

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE THE VICTORIA STREET MARKET



Introduction

The site on which the present day Victoria St Market was rebuilt , was that of the “Original Indian Market “ that was built Town Council in 1910 which was eventually gutted by fire in 1973. Prior to this major event, the history of the fight and struggle to keep the market a multi-racial and unrestricted place of trade stems from the arrival of Indian people labourers to south Africa in 1860 where approximately 152,641 people came to the Natal Colony as indentured labourers working on the sugar cane fields .



Indentured labourers working on the sugar cane fields

Upon expiration of their 5 year contracts, a few renewed their indenture and some returned to India but almost 60% decided to make their permanent residency in South Africa around the 1870s. This trend was also followed by families of entrepreneurs, known as passenger Indians who independently funded and established themselves locally as traders. Around 1884 some 20,877 free Indians had made their homes in Natal. These Indian people employed market gardening and fishing as a means of making a living

By 1885 around 2000 were labouring on lands in and around Natal, Some had established thriving businesses by being the cheapest suppliers of fresh produce whilst others led a hand to mouth existence therefore trading in Natal was a crucial factor to their economic survival.



What were their sentiments, motivations, values and activities?

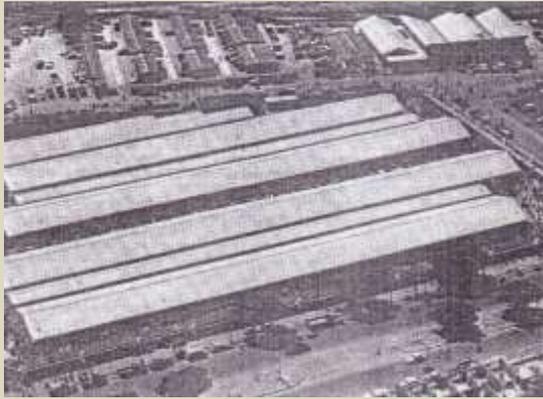
Around this time an open air street market was developed by the Durban City Council in Victoria Street extending from Grey Street to Brooke Street and the corner of Cemetery Lane. This market was the trading hub for around 2000 sellers whom majority were market gardeners that lined both ends of the street in carts selling mainly staple vegetables in baskets and barrows. These traders used to arrive each evening around 20:00pm and spent the night sleeping under their carts before trading began at 04:00am the next day.



Traders selling their wares in Victoria Street

According to the trading restrictions from the Council, trading ceased at 09:00 on weekdays and 10:30 on Saturdays. 30 minutes later a municipal water cart moved down the street to wash it down. This market came to be known as the “Squatters Market” as many traders squatted cross-legged in the street alongside their goods. Grey street developed into an established Indian business district but the white people saw the traders as a public nuisance as the streets were covered in rotting vegetables and leaves and schism developed between the Hindu and Muslim farmers which resulted in the Hindu group organising a Market Committee to meet with the council to request a separate market for their exclusive use. This resulted in the city council moving the squatters market to Warwick Avenue as the Council considered the market a lucrative industry to the economy of Natal. The Warwick early morning market was therefore established on the 1st February 1934, while the original Victoria Street Market, better known as the Indian Market, or the Stallholders’ Market, became an outlet for more diversified goods.

At around the same time the Council reconsidered the location of the Borough Market in the central CBD as its facilities, over time, had become congested and the availability of a railway siding in Berea Road Station had made the relocation more suitable, as a result a new bulk sales hall was opened south of the early morning market on the 1st October 1935. This fine brick building stood in stark contrast to the Early Morning Market, which was housed in a rudimentary, open-sided structure with concrete tables and few amenities. Access to the area was originally limited to a bridge which crossed over the railway line at Theatre Road, and was probably built before 1910, but this was improved in about 1931 with the construction a road bridge over the railway line at Victoria Street, and the development of a boulevard in 1933 linking Warwick to Old Dutch Road.



The Early Morning Market and Bulk sales Hall in Warwick Avenue and the Victoria Street Bridge

By the 1960s, the Victoria Street Market was a bustling place selling a variety of merchandise ranging from foodstuff to curios. There were nearly two hundred food stalls which included groceries such as rice, tinned and packaged foods, spices as well as cooked food and sweetmeats. The Indian market was for many years one of Durban's main tourist attractions. Saturday was the busiest day with the number of visitors at times reaching up to 60 000. This led to the envy of the European business in the CBD as the market was seen as a serious competitor. Nevertheless, it came under increasing pressure from the municipality, which under the pretext of health and safety measures was continually able to control the Indian market.



How did the Victoria Street Market Evolve from its origins till today?



The Victoria Street Market Prior and Post 1973

Around 1957 a series of events developed that consequently owed to the establishing of the Victoria Street Market as we know it today.

The Chief Officer of the Fire Department Mr H Kenchenten reported that the Indian Market, with its overstocking, bad storage and congestion was one of the worst fire hazards in the city. He suggested that, as an emergency measure, no cooking and fires be allowed inside the market and that the electrical wiring system be investigated. He also proposed a reduction in the number of stallholders and stock and the removal of all unnecessary combustible material and passage way between stalls widened. In addition, the City Engineer's Department proposed the demolition of the Indian Market in order to build a freeway.

In 1964 there were complaint of alleged cruelty to livestock and poultry in the Indian market reported to the SPCA by the Market Supervisor. Therefore stallholders who kept livestock had to provide proper pens and clearly label the number of birds kept to ensure no overcrowding of the animals.

On 31st December 1967 The Medical Officer of Health Dr C.R. Mckenzie supported recommendations, had investigated health conditions at the market came to the conclusion that 43 of the 270 stalls that sold foodstuffs were a definite health hazard and warning that conditions in the Indian Market were ideal for food poisoning therefore recommended that they be closed by 31 March 1966. However, in February 1966 the municipality decided that it would only close nine of the stalls and renew the licences of the others provided the stallholders agreed to abide by the by-laws controlling kiosks. At around the same time the City Engineers Department proposed the building of a freeway to reduce Durban's traffic congestion, which would result in the demolition of the Indian Market.

In 1957 the traffic plan for Durban which meant that The Indian Market was threaten with destruction to make way for the Western Freeway which could have been easily avoided if the freeway had been risen on stilts. However during 1967 and 1968 the City Council tried many ways to evict the stallholders and that led to the stallholders creating the 'Stallholders Deputation' that petitioned and held a meeting with the Mayor Mrs Magaret Mytom and addressed before the City Council led by Ashwin Choudree a member of the Stallholders Deputation that by destroying the market to build the freeway would threaten the livelihood of 269 stallholders as well as 1076 workers will be left without jobs, many families would suffer. The outcome was promising but sadly

only for a short period. The Trading Undertaking Committee agreed to allow the stallholders in the Indian Market to trade until a new market was built and stallholders could trade but under strict supervision this was finally approved on the 31st December but unfortunately rejected through the influences of the City Engineer Mr C.G. Hands who said the City Council had no obligation to the Indian Market.

On 20 February 1968 the City Council and the Deputy Mayor D.W. Watterson passed a recommendation of the Finance Committee that tenancies of trading at the Indian Market would not be transferred to deceased estates or to the heirs of deceased stallholders. The heirs were allowed seven days to wind up business and dispose of stocks. The City Council also regularly increased the rent for the stalls, forcing some stallholders to close down.

The City Councils Trading Undertaking Committee set up by the council recommended by Mr E.R. Irvine (Chairman of the Town Clerk) in February 1971 that the market be moved to Chatsworth. The Durban Indian Market Stallholders Association submitted a memorandum to the City Council expressing strong opposition to this recommendation. The Council then decided that the Indian Market would be rebuilt on the adjacent land on which the African Market and the Durban Home for Men were situated. The Durban City Council argued that it was not the responsibility of ratepayers to subsidise commercial undertakings and that private enterprise should take responsibility for the building of the market. However, since the Grey Street area was a "controlled area" in terms of the Group Areas Act (i.e. it has not been proclaimed as a group area for any racial group and so ownership and development of property was regulated by the Group Areas Act) a permit had to be obtained from the Minister of Planning before any development could take place in the area. The Minister of Planning Mr J.J. Loots rejected the Council's plan to allow a consortium of Indian stallholders to rebuild the market in Victoria Street. The South African Indian Council argued that the task of building a new market was too big for the stallholders and that the City Council should take responsibility for building and financing the new market.

After prolonged deliberation between the Stallholders Association and the City Council an agreement was reached that the notice of eviction would not be served on the stallholders before 31 March 1973. However, on the evening of Friday March 16th 1973, a fire that started at 8:45pm destroyed the Indian market. As the market burned, fireworks exploded in all directions and green flames from melting copper flared upwards. By 9:45pm the roof of the building collapsed. Two-thirds of the stalls between Cemetery lane and Queen Street were completely destroyed. The flames could be seen from the beachfront, the Berea, Yellowwood Park and some areas twenty kilometres away. It took eight fire engines and thirty five firemen to extinguish the blaze, the Police and men from the Natal Command Citizen Force were brought in to control the hysterical crowd, Mr and Mrs Naidoo who owned a pet shop in the market were devastated as they stood helplessly pleading to the firemen to save their birds but sadly many birds and small animals were burnt alive. The fire caused much havoc as the adjoining Naran building burnt down leaving families homeless. Only the meat, poultry and fish sections weren't badly damaged. All the curio and provision stalls were destroyed with millions of Rands worth of trinkets, curios and rare antiques as stalls had been packed to capacity in anticipation of Saturday's trading. The destruction of the market resulted in hundreds of people facing unemployment, stallholders and workers could not afford to buy basic essentials and pay for rent, transport, furniture and many other expenses. The relief fund from many organisations did help the destitute Market people.



After the remaining stock of fish and meat was sold in the undamaged area, the market was officially closed. Due to the stallholders losing almost everything in the fire, the Mayor of Durban Mr Ron Williams launched a relief fund on 20th March 1973. The committees, businesses and organisations who donated are as follows:

- *The Executive member of the South African Indian Committee (S.A.I.C) Dr M.B. Naidoo*
- *Secretary of the Indian Benevolent Society Mr I.C Limbada*
- *Secretary of the Indian Market Stallholders Associations Mr R.J Naran*
- *Municipal official Mr A.Gooden*
- *the Market Master Mr B.J. Johnson*
- *The Helping Hands Society Dr K.Goonam*
- *Mr Ramal Singh of the Admiral Hotel*
- *Packo(Pty) Ltd*
- *Glenton and Mitchell (Pty) Ltd*
- *the South African Teachers Association*

Funds over R39, 000.00 were raised and paid out to stallholders and dependents and helped 313 families. The Mayor's relief fund was closed on December 1973.



The demolition of the burnt market began on Saturday 24th March. The next step was to build a new market but sadly that was not the Council's concern, a few "reasons" were as follows:

- *The former site was a high crime area according to the District Commandant of the South African Police.*
- *Not enough funds to rebuild.*
- *The Western Freeway plans to pass through the Market site were in place and stallholders were given six years notice.*

Supporting the call for the rebuilding of the Indian Market included the Muslim community, the South African Indian Committee (S.A.I.C), the Action Committee of Fourteen leading Durban Indians and the Trade Unionist included: the committee was headed by Fatima Meer and comprised of The Action 14:

- *Dr Arusah Singh,*
- *Dr K. Goonam,*
- *Mrs Harriet Bolton,*
- *R.S Naidoo,*
- *M Moolla,*
- *M Sultan,*
- *L. Nelson,*
- *H.H. Dhupelia,*
- *Dr K Ginwala,*
- *D Moodliar,*
- *N.G.Moodley,*
- *Dhanpal Naidoo,*
- *Dharma Nair*
- *J.T. Bhoola.*

The City councils decision not to restore the market led to a meeting organized by the Durban Indian Market Stallholders Associations at the M.L Sultan Technical College on Saturday 31st March 1973 which included the Action committee however resulted very negatively. The council's attitude showed a lack of concern for the welfare of thousands from the destruction of the market as well as racism due to the fact that the market was one of the biggest Tourist attractions in Durban which in turn was brought in revenue in to the economy and finally Indian were rejected by the United Party Controlled City Council.

However Indians turned to the Nationalist Government for help. On 5th April 1973 the Chairman of the (S.A.I.C) Mr J.N. Reddy met with the Minister of Indian Affairs Senator Owen Horwood in Cape Town to discuss the plight of the many people who suffered financially, describing their struggles after the market was destroyed and how the market had become an essential amenity which served the city. On the same day in Durban the Mayor met with five members of the Action Committee representing the Indian Market Stallholders. The meeting was also attended by Councillor Mr Rauol Goldman (former Mayor), Mr Dixy Adams (Deputy Mayor) as well as heads of the Corporation Departments which included C.G Hands the city Engineer and O.D Gorven the city Treasurer. The meeting was held at the Mayor's parlour, while on the steps of City Hall 200 Indians people including the stallholders and the employees staged a silent protest, some holding up signs that read 'GIVE US OUR DAILY BREAD' and 'WHERE DO WE GET OUR MONEY TO BUY OUR DAILY FOOD'.

The outcome of the two meetings taking place in Cape Town and Durban brought upon another meeting however this time was different as it was arranged by the Minister of Indian Affairs, the Mayor of Durban and the Minister of Development A.H Du Plessis held in Cape Town the next day. The outcome led to finding solutions and building a temporary facility. The Minister of Indian Affairs went on to form a joint committee comprising of one representative from each of the department of Indian Affairs and Community Development, the Durban City council and the South African Indian Committee. The joint committee was under the chairmanship of J.H.Van Eyssen regional representation of the Department of Indian Affairs for Natal. The primary objective was to find a solution.

The Natal Indian Congress(N.I.C) supported the rebuilding of the Indian market, their ran campaigns and hosted a meeting in the Kaje Memorial on Sunday 15th April 1973 with a great turn out. There were many speakers from different racial background which includes: Ms Harriet Bolton who stated that the Market was a shopping centre for all races where there was no Apartheid however when the Market was burnt down it became an Indian problem. The Mayor of Umlazi Mr Soloman Ngobese said that the burning of the Market had caused hardship to all races from surrounding areas in Durban that depended on the Market. The Women's Cultural Group boosted the N.I.C Campaign on the 25th April as they received 10,000 signatures on a petition (highlighting the historical importance, as well as a popular tourist destination and the livelihood of the stallholders) organised by them, these petition were signed by different groups and was presented by its president Mrs Z.G.H. Mayet to J.H.de.W.Van.Eyssen Chairman of the Joint State Civic Committee.

A month later the Durban City Council were given consent by the administrator of Natal, Ben Havermann to start with building. After much struggles a new temporary market was built on the

site of the old Indian Market. The new Victoria Street Indian Market was officially opened on Saturday 30 November 1973. It was built at a cost of R 109 527 and accommodated 66 stallholders. The Victoria Street Market became a permanent institution in 1988.

Conclusion

The Indian Market was intended to provide for the needs of the Indian community but over the years it was attended by other racial groups as the Market had competitive advantages over their competitors including the Borough Market (Whites only) and the white traders of the CBD in terms of products, prices, place and promotion. The Indian Market had a great marketing mix strategy and was customer centric as people were allowed to bargain which led to loyal customer return and return on investment.

The Indian Market was an institution, it became a profitable venture for both stallholders and City council. It was second to Durban's beaches as a tourist attraction. Durban was growing and developing at a rapid rate which gave way to the conceptualisation of the Western Freeway and unfortunately the Indian market stood in the way. The City council thereafter made various attempts to evict the Indian Stallholders and close down the market by condemning it as a fire hazard and health hazard, as well as increased Rent and unreasonable regulations. There were plans to build a new market but through to many influences in the apartheid government the council rejected it as they legally claimed that the market was shopping centre and private institution, finally serving notices to vacate the market.

On the 16th March 1973 the fire that destroyed the market did what the Durban city council couldn't, leaving stallholders destitute and the council ready to commence with plan for the freeway. In the events that follow after the destruction of the market demonstrates the Apartheid Government power and controlled over society by benefitting one race group at the expense of the other races. Indian people were vote-less and helpless in deciding their destiny but they were not alone in their battles to fight for a new market. It was the unity amongst Indian communities and organisations as well as Blacks, Whites and Coloured communities that came together and fought to rebuild a new market that led the Victoria Street Market.



The Present Day Victoria Street Market Building was officially opened for trade on the 24 July 1990 by Dr Anton Rupert

What are the Unique Outstanding features of the site

Given the back history of the Victoria Street Market , we have come to understand the following

- The site the market is built on is one that comprised of the blood sweat and tears of those indentured labourers and our forefathers that have fought for the right to construct a place of trade that accommodates a multi-racial “melting pot of culture” destination that is rich in culture and heritage.
- The Victoria Street Market was based on the fight against the apartheid government against all odds that owed to the building Durban’s economy and trade.
- Many of the traders and stalls in the victoria street market were part of the original market that burned down in 1973.
- It is built amongst many other historically significant structures with the likes of , The Juma Masjid Mosque, The Emmanuel Cathedral, The Early Morning Market and the Ghandi library to name but a few, and sites that were involved in the struggle that formed part of the building blocks of making south Africa a free and fair democracy

Traders all for new Victoria Street Market

Daily News Reporter

A GROUP of Durban's longest-established traders, some of whom started as far back as 1920 at the old Indian market, gathered this week outside the lofty minarets of the new Victoria Street Market to admire what is already becoming one of the great new landmarks of the city.

It might represent a resurrection of the past, but as the old traders themselves agreed, the Victoria Street Market will show the new face of South Africa — multi-racial trading with a wider splash of goods.

With particular care having been taken to establish the right tenant mix, the market will boast a far greater variety of merchandise and shops than ever before. There will be everything from fish, spices and vegetables to clothing, hairdressers and even an optician. In addition, there will be a music-to-go shop, jewellers, a pharmacy, kitchenware, a sports shop, a photo-

graphic studio, travel goods, baby wear and even a resident doctor.

The longest-serving trader of the group who visited the new market this week, Mr V.M. Govender, began trading with his father in a stall at the original market in 1920. His father began trading at the inception of the market in 1920 and proudly announced that his sons would continue the family tradition in the new market.

"Now that you bring me here I'm overwhelmed by the beauty and size of this building. Along with other traders I have been pushed around three times from one market to another. But looking at this building I'm certain that the Indian market will at long last rest here forever."

Mr M.M. Naidoo and Mr Gopal Bhikha, who began trading in 1933 and 1936 respectively, both said that the new market would be a huge success.

"You must remember that the original market was a very big tourist attraction in its day.

Apart from tourists in general we had a wide and sometimes surprising mixture of ambassadors, actors, cabinet ministers and all sorts of people coming in see our wares. I think the Victoria Street Market will attract people and tourists like never before."

Mr M.G. Moodley, who started trading in 1933, said while the market had an Indian or Asian flavour about it, the Victoria Street Market would probably become much more multi-racial than any of the other markets.

"You only have to look at the site to realise that a huge number of blacks will pass through it and I know that a few stalls have been taken by black entrepreneurs. We all live together and I think the market will reflect our changing times."

The occupation date for the market is on April 1 and trading will begin on Friday, June 1.



OUTSIDE the new Victoria Street Market are Mr M. Bhikha, Mr G. Bhikha, Mr M.M. Naidoo, Mr M.G. Moodley and Mr V.M. Govender.

Sources:

Shunmugam Govindasamy Padayachee – The Victoria Street Indian Market 1910-1973

Goolam Vahed - A 'Public Health Nuisance': The Victoria Street Early Morning Squatters Market, 1910-1934

South African History Online – www.sahistory.org.za

Mr Rootheren Moodley

Ishaan Blunden

Buddy Govender

Leonard Rosenburg

Local History Museum

The Victoria Street Market Archives

Independent Newspapers

The R.J Naran Family

STALLHOLDERS MEET TO DISCUSS PLANS



FIRE!! INDIAN MARKET

"REGISTRATION" URGENT NOTICE

All affected Stallholders must report for
REGISTRATION AT THE
"BURNT-OUT MARKET SITE"
VICTORIA STREET - DURBAN

on
SATURDAY, 14th APRIL, 1973
From 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

PLEASE NOTE:
Stallholders who fail to register will not be considered
in any negotiations for a New Market.

For Durban Indian Stallholders Association
A. R. NAIDOO (Chairman)
R. J. NARAN (Sect.)

Aid for market victims

JOINT MOVE OVER MARKET

Daily News Reporter
THE DURBAN Indian Market

Get priorities in council told order

PLAZA
MUST

GREY STREET - NO CHANGE IN ZONING

Rents rise Traders

MARKET PLAN IS OPPOSED

Municipal Reporter
MORE than 200 stallholders of Durban's famous
Indian Market have declared their opposition to the
market plan.

Daily News Reporter
T.A.L. HODLDEES
The Indian Market is in
a state of confusion as
traders are up in arms
their rents increased from the
beginning of this month.
In a memorandum to the
Mayor of Durban, Mr. Ramo
sub-committee w
main building, sheds,

Wajaja
City
Council

4/13
The City Council has
approved a plan for
the reconstruction of the
Indian Market site. The
plan is to build a new
market building which will
be a modern structure with
a covered walkway and
a parking area. The plan
is to be implemented in
phases over a period of
three years. The first phase
will be the construction of
the main building. The
second phase will be the
construction of the parking
area. The third phase will
be the construction of the
walkway. The plan is to
be implemented in phases
over a period of three years.

Market
rent
rise
attacked
23/1/73
Daily News Reporter
Dr. M. B. Naidoo, a member
of the executive of the South

I am not against the Indian
Market. I am against the
market.
As far back as 1966 the
South Government there were
being criticised.
The drainage is absolutely
horrible. Always blocked,
overstuffed with
multicoloured boxes.
It is not modern
and it will not be a
market.