

Early Pretoria

In the 1830's, Voortrekkers, mainly farmers, came to settle north of the Vaal River where they laid claim to the land, set up a Boer Republic, and occupied sites that developed into towns - among them Potchefstroom, Klerksdorp, Lydenburg, Rustenburg and Pretoria. Those who settled in and around Pretoria lived in close proximity to Ndebele villages north of the Magaliesberg and to Tswana and Northern Sotho groups in the Moot and in the area that would become the city centre. The Boers took up farming along the Apies River, employed African people from the surrounding area and provided accommodation for their workers on their farms and homesteads.

As the Trekkers did not want African people among them as neighbours, the Boer Republic of the Transvaal passed legislation to keep Africans out or to segregate them, and until after the Anglo-Boer War, African women were not allowed into urban areas. Such regulations contradicted the need for African labour especially after the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand and during the two world wars. Efforts to limit entry of African people to labour only, being unpractical, were undermined by the provision of temporary accommodation in compounds and hostels and the development of informal settlements. Eventually, townships such as Bantule, Skoolplaats and Marabastad were proclaimed for African people. But the need for African labour, on the one hand, and the desire for segregation, on the other, continued to create confusion and led to onerous and incongruous regulations to control and restrict the movement of the indigenous population.

When Indians and Coloureds arrived in Pretoria, they were subjected to similar controls.

Many Indians, following developments in the mining industry, began arriving in the Pretoria area from the 1870's. Most were traders and settled in the Prinsloo Street area and in the east around what is now Esselen Street. As their numbers increased, restrictions began to be placed on their mobility, their access to trade and the acquisition of land. Eventually, in 1892-3, the Coolie Location, adjacent to Marabastad, was proclaimed for Indians and those living in the town were expected to relocate. The traders in Prinsloo Street and Hercules resisted the move and remained where they were until the Group Areas Board forced them out of their residences in the 1960s and '70s

Coloureds from the Cape, who began to arrive in the Pretoria area from about 1884, owned or rented property in central Pretoria. When white residents complained, a location for Coloureds was proclaimed in 1899. The Cape Boys Location occupied three streets of the Asiatic Bazaar from Bloed to Struben Streets and Coloured people lived under similar restrictions and controls as Indian people.

In all, there were three locations in the Marabastad area: The Cape Boys Location, The Coolie Location (later the Asiatic Bazaar) and Marabastad for African people. Though they were separate, they were all part of one settlement generally known as Marabastad.