

1014
Maverley, Primrose Avenue, Wynberg,
Cape Town 7800.

21st September, 1990.

The City Administrator,
Civic Centre,
Cape Town 8000.

Dear Sir,

The Possibility of an Additional Commemorative Plaque
at Maynardville Open Air Theatre

Thank you for the courtesy of allowing me to approach you on behalf of the Former Athlone Nursery School Committee with regard to the early history of the Maynardville property, its acquisition by the Cape Town City Council in 1949, and the very first inaugural events that were arranged there.

At that time, the retiring Headmistress of the Lady Buxton Nursery School and Teachers' Training College urged the mothers whose children had the privilege of attending the school, to try to establish similar institutions for the Coloured Community, as there was no such provision. A Committee chaired by the Late Mrs. Peter Molteno, dedicated itself to doing just this, and approached the Mayor, the Late Mr. Abe Bloembergen, who generously gave the free use of Maynardville for fund-raising events for this worthy cause. He explained that although the Council had acquired the property, no funds had yet been allocated on the year's estimates for clearing the wildly overgrown garden. This was no obstacle to the Committee, who, with willing helpers, weeded the Oleander Walk, and cut a clearing for an improvised stage.

Dr. Dulcie Howes was approached, also the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra, and they gave their services with great enthusiasm. Thus it was that in 1950 the very first public event took place at Maynardville, followed by subsequent ballet productions in 1951 and 1952. The artist, John Dronsfeld designed the programme logo, still used today and the various performances with forty members of the Orchestra were conducted by Dr. Eric Chisholm, Enrique Jorda and Frits Schuurman.

The Press - The Cape Times, The Argus and Die Burger, were ecstatic in their praise and all urged that this "magical" setting be recognised as an outstanding Open Air Theatre for the citizens of Cape Town. The Athlone Nursery School Committee were distressed when they learnt that the charming, though dilapidated homestead had been demolished, instead of being restored, but, in consultation with the City Councillors, were able to dissuade them from the idea of building a "Hollywood Bowl" which was being considered, and at all costs, to retain the lovely sylvan grounds and keep them as natural as possible. Happily The City Council has done this, and preserved the essential beauty of this unique property.

City Administrator

From: Mrs. Ann Harris

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It is hoped to be able to pay a tribute to this early history which links the founding of the Maynardville Open Air Theatre with the establishment of the extension of Nursery School Education to the wider community in our City. Your Council, The U.C.T. Ballet School, the C.T.S.O. and the Athlone Nursery School Committee all contributed to the joint success of both the establishment of the Theatre and the provision of Nursery School Education and Training for the Coloured community. The latter, in fact has been such a success, that it has been fully incorporated into the Education Department and recently celebrated its Fortieth Anniversary. A second school, the Blouvtel, has been set up in Retreat.

At the moment there is a plaque at the gates of Maynardville commemorating the founding of the Shakespeare Theatre in 1956 - also a meritorious achievement - but the Former Athlone Nursery School Committee feels that an additional plaque mentioning the earlier ballet productions held there from 1950 onwards, could suitably commemorate the actual inaugural events that took place. We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss the idea of an additional plaque with you and your colleagues, and we are hopeful that the suggestion will receive your favourable consideration. We shall look forward to hearing from you at your convenience, and we trust that you will not hesitate to let us know if there is any further information you might require, or indeed any assistance that we might give.

Yours faithfully,

Ann Harris

Mrs. Ann Harris,

Devon,
Devon Road, Claremont 7700.

29th October, 1960.

His Worship The Mayor,
Alderman Gordon Oliver,
Civic Centre,
Cape Town 8001.

Dear Mr. Oliver,

I would be very grateful if you would spare the time in your busy life to give the following matter your attention.

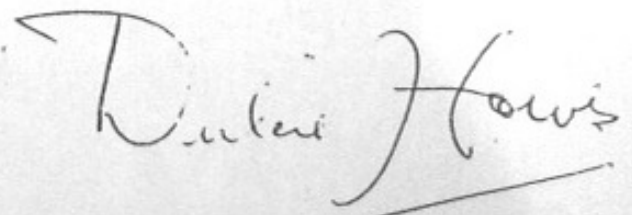
The former Athlone Nursery School Committee has drawn my attention to the fact that there is no recognition of their initiative in being the first to recognise and make use of Maynardville as an open air theatre in 1950. They approached me in 1949 when your Council had acquired the Maynardville property and asked that the University Ballet present a programme to establish the idea of an open air theatre for all the citizens of Cape Town, and at the same time, to raise funds for another first - the establishment of a Coloured Nursery School and Training College for Coloured Nursery School Teachers in Athlone. Both ideas had an immediate appeal for me. I was dedicated to expanding our world of ballet, and I likewise have always done everything in my power to bring ballet to all sections of our community.

Thus it was, that the University Ballet School together with the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra, gave their services, waiving all fees, and performed annually at Maynardville for three years, 1950, 1951 and 1952. The entire proceeds of these performances were donated to establish the first Coloured Nursery School and Teachers' Training College in Cape Town. Maynardville was accepted by enthusiastic audiences of all sections of our community (at a time when few venues were open to integrated audiences) and by the Press as an exciting facility for our City.

I am aware that a plaque exists which gives credit to the valuable work of the Shakespearean productions from 1956 to the present day, but I feel that in order to correct the history of the Open-Air Maynardville Theatre, some recognition should be given to the initiative of the Athlone Nursery School Committee, the University Ballet School, and the Municipal Orchestra, by means of an additional plaque giving the correct date of the opening of the Maynardville Open-Air Theatre. The U.B.S. Ballet School continued to perform annually at this venue from 1953 to 1959 to large and appreciative audiences.

With my continuing admiration for your leadership and courage,

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Dulcie Harris.

Waverley
Primrose Avenue
WYNBERG
7800

30 September 1992

The City Administrator
Civic Centre
CAPE TOWN
8001

Dear Mr De Villiers

Thank you for your letter of 29/9/92 just received re the "Maynardville plaque".

As you already know, members of the Athlone Nursery School Committee feel strongly that there is no controversy or conflict in this matter. The introduction of Shakespeare productions at Maynardville in 1956 was indeed splendid and meritworthy. However, there is no doubt whatsoever that the opening event at Maynardville, launching it as an Open Air Theatre for all members of the community, took place in 1950, with a superb production of ballet by the University of Cape Town Ballet School, directed by Dr Dulcie Howes and accompanied by the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra. This was made possible by your Municipal Council and was acclaimed by the Press. It was organised by our Committee.

Your Council has approved recognition of these facts and I would appreciate it if, without delay, you would be kind enough to send me a copy of Mrs Sonnenberg's objection, so as to enable me to immediately forward a counter objection to her objection, and thus bring this matter to finality. Should you require any further information, I will be happy to send you copies of all correspondence and Press reports.

Yours truly

Ann Harris.

ANN HARRIS

"Waverley"
Primrose Avenue
WYNBERG
7800

21 May 1993

The Mayor of Cape Town
Civic Centre
Foreshore
CAPE TOWN
8001

Dear Alderman van der Velde

The Athlone Nursery School Committee would like to place on record our deep gratitude to you, as our first citizen, the members of your Council, as well as your municipal colleagues, for your recognition of the founding of Maynardville as an open air theatre for all our citizens in 1950. This notable event came about as a result of the retiring Principal of the Buxton Nursery School appealing to parents whose children were privileged to attend the school, to establish teacher training and nursery school education, for people of colour, there being no such facilities in South Africa at that time.

With this in mind, the Athlone Nursery School Committee was formed. The first move was to approach the Mayor of Cape Town for the use of the newly acquired Maynardville property as an open air theatre for ballet presentations to raise the required funds for this project. This request was generously agreed to. The next move was to approach Dr Dulcie Howes to provide the ballets. Her wellknown dedication, not only to ballet as such, but to bringing ballet to the townships, as well as her dynamic leadership in this field, prompted her to accept with enthusiasm. Your Council also kindly gave us the free use of the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra and John Dronsfield designed the programme logo, still used by ~~CAPAB~~ today.

cover

U.C.T. Ballet School

The inaugural and subsequent productions were a spectacular success in that beautiful setting, the Press published ecstatic reports and proclaimed Maynardville as an outstanding asset not only to Cape Town, but to South Africa, as an Open Air Theatre and all citizens, without any restrictions were welcome.

With the funds raised in this way, the first Teacher Training course and Nursery School for people of colour was established, and rapidly grew from strength to strength, being followed by the establishment of a second school, called Blouvillei. These schools were subsequently absorbed by the Education Department as a fully operative part of our education system and the Athlone Nursery School became a pre-primary school.

We feel that these developments are part of the pride of our city's dedication to service to the community, and thank you for your much appreciated assistance in this matter. We are grateful for the plaque commemorating these facts, and know that it records a milestone in the history of our beloved city.

With our renewed thanks and appreciation.

Regards,

Ann Haines
Original signed by members of the Athlone
Nursery School Committee: - Dulcie Cooper (nee Jo
Drethorn) Margaret Mackenzie, Jean Burnett
Lorna Thompson, Rosemary Liebman.
Also Dr. Dulcie Haines.

cc. The Deputy Mayor, Alderman Clive Keegan
Alderman Richard Friedlander
The former Mayor of Cape Town, Alderman Gordon Oliver
Municipal Administration Officials:

Mr D De Villiers
Mr Brian Schreiber

The Cape Town Municipal Orchestra
Dr Dulcie Howes - University Ballet School and CAPAB
The Principal The Sally Davis School (formerly the Athlone
Nursery School)

GORDON R. OLIVER

Alderman of the City of Cape Town
Mayor of Cape Town - 1989 to 1991

Telephone 021- 712 6362
e-mail: gordonroliver@metroweb.co.za

23 Edgware Road
Diep River 7800
Cape Town

4th June 2009

To Councillor Owen Kinahan

Dear Owen,

Commemorative Plaque : Maynardville Open Air Theatre, Wynberg

I've been approached by Ms Victoria Cawood, General Manager of Fine Music Radio, with regard to a memorial plaque being placed at the Maynardville Open Air Theatre.

During my mayoral term and that of Frank van der Velde, this matter was under discussion, but unfortunately nothing has come of it. I thought I'd approach you in the light of your longstanding leading role in preserving the City's heritage, to see whether you could help this matter come to fruition.

There are actually two memorial plaques at Maynardville and I recently went to see for myself what was being commemorated by these plaques. Both, one at the main entrance gate on Church Street and another, a smaller one at the entrance to the theatre itself, pay tribute to Celia Sonnenberg and Rene Ahrenson, for their work in founding of the Maynardville Shakespearian theatre. There is nothing to commemorate the founding of the Ballet theatre.

Here, enclosed, are copies of correspondence relating to the work done by the Athlone Nursery School Committee and the late Dr Dulcie Howes in the context of the earlier and inaugural ballet productions held there from 1950.

May I ask you therefore to take this up so that due recognition can be given to this very notable aspect of Cape Town's cultural heritage. I'd greatly appreciate that.

With warm regards and every good wish,

Sincerely,