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C I T Y O F J O H A N N E S B U R G

Brief History of the Development of its

system of Government.

Compiled by the
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On 8th September, 1886, Paul Kruger, President of the Transvaal Republic, signed a proclamation declaring several farms, including Randjeslaagte, on the Witwatersrand ("Ridge of White Waters") public gold diggings. The biggest gold rush in history began to what was until then a piece of bare veld and rocky outcrop.

In the next four months the township of Johannesburg was established on Randjeslaagte and the population had grown from 100 to 3,000. The proclamation in respect of Randjeslaagte came into operation on 4th October, 1886, and that date is now celebrated as the city's birthday. However, only a year later no one was certain after whom the town was named; four men with the name Johannes was associated with its establishment.

The government of Johannesburg started two months after President Kruger's proclamation and took the form of a Diggers' Committee of nine under the chairmanship of the Mining Commissioner. A year later this committee was replaced by the Gezondheids Comité (Sanitary Board) headed by the Commissioner and made up of five elected members and two Government nominees. Two years later this body was reconstituted to consist of twelve elected members under the chairmanship of a Government Commissioner and its area of jurisdiction was five square miles.

A Town Council was constituted in December 1897 and governed the town for two years. The Council consisted of twelve elected members, with a Burgomaster appointed by the Government. The area was now nine square miles. The Council was given powers to make regulations in regard to safety, public order, morality and health.

On 12th October, 1899, the Republic and England were at war and seven months later the British forces occupied Johannesburg. The town became an "Imperial Government Municipality" and the Military Governor was assisted by an Acting Mayor who had to administer municipal affairs, until it was possible to establish a civil form of local government.

This happened in 1901 when Lord Alfred Milner became Administrator of the Transvaal and invited twelve prominent citizens to serve as town councillors until such time as proper elections could be held.

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As town clerk was appointed Lionel Curtis, to whom more than anyone else Johannesburg owes its tradition of sound local government and efficient administration. He worked hard to set up the organisation of a municipal undertaking with wider functions than had been hitherto granted and based on the Anglo-Saxon model, i.e. elected councillors and a mayor, as opposed to the Continental model of appointed (or partially appointed) councillors and an appointed burgomaster. Standing committees were established, weekly meetings were held in public, a finance committee made obligatory and powers granted to borrow money. At the same time, the municipal area was increased to 83 square miles.

In 1903, the first proper town council was elected for three years and consisted of 30 councillors who elected their own mayor and deputy mayor. At this stage the population was 109,452 and the total rateable value almost R73-million. The new Council tackled several large projects in order to keep pace with the demands of the fast growing town, and in three years spent R7-million on capital projects.

In 1905, provision was made for the holding of municipal elections on the ward system. This system prevailed until 1909, when the Transvaal Government applied the principle of proportional representation (single transferable vote) to the municipalities of Johannesburg and Pretoria. A further period of experiment then followed until 1918, when proportional representation was finally abandoned in favour of the single-majority system. The municipality was divided into twelve wards, each returning three members (the number of members had been increased to 36 in 1915).

To-day there are 42 councillors, each representing one ward and elected for five years at quinquennial general elections. A mayor and deputy-mayor are elected annually by and from the councillors. In the meantime, in 1928, the town had been granted city status.

Major changes in the local government system in the Transvaal were brought about in 1961 by the Local Government (Administration and Elections) Ordinance, 1960. The main change was the establishment

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of a Management Committee with fairly wide powers delegated to it by the Council and which is directly responsible to the Council for the good government of the municipality.

In Johannesburg there are five members of this Management Committee appointed for a five-year period. In view of its size, Johannesburg was allowed to have four main other committees, namely Works and Traffic, Non-European Affairs, Health and Amenities and Utilities. These committees direct the policy of certain departments, as shown on the attached diagram. They may dispose of various matters but the majority of their decisions are submitted to the Management Committee from where, if necessary, they go to the Council.

The position of the Town Clerk was also fundamentally altered in 1961. He is now the chief official of the municipality and head of the service as a whole. One of his main functions is responsibility to the Management Committee for the co-ordination of the activities of the Council's twenty departments. In his task he is assisted by the Technical Committee and the Departmental Committee, both composed of senior officials. The Council is served by about 28,000 employees.

By 1967 the population of Johannesburg had grown to 1,327,352, its net rateable value to R1,149,961,018, and the municipal area covers 94.46 square miles.