. Kumar, Englishness, Britishness and empire in the politics of English nationhood, *British Politics* 11(3), 2016, pp. 354-360.

37 For information on the English cottage garden, see G. Darley, The English cottage garden, in M. Mosser & G. Teyssot (eds), *The history of garden design: The Western tradition from the Renaissance to the present day*, pp. 424-426.

38 For more information, see Du Bruyn, *Gardens, gardening culture and...*, pp. 437-440.

39 National Museum Oral History Collection: Interview conducted by D. du Bruyn with M.M. Marumo, Batho, 28.10.2014.

40 Du Bruyn, *Gardens, gardening culture and...*, pp. 399-407; National Museum Oral History Collection: Interview conducted by D. du Bruyn with M.M. Marumo, Batho, 28.10.2014.

41 E.J. Solomon, Bloemfontein Native Location, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 19.8.1922, p. 3.

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Umteteli wa Bantu* was a weekly newspaper established in 1920 and discontinued in 1956. The paper was a mouthpiece of South Africa’s black middle-class opinion.

45 H.G. Plaatje, Natives in urban areas: The brighter side for the African, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 13.1.1934, p. 4; Ginsburg, p. 135.

46 Barnes was mayor of Bloemfontein from April 1922 to March 1923.

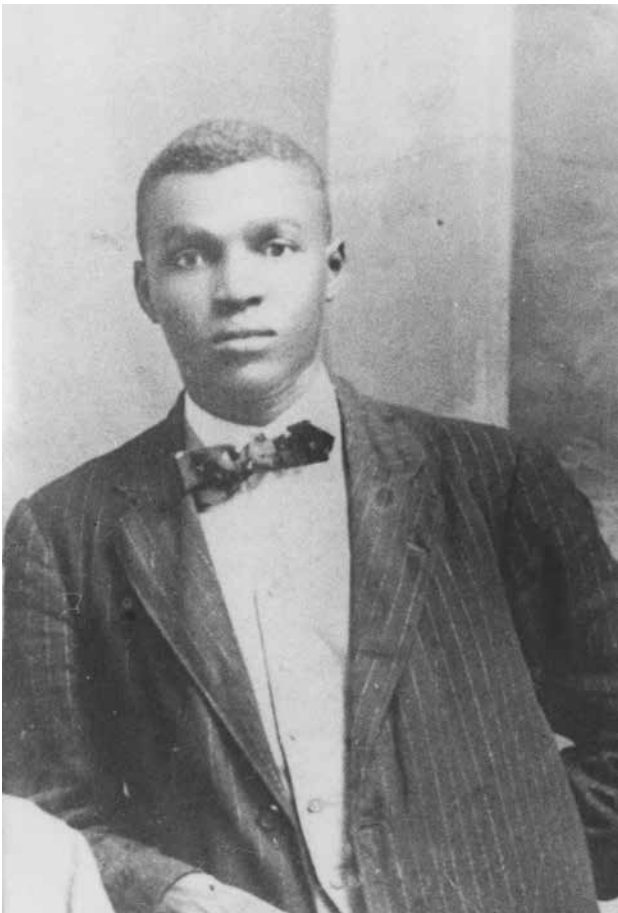


Figure 3: Henry Selby Msimang, c. 1913. (Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM 01/6751)



Figure 4: Bishop Walter Carey, undated. (Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM 01/7707)

location which makes for better, cleaner living”.⁴⁷ This statement is significant because the mayor’s reference to “keen civic pride” indicates that some Batho residents had taken “ownership” of their new location and, as a result, had accepted “responsibility” for its beautification. Batho’s standholders did not own the stands on which their houses were built but they owned the houses. In Batho, as it was the case in the rest of the Orange Free State, the issue of ownership was characterised by an anomaly. This skewed ownership policy was sanctioned by the Natives’ Land Act (no. 27 of 1913) and it was rooted in the belief that the locations were not the permanent residence of black people. Locations were, to quote the journalist, Henry Selby Msimang (1886–1982; Fig. 3): “places set aside for the habitation of casual labourers”,⁴⁸ that is, temporary living areas where black people, who were employed by whites, could stay.⁴⁹ Ironically, Batho’s residents felt urged to beautify their houses by laying out gardens – even if this was done on land that did not belong to them.

As it was the case in other locations, a title deed or security of tenure was not necessarily a requirement for Batho’s residents to improve and stamp their individuality on their domestic environments.⁵⁰

In the above-mentioned annual report, Barnes drew a parallel between the Batho residents’ civic pride and sense of ownership, on the one hand, and the potential for “cleaner” living on the other hand.⁵¹ By the same token, a parallel may also be drawn between civic pride and a desire to garden because laying out gardens is rooted in an urge to improve one’s immediate environment.⁵² It seems as though a desire for gardening had become fairly widespread among Batho residents by the mid-1920s. For example, in 1925, the residents of Lovedale Road in Batho’s Cape Stands section (Fig. 1) officially asked the Town Council (hereafter referred to as “the council”) for permission to “extend the frontage of their stands by 9 ft.”,⁵³ evidently to secure a larger space for their front gardens. This request was granted despite the

47 FSPA: MBL 3/1/19, Mayor’s minute 1922–1923, p. 8.

48 H.S. Msimang, Native locations, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 1.10.1921, p. 2.

49 Krige, pp. 2-4; S.T. Plaatje, *Native life in South Africa, before and since the European war and the Boer rebellion*, pp. 21-32; S.T. Plaatje, The Native mind, *The Friend*, 7.12.1927, p. 5; FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/17, Minutes of joint meeting of Native Affairs Committee and Native Advisory Board, 13.8.1929, pp. 1-2.

50 Ginsburg, pp. 132-133; F.J. Wepener, Psychological approach, in P.H. Connell et al., *Native housing: A collective thesis*, p. 79.

51 FSPA: MBL 3/1/19, Mayor’s minute 1922–1923, p. 8.

52 T.S. Somerville, Our first garden city, *The Outspan* 2(38), 18.11.1927, p. 43; *The Friend*, 12.9.1932, p. 4.

53 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/8, Report of Superintendent of Locations, June & July 1925, 1.8.1925, p. 4.



Figure 5: A typical Batho garden in Matli Street showing the classic Batho garden design “blueprint”: A simple and formal layout with a central garden path leading to the front door and two symmetrical sections on both sides of the path, c. 2011. Note the clipped hedges and topiary. (Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM Photo Batho 320)



Figure 6: Another typical Batho garden in Moiloa Street showing the English cottage-style influence with typical elements such as an ivy-covered arch, metal garden gate, and standard topiary, c. 2009. (Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM Photo Batho 80)

fact that, as a result, the width of Lovedale Road’s sidewalks was considerably reduced, which left the impression that bigger front gardens enjoyed priority.⁵⁴

A desire for gardening, which was expressed by members of the Batho community, serves as evidence of a gardening culture that was taking root, especially among the so-called “better class natives”,⁵⁵ to quote the Anglican Bishop of Bloemfontein, Dr Walter Cary (1875–1955; Fig. 4). During a meeting with the Native Affairs Committee (hereafter referred to as “the NAC”),⁵⁶ Carey argued that the “better class natives were anxious to show not only for their own uplifting, but for all their kindred Bantus, that they were capable of self-help.”⁵⁷ Despite the patronising

tone of Carey’s words, they were uttered by one of Bloemfontein’s leading white men who, according to *The Friend*,⁵⁸ “cared for the Native peoples.”⁵⁹ Apart from a need to show their ability to erect fine houses and to improve their standard of living, Batho’s middle-class felt the need to show that “self-help” also meant their ability to lay out attractive gardens (Figs 5 & 6). Many aspirations of this class of location resident related to the urge to display a certain level of “civilisation”. A close link between a person’s perceived level of civilisation and the ability to lay out and maintain gardens existed in the white English-speaking public opinion⁶⁰ – a perception that was seemingly transferred to Batho’s middle-class.⁶¹ It was not only the location residents who wanted to garden; influential individuals such as key municipal officials, including the Superintendent of Locations, the Town Clerk, the Location Medical Practitioner, and certain councillors also wanted to see a lively gardening culture in Batho. During the 1920s and 1930s, when British town planning theories became entrenched in South African public discourse,⁶² it was widely acknowledged that the immediate domestic



Figure 7: Thomas Mtobi Mapikela, c. late 1930s. (Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM 01/4621)

54 *Ibid.*

55 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/8, Minutes of special meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 9.9.1925, p. 1.

56 The municipal decision-making body which dealt with the locations.

57 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/8, Minutes of special meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 9.9.1925, p. 1.

58 *The Friend*, previously known as *The Friend of the Sovereignty and Bloemfontein Gazette*, was founded in 1850. In 1854 the weekly newspaper became *The Friend of the Free State and Bloemfontein Gazette* and later it was renamed *The Friend*. The paper was discontinued in 1985. *The Friend*, 10.6.1927, p. 8.

59 *The Friend*, 11.5.1923, p. 8.

60 For more information, see L. Taylor, *A taste for gardening: Classed and gendered practices*, pp. 22-24.

61 Msimang, p. 2.

62 Coetzer, pp. 6, 8, 10, 14; R.K. Home, Town planning and garden cities in the British colonial empire 1910–1940, *Planning Perspectives* 5(1), 1990, p. 30; Mabin, pp. 10-11.



Figure 8: An advertisement for Kirchoff's Seeds as it appeared next to Msimang's piece in *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 1 October 1921. (Source: National Library of South Africa)

environment had had a profound effect on the general conduct of communities, including the Union's locations.⁶³ Significantly, an awareness of new town planning trends was also noticeable among members of the black literate middle-class such as Msimang and the Batho community leader Thomas Mapikela (1869–1945; Fig. 7). Msimang emphasised the importance of proper town planning for the Union's locations in an opinion piece that he wrote for *Umteteli wa Bantu*. He noticed “a generous feeling among thinking Europeans in favour of a drastic change in the existing conditions”⁶⁴ in locations and he was

convinced that “the old idea of controlling Natives anyhow and housing them in tin shanties is gradually giving place to quite a new conception.”⁶⁵ According to Msimang's opinion, the success of better location planning also “depends upon our personal and national efforts to improve existing conditions”⁶⁶ in the locations. He referred to location residents' own initiatives to improve their domestic environments in ways which included gardening; if only the planting of vegetable seeds. The fact that an advertisement for Kirchoff's Seeds (Fig. 8) was prominently placed right next to Msimang's article is noteworthy.

To create an aesthetically pleasing environment in Batho, Bishop Carey and some “progressive”⁶⁷ councillors such as Messrs I.H. Haarburger, J.H.B. Reitz, R.C. Streeten, and D. Urquhart,⁶⁸ openly voiced their desire for a gardening culture to develop among location residents.⁶⁹ Noble as it may seem, the white municipal officials' sentiment must be seen in the context of racial segregation. Although segregation was primarily rooted in racism and in white people's fear of being overwhelmed by a black majority, there was also a perception among whites that people of colour were unclean and prone to disease.⁷⁰ This exaggerated fear of disease – the so-called “sanitation syndrome”⁷¹ – was used as another justification for people of colour to be territorially segregated from whites and to be restricted to locations. Yet, it was believed that people of colour could still present a health menace to whites in their segregated locations; therefore, the locations had to be well-planned, orderly, clean, and aesthetically pleasing to be hygienic. The rationale that underpinned this thinking was illustrated in a letter from Bloemfontein's Town Clerk, Mr J.P. Logan, to the mayor in which Logan argued that “it paid the Europeans for the Natives to have sanitary homes – hygienic surroundings [read as gardens] – good water supplies – sanitation – recreation grounds etc.”⁷² It was reasoned that Bloemfontein's whites would benefit if a gardening culture developed in Batho because it would then lead to a “sanitary” location and to “healthy” location residents which, in turn, meant “healthy” domestic servants and garden labourers.⁷³ This argument raises the question as to whom the council considered primary beneficiaries of the garden location idea: Batho's residents or Bloemfontein's white electorate? In addition to the “sanitation syndrome”, another

63 *The Friend*, 10.7.1931, p. 6; 12.9.1932, p. 4; 31.12.1936, p. 8; J.R. Cooper, *The Municipality of Bloemfontein: Native housing and accommodation*, *South African Architectural Record* 28(6), June 1943, pp. 120-123.

64 Msimang, p. 2.

65 *Ibid.*

66 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

67 Due to their more relaxed racial stance, some English-speaking Bloemfontein residents and the predominantly English-speaking council were described as “progressive”. *The Friend*, 28.7.1921, p. 4; W.H. Dawson, *South Africa: People, places, and problems*, p. 249.

68 Urquhart was mayor of Bloemfontein from April 1923 to March 1924.

69 *The Friend*, 11.5.1923, p. 8.

70 Krige, pp. 104-107; Christopher, p. 146.

71 M.W. Swanson, *The sanitation syndrome: Bubonic plague and urban native policy in the Cape Colony, 1900–1909*, *Journal of African History* XVIII(3), 1977, p. 387.

72 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/8, Letter from J.P. Logan, Town Clerk, to Dr M.J. Steyn, His Worship the Mayor, 14.9.1925, p. 1.

73 *Ibid.*

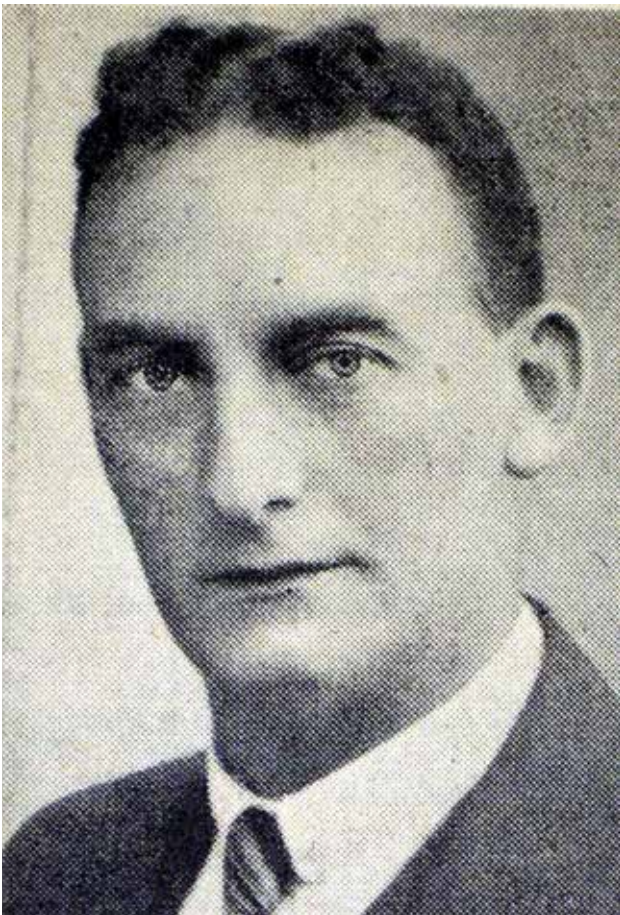


Figure 9: John Richard Cooper, undated. (Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM Photo Batho 501)

argument in favour of a gardening culture in Batho was strengthened by the belief that such a culture would focus the Batho residents' attention on their own location gardens. Such a "distraction" would divert their attention from the whites-only public parks and squares, notably Hoffman Square, King's Park, and Hamilton Park. In the same way in which white bureaucrats considered sport and ballroom dancing to be "proper" leisure activities that could pacify and depoliticise an increasingly politically conscious and restless location population,⁷⁴ gardening was considered a "noble" pastime that could serve the same purpose.⁷⁵ The question as to whether this objective was a hidden motive for the garden location idea should be raised. The council's

decision to lay out a "park"⁷⁶ near Batho's entrance for the exclusive use of location residents is rooted in this novel type of segregationist thinking and moral self-righteousness on the part of Bloemfontein's white bureaucrats. Councillor J.S. Franklin's⁷⁷ explanation of the rationale behind the new park exemplifies this mentality: The council's objective with the new park was to "encourage the natives away from the parks in town".⁷⁸ The emphasis on gardening and a gardening culture served to disguise the fact that Batho's residents were subjected to the same segregationist policies as any other location. The focus on a "proper" and "noble" pastime, namely gardening, was meant to soften the effects of territorial segregation.

"Competition in the growing of vegetables is keener":⁷⁹ Batho's market-gardening culture

According to municipal records, a gardening culture was fully established in Batho towards the mid-1920s. In his annual locations report of 1925–1926, the new Superintendent of Locations, John Richard Cooper (1881–1946; Fig. 9),⁸⁰ stated that "gardening and tree-planting are encouraged"⁸¹ among residents. In addition, he observed that "competition in the growing of vegetables is keener".⁸² Cooper's mention of competition between Batho's gardeners being "keener" is significant because it indicates the existence of a lively gardening culture – in this case also a vegetable gardening culture. His observation confirms Emilie Solomon's impression of the existence of a healthy competitive spirit among residents during her visit to Batho in 1922. Eager to cement his legacy, the vigilant superintendent saw an opportunity to make the most of the gardening enthusiasm among Batho's gardeners. Therefore, Cooper played a key role in the establishment of a new fresh produce market (known as "Maraka") for Batho. This facility, erected in bustling Fort Hare Road (Fig. 1) and completed in 1929, bolstered Batho's emerging market-gardening culture.⁸³ In the same year, he reported in the patronising language of the time that Batho's market-gardeners were earning an "honest living" by the sale of their produce which, in the majority of cases, was "excellent in quality."⁸⁴ Vegetables were grown in home gardens and in "garden allotments"⁸⁵ allocated to selected standholders on

74 Consider the growing influence of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), renamed the African National Congress (ANC) in 1923. The SANNC was founded in Bloemfontein in 1912.

75 Maylam, *Explaining the apartheid city...*, p. 31; Du Bruyn & Oelofse, "The idea of beautifying...", p. 36.

76 This so-called "park", which doubled as a sports ground, was laid out on the corner of Hamilton Road and Lovedale Road in Batho. Initially known as Ramblers, the park/sports ground subsequently became known as Masenkeng because of the corrugated iron fence erected around it. Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand (hereafter HP): AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1925–1926, p. 4.

77 Franklin was mayor of Bloemfontein from April 1928 to March 1929 and from April 1944 to March 1945.

78 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/13, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 17.8.1927, p. 3a.

79 HP: AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1925–1926, p. 2.

80 FSPA: MHG 38829, Estate of the late John Richard Cooper: Death notice, p. 1. Cooper served as Superintendent of Locations from 1923 to 1945.

81 HP: AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1925–1926, p. 2.

82 *Ibid.*

83 Du Bruyn & Oelofse, "The idea of beautifying...", pp. 42–43.

84 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/16, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 24.7.1929, p. 4.

85 *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 15.11.1924, p. 2.

the banks of the Kaffirfontein Spruit⁸⁶ and on the open piece of land adjacent to Cook Avenue (Fig. 1). According to Mohau Phakoe (born 1942), his parents, Adam and Lydia Phakoe, referred to the area as “Masimo”⁸⁷ because of the maize (*Zea mays*) that was planted there in small patches.⁸⁸ Towards the mid-1920s, the allotments were fully utilised by market-gardeners who had become successful vegetable growers. This trend points to the fact that many Batho gardeners had moved beyond traditional subsistence farming by embracing market-gardening.⁸⁹ Cooper confirmed this phenomenon when he reported that the growing of vegetables was “gradually replacing the proverbial mealie”.⁹⁰ In effect, it meant that vegetables, which were easy to cultivate, were increasingly consumed together with the traditional staple food, namely maize. In addition to the market-gardeners’ own efforts, credit is also due to Batho’s Garden Committee (hereafter referred to as “the Committee”). Cooper played an important role in establishing the Committee, which signalled a major step forward in the development of Batho’s gardening culture. The Committee consisted of municipal officers and members of the Native Advisory Board (hereafter referred to as “the NAB”);⁹¹ this board was, among others, responsible for supervising the allocation of allotments. Chaired by the enthusiastic gardening expert with a diploma in horticulture, Ms M.S. Moikangoa,⁹² the Committee contributed to the establishment of a solid market-gardening culture in Batho towards the end of the 1920s.⁹³

Cooper was hopeful that Batho’s flourishing market-gardening culture would also influence those mostly working-class residents, who were not interested in gardening, but who could possibly be convinced to lay out gardens once they have realised the benefits involved. He was adamant that Batho’s gardening culture should rest on sound horticultural knowledge and not merely on popular wisdom. Although this was mainly applicable to vegetable gardening, ornamental gardening was not excluded. To raise the standard of gardening, Cooper and others who were concerned with the Batho residents’ well-being, saw the need for the appointment of a full-time black gardening instructor who could teach them gardening skills and disseminate horticultural know-how. In his

monthly locations report of September 1930, Cooper reported that Ms Moikangoa was tasked to provide standholders with gardening advice. An amount of £1.5 per month was approved to cover her expenses, including the purchasing of seed to distribute free of charge. Moikangoa’s efforts must have paid off because long-time Batho resident, Sarah Mahabane (born 1927; now deceased), recalled that Batho indeed looked like a garden location when she was a young child: “Batho was a beautiful location in those days – it was green and there were many beautiful gardens everywhere”.⁹⁴ To Moikangoa’s credit, it can also be stated that not long after her appointment, the cultivation of vegetables for market-gardening purposes had expanded. Her efforts gave further impetus to the residents’ enthusiasm for growing vegetables that had already received a boost with the opening of Batho’s fresh produce market the previous year.⁹⁵

THE DEVELOPMENT OF BATHO’S GARDENING CULTURE II: THE LATE 1920s TO THE LATE 1930s

“The best gardens in the locations”:⁹⁶ Garden competitions as a tool to revive Batho’s gardening culture

Batho’s reputation as a model location, which was also becoming a garden location due to its strengthening gardening culture, attracted the interest of mayors and other senior officials of towns and cities across the Union. Some of them visited Batho because they wanted to see it for themselves. It seems as if these visits have played an important role in the decision by some local individuals that garden competitions should be introduced as an incentive to further encourage gardening. It was reasoned that such competitions, which had become popular among white gardeners, could persuade Batho’s residents to make their location attractive to visitors and to themselves. Ironically, Batho’s first garden competition was not initiated by a local resident but by one of the distinguished visitors, namely the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg. Mayor Hardy, who visited Batho in 1926, was so inspired by the new location and its gardens that he offered prize money to the value of £1.1 for “the best kept garden in the location.”⁹⁷ It was

86 Today known as the Renoster Spruit that serves as the boundary between Batho and Bochabela. FSPA: MBL 3/1/19, Mayor’s minute 1921–1922, p. 14; HP: AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1925–1926, p. 2.

87 A Sesotho word meaning “cultivated fields” or “gardens”.

88 National Museum Oral History Collection: Interview conducted by D. du Bruyn with M. Phakoe, Batho, 25.11.2014.

89 HP: AD 1765, Yearly report on locations 1925–1926, p. 2.

90 *Ibid.*

91 The Native Advisory Board consisted of 12 elected and three nominated ward councillors. The Superintendent of Locations acted as *ex officio* chairperson of the Board. C. le Roux, J.R. Cooper as Township Manager of Mangaung at Bloemfontein, 1923–1945, *Navorsing van die Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein* 26(1), December 2010, p. 16.

92 Ms Moikangoa’s biographical details could not be obtained.

93 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/25, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 6.12.1934, p. 1; Du Bruyn, ‘Township Topiary’: The history..., pp. 67–68.

94 National Museum Oral History Collection: Interview conducted by D. du Bruyn with S.M. Mahabane, Batho, 7 & 20.11.2014.

95 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/18, Monthly report of Native Administration Department for September 1930, s.a., p. 3.

96 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/17, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 11.9.1929, p. 1.

97 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/9, Report of Superintendent of Locations, January 1926, 2.2.1926, p. 1.

not all praise, though, because Hardy also criticised the poor condition of Batho's streets,⁹⁸ which serves as a reminder that not everything about the model location was praiseworthy. Therefore, one must guard against a romanticised view of Batho despite the fact that it was in a much better shape than the majority of the Union's locations such as Alexandra (Johannesburg) and Ndabeni (Cape Town),⁹⁹ to name but two.

Batho's gardeners responded positively to Hardy's initiative and, the following year, the Location Medical Practitioner, Dr J. Lovius, announced another garden competition. This competition was better organised than the previous one because Lovius directly involved Batho's influential "blockmen" (ward councillors) in his project. The blockmen, who had been requested to "urge competitors to call for seeds as soon as possible",¹⁰⁰ had since then played an important role in the success of Batho's garden competitions by encouraging residents to participate. In addition to floating trophies, prize money also became a lucrative drawing card. Considering the challenging socio-economic conditions that many Batho residents faced during that time, it does not surprise that financial reward became an effective tool to convince gardeners to participate, despite the fact that the true motives of the initiators of such competitions were not always clear. Was it only about the noble ideal of encouraging gardening in Batho or did personal prestige of having initiated such competitions and of having donated prize money also play a role? The fact that the affluent land-surveyor, Gustav Baumann (1858–1930), enthusiastically supported Lovius' initiative by publicly donating £1.1 as prize money, raised some eyebrows.¹⁰¹

Despite the initial enthusiasm for garden competitions, it appears as though the fervour for them was not shared by all Batho gardeners. It was decided that the competition initiated by Lovius would be an annual one and Councillor Franklin managed to secure the council's support for this project. Franklin had no difficulty in obtaining the necessary support because he already had the buy-in of key municipal officials. Being aware of the waning enthusiasm for competitions among some Batho gardeners, he attempted to make the competition more lucrative by offering £5 for "the best garden in the Location".¹⁰² Alas, the drought conditions that gripped Bloemfontein and much of the Orange Free State at the beginning of 1928 dampened enthusiasm



Figure 10: A clipped hedge encloses Thomas Mapikela's garden in Community Street, c. 1930s. Mapikela belonged to Batho's emerging black middle-class who could afford to build bigger and better houses than the average Batho resident. (Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM 01/7476)

for garden competitions; Batho's gardeners were dependent on a few communal taps which, according to Phakoe, were strategically placed on street corners. Gardening was a challenge because residents had to queue up for their turn and water had to be carried to gardens in buckets or pushed on wheelbarrows.¹⁰³ Consequently, Cooper reported that gardening in Batho had been "disappointing". He mentioned a "lack of interest"¹⁰⁴ but it is unclear as to whether it was the result of the drought or general apathy which had set in. Did some Batho gardeners suspect hidden motives in the light of the council's recent efforts to declare Bloemfontein's public parks and squares off-limits to people of colour on the basis of racial segregation?¹⁰⁵ These suspicions and the practical challenges that gardeners were facing, emphasise the fact that the council's attempts – whether well-intended or not – to develop a gardening culture in Batho were not without frustrations and setbacks. Therefore, it is vital to guard against the impression that the interest in gardening among location residents, specifically the "educated and advanced Native"¹⁰⁶ as Cooper referred to Batho's middle-class, was enthusiastic and widespread at all times.

The council and, specifically, the fervent Cooper did not allow droughts and dampened enthusiasm to hamper their efforts to use garden competitions as a tool to revive the gardening culture in the locations. The term "locations" is used deliberately because Bochabela,¹⁰⁷ a new location founded in 1925, was

98 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/9, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 29.1.1926, p. 1.

99 *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 18.9.1920, p. 2; 5.11.1921, p. 2; 4.10.1930, p. 4.

100 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/12, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 15.2.1927, p. 1.

101 *Ibid.*

102 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/14, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 15.3.1928, p. 9.

103 National Museum Oral History Collection: Interview conducted by D. du Bruyn with M. Phakoe, Batho, 25.11.2014.

104 *Ibid.*

105 For more information, see Du Bruyn & Oelofse, "The idea of beautifying...", pp. 50–54.

106 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/21, Annual report of Native Administration Department 1931–1932, 1.5.1932, p. 2.

107 A Sesotho word meaning "east" because Bochabela was laid out east of the Renoster Spruit which marked Batho's eastern boundary.



Figure 11: An example of Batho's "township topiary" in Matti Street, c. 2011. (Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM Photo Batho 326)

also included in all present and future efforts. Thanks to good rainfall, the prospects looked more promising for location gardeners at the start of the 1928–1929 gardening season. The improved circumstances prompted Cooper to further refine the location garden competition concept. In October 1928, he announced his "principal points"¹⁰⁸ that had to be observed for the adjudication and awarding of prizes for the best gardens. Apart from general layout, neatness, and the overall quality and condition of the plants, criteria such as design and creativity also scored high points. The prevalence of clipped hedges (Fig. 10) and "township topiary"¹⁰⁹ (Fig. 11) must have been considered during the adjudication because by then these trends – initially made popular by white gardeners – had become fairly widespread among location gardeners.¹¹⁰ The Committee, chaired by the Assistant Superintendent of Locations Mr R.N. Brits, ensured that everything was in place for the adjudication of gardens scheduled for January and February the following year.¹¹¹

For undisclosed reasons, the adjudication of location gardens scheduled for early 1929 never took place. Cooper lamented the fact that the garden competition, which was originally scheduled for January and February, never materialised "for one reason and another";¹¹² consequently, it had to be postponed. Once again, questions concerning hidden motives remain unanswered. Why was a garden competition scheduled to take place during the time of year when Bloemfontein gardens were not at their best, that is, during the scorching months of high summer? Six months later – in September 1929 – Cooper unexpectedly announced the launch

of yet another new garden competition. Sensing the need to rejuvenate the location residents' interest in gardening, Cooper felt "it was now time that something was done in the matter".¹¹³ The fact that the members of the esteemed NAB were officially informed of this new development, indicates the seriousness with which Cooper approached his new venture. This time Cooper realised that he needed the support of influential community leaders. The NAB was told that the new competition was "ambitious" and that lucrative prizes had been offered for "the best gardens in the locations".¹¹⁴

The Committee, still chaired by Brits and assisted by members of the NAB, was officially tasked with organising the new competition. The Committee was responsible for compiling the competition's rules based on Cooper's "principal points". It was decided that gardeners could enter their gardens in two categories, namely a category for flower or ornamental gardens and a category for vegetable or market gardens. At face value, it appears as though this initiative succeeded in injecting renewed enthusiasm into Batho's gardeners because they reportedly put in extra effort with their spring and early summer gardens. Cooper's efforts certainly paid off in the long term – not only did it revive Batho's gardening culture (at least among the middle-class) but it also boosted the gardening culture in neighbouring Bochabela.¹¹⁵ According to long-time Batho resident, Mogrey Mogaecho (born 1970), the legacy of Cooper's garden competitions lasted well beyond his retirement in 1945 because competitions that were informally organised for residents of specific Batho streets were held annually until the 1980s. Mogaecho remembered that "back in the old days we would compete in the street whose garden was the best".¹¹⁶ This phenomenon underscores the argument that garden competitions contributed significantly to the above-mentioned revival and, importantly, also to the longevity of Batho's gardening culture beyond 1939.

During the late 1930s, the gardening culture in Batho and in Bochabela was about to receive an additional stimulus in the form of yet another garden competition; this time due to developments in Britain. Although the political undercurrents of the volatile 1930s dampened enthusiasm for the British monarchy¹¹⁷ among certain sectors of South African society, the coronation of George VI (1895–1952; Fig. 12) on 12 May 1937 did not fail to capture the imagination of most black and white South

108 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/15, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 30.10.1928, p. 2.

109 For a detailed discussion of "township topiary" in Batho's gardens, see Du Bruyn, 'Township Topiary': The history..., pp. 37-82.

110 *Ibid.*, pp. 63-75.

111 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/15, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 30.10.1928, p. 2.

112 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/17, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 11.9.1929, p. 1.

113 *Ibid.*

114 *Ibid.*

115 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/17, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 11.9.1929, p. 1.

116 National Museum Oral History Collection: Interview conducted by D. du Bruyn with M. Mogaecho, Batho, 9.4.2013.

117 South Africa was a dominion of the British Empire from 1910 to 1961.



Figure 12: Thomas Mapikela presents an address to Prince George, later King George VI, during his visit to Bloemfontein on 28 February 1934. (Source: National Museum, Bloemfontein, NM 01/6881)

Africans.¹¹⁸ Bloemfontein was no exception and the predominantly English-speaking council rose to the occasion. The coronation celebrations organised for Bloemfontein also involved the location residents who, it was felt, had to be pragmatically reminded that they were still subjects of the Crown.¹¹⁹ Subsequently, the council decided to introduce a Coronation Cup for location residents whose stands were in “the best condition as regards cleanliness, upkeep of gardens and appearances and condition generally.”¹²⁰ Council members were so keen on this initiative that they decided to present three Coronation Cups as floating trophies to be awarded annually.¹²¹ Not only did this gesture subtly boost pro-British sentiment in Batho, it also became another important stimulus for Batho’s stagnating gardening culture. In addition to the aggravating effect of the drought conditions mentioned earlier, the stagnation was worsened by the harmful impact of growing economic hardship and rising unemployment among location residents, particularly among the working-class. Added to these are the concomitant negative social trends such as gangsterism, prostitution, alcoholism, and juvenile delinquency which had beset Bloemfontein’s and, in fact, many of the Union’s locations during the 1930s.¹²²

“Trees which they would look upon as their own”:¹²³ Tree-planting competitions in Batho

In addition to garden competitions, tree-planting

competitions were also initiated to bolster Batho’s gardening culture. As early as 1921, the first competition was announced not long after Cooper’s predecessor, Mr G.P. Cook¹²⁴ (dates unknown), urged Batho’s residents to “get their ground ready”¹²⁵ for tree-planting. Councillor Urquhart was asked to adjudicate the competition and to award the prizes (sponsored by the NAC) to the trees that were in the best condition.¹²⁶ Since then, trees were planted on Batho’s sidewalks, in open spaces, and in gardens on an unprecedented scale. However, by the mid-1930s, these efforts had lost steam. The reasons for the waning interest in tree-planting were not specifically mentioned but it is argued that a combination of drought conditions, apathy, and residents failing to see the need for tree-planting, caused the malaise. In an attempt to revive tree-planting, Councillor Gordon Smit suggested a tree-planting competition in August 1936 to encourage residents of Batho and Bochemela “to beautify their homes and the locations by the planting of trees in their gardens”.¹²⁷ By then garden competitions with attractive prizes had proven to be an effective tool to inject renewed enthusiasm for gardening among location residents.

Councillor Smit, who desperately wanted location gardeners to share his passion for trees, argued that tree-planting competitions were the ideal mechanism to inspire local residents to take pride in “their” trees, in other words, “trees which they would look upon as their own”.¹²⁸ Smit’s emphasis on location residents taking ownership of the trees that they had planted by considering them “as their own” is important for an understanding of Batho’s gardening culture in the context of the already-mentioned skewed land ownership policies of that time. On the one hand, Batho’s gardeners were encouraged to take ownership of the trees and plants in their gardens but, on the other hand, the soil in which they grew belonged to the municipality.¹²⁹ The moderate African nationalist and author, R.V. Selope-Thema (1886–1955), illustrated this contradiction by means of an apt metaphor: “Natives in the Free State may be likened to the birds which are at the mercy of the people who own the trees on [sic] which they live. The birds may claim the trees to be their natural homes,

118 For more information, see Schoeman, pp. 264–269.

119 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/28, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 3.3.1937, p. 1; MBL 1/2/4/1/28, Report of Manager of Native Administration Department, January 1937, 12.2.1937, pp. 3–4; *The Friend*, 13.5.1937, p. 6; *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 22.5.1937, p. 5.

120 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/28, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 3.3.1937, p. 1.

121 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/28, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 10.5.1937, p. 1; MBL 1/2/4/1/28, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 3.3.1937, p. 1.

122 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/18, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 9.10.1930, p. 1a; MBL 1/2/4/1/20, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 24.11.1931, pp. 2–5; MBL 1/2/4/1/21, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 23.6.1932, pp. 1–2; MBL 1/2/4/1/23, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 5.12.1933, pp. 2–3; Wepener, p. 85; C. le Roux, The performance of tsotsi gangs and causes leading to their formation in Mangaung, Bloemfontein, 1945–1976, *Journal for Contemporary History* 29(2), September 2004, pp. 43–47; *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 9.1.1932, p. 2; 26.11.1932, p. 2.

123 FSPA: MBL 1/1/1/34, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Town Council, 28.8.1936, p. 453.

124 Cook was Superintendent of Locations from 1917 to 1923. *The Friend*, 27.11.1923, p. 8.

125 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/5, Letter from G.P. Cook, Superintendent of Locations, to G. Golds Esq., Acting Town Clerk, 20.9.1921, p. 2.

126 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/5, Minutes of meeting of Native Affairs Committee, 24.10.1921, p. 3.

127 *The Friend*, 31.8.1936, p. 8.

128 FSPA: MBL 1/1/1/34, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Town Council, 28.8.1936, p. 453.

129 R.V. Selope-Thema, Urban natives’ title to land, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 24.2.1923, p. 4; *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 24.5.1924, p. 2; 29.10.1938, p. 6.

but they have no security. Without their knowledge and consent the trees with their nests can be cut down and destroyed.”¹³⁰ Because location residents were not considered permanent residents of Bloemfontein, they were allowed to own their trees but not the land on which the trees were planted.

Despite Batho’s strong gardening culture, the land ownership issue negatively affected the Batho gardeners’ sense of ownership of the trees in the location. Needless to say, the sense of ownership that Smit encouraged, was undermined by the absence of title deeds to the soil in which the trees grew. Could this be the actual reason why tree-planting efforts lost steam and why the residents’ enthusiasm for tree-planting initiatives waned during the 1930s? Because of a compromised sense of ownership, the trees in the locations were not always looked after. Cooper expressed his concern that many of the trees that had been planted in Batho and Bochabela perished because of neglect. He also criticised his allies, namely the blockmen who, he believed, had to take the lead and “interest themselves in this matter and encourage standholders to water these trees regularly to prevent them dying.”¹³¹ Cooper’s disappointment in them was not devoid of the patronage that so often characterised English-speaking municipal officials’ attitudes to location residents, including community leaders. He wryly reminded the blockmen that “tree planting was a great asset and improved the appearance of the Locations.”¹³² For Cooper, tree-planting was an important part of his ultimate vision of Batho as a garden location and he did not grow weary of reminding and encouraging Batho’s residents to persevere. Despite the indifference which reportedly persisted among some blockmen towards the late 1930s, Cooper could still report to the council that substantial numbers of trees were planted each year to achieve the ultimate goal, namely “to make the location resemble a park”.¹³³

“How to make home life conducive to happiness and moral uplift”:¹³⁴ Home improvement societies and clubs in Batho

During the 1920s and 1930s the social lives of many Batho residents were influenced by the activities of various civil societies, organisations, and social clubs. Most of them were introduced and launched

by “progressive” whites who were concerned about the welfare of location residents. Although most of these societies and clubs were not directly involved in gardening, some of them contributed to the development and strengthening of Batho’s gardening culture, if only indirectly. Societies and clubs that had been active in Batho included the Church Lads’ Brigade, the Independent Order of True Templars (IOTT),¹³⁵ and the Bantu Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). The Pathfinders for black boys and the Wayfarers for black girls catered to the needs of the local school-going youth. These racially segregated organisations were associated with the whites-only Boy Scout and Girl Guide Movements that, among others, stressed the importance of getting to know indigenous plants among learners.¹³⁶ Societies and clubs with religious or semi-religious undertones, such as the YMCA, were overseen by local churches and church leaders. Also noteworthy, is the Bloemfontein Bantu Social Institute (BSI)¹³⁷ that had its own recreation facilities in the Sports section of Batho (Fig. 1). The BSI’s main objective was, to quote the patronising language of that time, “to help the Bantu to devote their leisure time to the best advantage in healthful recreation and good citizenship”.¹³⁸ Needless to say, gardening and tree-planting were activities considered “healthful recreation”. The objectives of the other societies and clubs were similar to that of the BSI’s.

In a leading article, *Umteteli wa Bantu* praised Bloemfontein’s council for providing Batho with, among others, a YMCA building and a recreation hall. Significantly, the paper credited the council and societies such as the YMCA for “teaching the Natives how best to live, how to spend their leisure hours and how to make home life conducive to happiness and moral uplift.”¹³⁹ It is noteworthy that the same patronising language used by white officials and by the white-owned English media, was also adopted by a newspaper with a black readership such as *Umteteli wa Bantu*. Teaching location residents how to spend their leisure hours and how to improve their home life often involved outdoor activities such as gardening.¹⁴⁰ Women’s clubs, including the Bloemfontein Bantu Women’s Club, the Bantu Ladies Club, and the Bloemfontein African Home Improvement Society gave lectures on gardening-related topics such as vegetable gardening and the “food values of

130 R.V. Selope-Thema, Homeless wanderers, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 22.10.1927, p. 3.

131 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/29, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 2.9.1937, p. 2.

132 *Ibid.*

133 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/32, Minutes of ordinary meeting of Native Advisory Board, 8.5.1939, p. 2.

134 *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 16.7.1927, p. 2.

135 For more information, see D. du Bruyn, ‘No liquor for me, I only take tea!’: The story of the Independent Order of True Templars foundation stone in the Batho exhibition, *Culna* 71, November 2016, pp. 10-11.

136 For more details, see T.M. Proctor, “A separate path”: Scouting and Guiding in interwar South Africa, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42(3), July 2000, pp. 605-617.

137 Today known as the Caleb Motshabi Centre situated in African Road.

138 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/27, Report of Manager of Native Administration Department, October 1936: Annexure D, 7.11.1936, p. 1.

139 *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 16.7.1927, p. 2.

140 For arguments concerning the importance of recreation and outdoor activities for location residents, see *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 20.12.1924, p. 2; 10.7.1926, p. 2; *The Friend*, 12.9.1932, p. 4.

vegetables”.¹⁴¹ The Bloemfontein African Home Improvement Society’s secretary was none other than Batho’s garden expert, Ms Moikangoa. The Society’s stated objective was to teach black women “the art of making their homes pleasant and attractive”¹⁴² – a “noble” objective that included gardening.

The women’s clubs counted among their members some influential local white women, including N.J. (Nell) Marquard,¹⁴³ L. (Louise) Marquard,¹⁴⁴ M.H. Ensor, J. Lovius, and E. Earl. Needless to say, these women’s knowledge of a wide range of gardening-related subjects benefited the clubs’ black members.¹⁴⁵ Most church denominations also had their own women’s guilds or Manyanos¹⁴⁶ that involved their members in gardening activities, albeit very elementary. The women’s league of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, which was led by the well-known Batho flower artist and gardener, Emily Mogaecho,¹⁴⁷ (Fig. 13) was particularly active in this regard.¹⁴⁸ With an interest in “Bantu social upliftment”,¹⁴⁹ these women’s clubs considered it important that their members “learn something useful”¹⁵⁰ such as gardening. The common view that gardening was not only “something useful” but also the “ideal form of recreation”,¹⁵¹ points to the fact that many of these societies and clubs intentionally or unintentionally promoted gardening as a moralising and civilising tool among people of colour. An aesthetic relationship to nature was considered a sign of moral progress;¹⁵² a sentiment that was seemingly shared by members of societies and clubs.¹⁵³ Thus, it is argued that Batho’s civil societies and social clubs were influential to the extent that they had played an important role in the development of a gardening culture in Batho.

“Plant in rows 3 feet apart”:¹⁵⁴ Gardening columns and articles

Finally, a discussion of Batho’s gardening culture will be incomplete without referring to the influence of the printed media of that time. Apart from the gardening



Figure 13: Emily Mogaecho standing next to one of her famous flower arrangements, c. 1950s. (Source: Mogaecho Family Private Photographic Collection, Batho)

columns which appeared in *The Friend* during the 1920s and 1930s,¹⁵⁵ Batho’s gardeners also had access to the gardening columns and gardening information published in the widely read *Umteteli wa Bantu*. During the 1920s, the paper published the popular *Farm and Garden* column written at the time by Mr S.G. Butler, who was principal of Tsolo School of Agriculture in the Eastern Cape.¹⁵⁶ Butler’s columns covered a variety of horticultural and agricultural topics, including vegetable gardening and the ever-popular maize patch. A wide range of vegetables were discussed and it was advised that they had to be planted or sown in rows.¹⁵⁷ Concerning the maize patch, readers were instructed to “plant in rows 3

141 *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 26.9.1939, p. 6.

142 FSPA: MBL 1/2/4/1/32, Report of Manager of Native Administration Department, September 1939: Annexures D, E & F, s.a., pp. 10-12.

143 Nell Marquard was the wife of author, history teacher, and philanthropist Leo Marquard (1897–1974). She was an English lecturer and a prominent member of the Liberal Party of South Africa. Anon., *Real South Africans*, *Reality* 13(3), May 1981, p. 2.

144 Louise Marquard was the sister of Leo Marquard. She played a key role in improving child welfare in the Bloemfontein locations. Schoeman, p. 288.

145 *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 25.5.1935, p. 3; 15.6.1935, p. 6; 1.2.1936, p. 5; 26.9.1939, p. 6.

146 A Xhosa word used by several South African black churches to refer to women’s associations.

147 Emily Mogaecho was Mogrey Mogaecho’s grandmother.

148 *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 22.2.1936, p. 3; 12.11.1938, p. 6; D. du Bruyn, The story of a township garden: Mogrey’s family re-collections, *Culna* 68, November 2013, pp. 34-36.

149 *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 22.2.1936, p. 3.

150 *Ibid.*

151 S. Constantine, Amateur gardening and popular recreation in 19th and 20th centuries, *Journal of Social History* 14(3), Spring 1981, p. 389.

152 For more information, see J. Wolschke-Bulmahn, Ethics and morality: Questions in the history of garden and landscape design: A preliminary essay, *Journal of Garden History* 14(3), 1994, p. 140.

153 For more information on gardening as a moralising and civilising tool in the South African context, see Du Bruyn, Gardens, gardening culture and..., pp. 209-210.

154 S.G. Butler, Farm and Garden: December practice, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 27.11.1926, p. 4.

155 For more information, see Du Bruyn, Gardens, gardening culture and..., pp. 247-248.

156 Anon., Tsolo – where the Bantu farmers of the future are trained, *Bantu* 4, April 1957, pp. 23-26; *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 16.7.1927, p. 4.

157 S.G. Butler, Farm and Garden: January practice, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 25.12.1926, pp. 3-4; S.G. Butler, Farm and Garden: February practice, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 19.2.1927, p. 4.

feet apart with the seeds at least 12 inches apart in rows".¹⁵⁸ The general tendency of moving away from the traditional broadcasting of seed to the planting or sowing of seed in rows was reinforced among black gardeners through these and other gardening columns in publications. The influence of the renowned Tsolo School of Agriculture was not limited to students of this institution; instead, it reached far beyond, including Bloemfontein's locations.

Apart from gardening columns, *Umteteli wa Bantu* also published a variety of gardening articles, many of which were written by people of colour. A range of topics was covered such as planting a backyard kitchen garden and reserving a separate flowerbed in the front garden for growing flowers which were meant for cutting. The gardening articles emphasised a formal garden layout by advising gardeners to plant seed in rows and at equal intervals in rectangular or square beds.¹⁵⁹ Considering the extent of *Umteteli wa Bantu's* readership, it is argued that the gardening columns and articles contributed to the development of a gardening culture in the locations, including in Batho where the paper was widely read.¹⁶⁰ Accordingly, it is debated that the gardening columns and articles also served as barometers of the general state of black people's gardening culture, considering the type of information published. Could this be an indication of the level of sophistication that was achieved in some black gardening circles during that time? Articles such as "Hints on cutting flowers"¹⁶¹ and "How to treat flowers"¹⁶² were not uncommon. Most insightful is a statement made by E.W. Msimang, one of *Umteteli wa Bantu's* revered garden writers, in a gardening article published in 1939: "the African woman has reached a stage when she realises the part played by the flower garden in improving the aspect of her premises."¹⁶³

CONCLUSION

The embryonic gardening culture that was transferred from Waaihoek to Batho when Bloemfontein's black and coloured residents were relocated there, provided the impetus for a much stronger gardening culture to emerge and further develop in the new location. Batho was conceived and laid out as a model location with an exemplary layout, better houses, and individual stands big enough for the laying out of gardens. Owing to the many ornamental and vegetable gardens that were subsequently laid out and the copious numbers of trees that were planted in Batho, it soon developed into a garden location. The garden location concept was popularised by

the Garden City Movement and other British town planning ideals that strongly influenced location planning in South Africa during the 1920s and 1930s. Because Bloemfontein was mainly an English-speaking city with a predominantly English-speaking municipality and council, English gardening culture and garden style strongly influenced Batho's gardens and gardening culture.

During the 1920s and 1930s Batho's gardening culture steadily developed and later flourished as a result of both the Batho residents' own attempts to lay out gardens and the initiatives taken by influential white municipal officials and other individuals. The 1920s, which is considered the first stage in developing Batho's gardening culture, was typified by a healthy competition spirit among residents, especially among Batho's middle-class as personified by people such as Mapikela and Moikangoa. Residents were eager to lay out attractive gardens that not only complemented their new houses but also compared favourably with the gardens of other location residents. Reportedly, there was a general feeling of "responsibility" for Batho's beautification among residents. During the second stage in developing Batho's gardening culture, that is, during the late 1920s to the late 1930s, the municipality's efforts and initiatives to revive and sustain Batho's stagnating gardening culture predominated. These efforts and initiatives included garden and tree-planting competitions; the founding of a Garden Committee; the allocation of allotment gardens; the establishment of a fresh-produce market; and the use of societies and clubs as vehicles to promote gardening and a gardening culture in Batho.

It is critical that the municipality's efforts to develop a gardening culture in Batho should be viewed in the context of the Union government's segregationist ideology and policies of the 1920s and 1930s. Although the municipality's initiatives and efforts were seemingly well-intended, they were undermined by suspected ulterior motives such as the use of the "sanitation syndrome" as an excuse to create a "sanitary" and "healthy" location to justify territorial segregation. Added to these, were the municipal officials' fears that Batho's residents would swamp the city's whites-only parks and squares; the use of gardening and a gardening culture as tools to depoliticise Batho's residents and to focus their attention on a "noble" and "worthy" pastime such as gardening; and some white councillors' personal prestige and egotism. Therefore, the question is raised as to whose interests were best served by

158 S.G. Butler, Farm and Garden: December practice, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 27.11.1926, p. 4.

159 G.G. Copiso, Vegetable gardening, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 29.10.1938, p. 10.

160 Plaatje, Natives in urban areas..., p. 4.

161 *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 8.10.1938, p. 10.

162 *Ibid.*, 8.7.1939, pp. 6, 11.

163 E.W. Msimang, Flowers in winter and spring: Some timely hints, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 25.3.1939, p. 7.

the gardening culture initiatives and who benefited most from these. It is argued that the municipality's primary motivation to develop a gardening culture in Batho was to justify territorial segregation and to soften its effects by reasoning that an exemplary model location was provided for Bloemfontein's people of colour.

Finally, it is argued that the municipality's efforts to develop a gardening culture in Batho were fairly "successful", provided that they are viewed at face value and within the context of the cultural-historical timeframe in question, that is, from 1918 to 1939. The "success" that was achieved should be attributed not only to efforts made by Cooper and his colleagues but also to the support of the NAB members, blockmen, and location residents. During the 1920s and 1930s, Batho was indeed a model location in comparison with other locations in the Union but not in comparison with Bloemfontein's white areas. Batho was considered a national example and it became a blueprint for other municipalities

in location planning, layout, and, importantly, how to create an aesthetically pleasing environment. Ultimately, this was achieved by means of laying out gardens and the development of a gardening culture. Consequently, Batho became known for its English-style ornamental gardens with clipped hedges and topiary, as well as the trees planted on sidewalks and in gardens. However, the municipality's "success" must also be measured against the sustainability of its initiatives, specifically towards the end of the 1930s. In addition to the already-mentioned detrimental factors, others such as periodic droughts; inadequate water supply; general apathy among blockmen and residents; discriminatory segregation policies; and the prohibition of land ownership for people of colour also undermined the municipality's efforts to develop and sustain a gardening culture in Batho. When the War broke out, a combination of all these factors and the crippling socio-economic conditions in Batho ended its gardening "golden age" but, ultimately, its gardening culture endured beyond 1939.

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