

LOCAL HISTORY MUSEUMS

MAHATMA GANDHI  
MEMORIAL MUSEUM

GANDHI SITES  
IN DURBAN

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## INTRODUCTION

The young London-trained barrister, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi set sail for Durban from Bombay on 19 April 1893 and arrived in Durban on Tuesday 23 May 1893. Gandhi spent some twenty years in South Africa, returning to India in 1914. The period he spent in South Africa has often been described as his political and spiritual apprenticeship. Indeed, it was within the context of South Africa's political and social milieu that Gandhi developed his philosophy and practice of Satyagraha. Between 1893 and 1903 Gandhi spent periods of time staying and working in Durban. Even after he had moved to the Transvaal, he kept contact with friends in Durban and with the Indian community of the City in general. He also often returned to spend time at Phoenix Settlement, the communitarian settlement he established in Inanda, just outside Durban. Gandhi's life and works have been the focus of a vast number of publications and several films. Sadly, however, the sites associated with Gandhi's sojourn in South Africa have suffered neglect and worse. In Durban, Phoenix Settlement fell victim to the political unrest that engulfed Inanda in 1985 and still stands in ruins today. Most of the other sites associated with Gandhi have had to give way to modern development.

A study of the sites associated with Gandhi's years in Durban throw interesting light on Gandhi's life and works and on the history of the City.

## Background

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2 October 1869 in Porbandar, a princely state on the north west coast of India. His father was a highly placed state official. At the age of thirteen years, while still at high school, Gandhi married Kasturba Makanji, in 1882. In the same year that his eldest son, Harilal, was born, in 1888, Gandhi left India to study law in London. Gandhi was called to the Bar in 1891 and enrolled in the High Court of London. He returned to India in July 1891 and was admitted as an advocate of Bombay and Rajkot, but his legal practice was unsuccessful.

## GANDHI SITES IN DURBAN

### 1. Dada Abdullah and Company

(427 Dr Pixley kaSeme Street)

Sheth Abdul Karim Adam Jhaveri, a partner of Dada Abdullah and Co., a firm in Porbandar, wrote to Gandhi's brother, informing him that a branch of the firm in South Africa was involved in a court case with a claim for 40 000 pounds. He suggested that Gandhi be sent there to assist in the case. Gandhi's brother introduced him to Sheth Abdul Karim Jhaveri, who assured him that the job would not be a difficult one, that he would not be required for more than a year and that the company would pay "a first class return fare and a sum of 105 pounds, all found". Gandhi had tried unsuccessfully to set up a legal practice in Rajkot and Bombay. He was therefore willing to take on the offer and contracted for a year with Dada Abdullah and Co. to assist in the action against T.H.K. Mohamed and Co. and Moosa Amod and Co., which was to be heard in Pretoria. His function was to instruct counsel, dispose of English correspondence and translate Gujerati documents.



Gandhi as a young barrister  
in South Africa circa 1900



West Street in 1895. Dada Abdullah and Co. was situated at 427 West Street, between Harvey Greenacre and Co. (417) and Rogerson (445)



West Street south side, Gardner and Mercury Lane circa 1900

Gandhi set sail from Bombay on 19 April 1893. On his arrival in Durban on 24 May 1893 he was met at the quayside of the Durban docks by Dada Abdullah (Abdullah Hajee Adam Jhaveri), one of the main directors of the firm Dada Abdullah and Company. Dada Abdullah took Gandhi to the premises of the firm, Dada Abdullah and Co., at 427 West Street (renamed Dr Pixley kaSeme Street, and in the vicinity of the present day Greenacre's Passage), next to Messrs. Harvey Greenacre and Co. The business premises were on the ground floor and the upper storey was used for residential purposes. Gandhi stayed with Dada Abdullah while familiarising himself with the facts of the court case he was to assist in.

*[The General Borough Rate for the period August 1894 to July 1895 indicates that the property at 427 West Street was owned by W.G. Baker and occupied by Dada Abdullah and Co.]*

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## 2. Durban Magistrate's Courts

(Old Court House Museum - Samora Machel Street)

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On 25 May 1893, Gandhi's third day in Durban, Dada Abdullah took him to the Durban Magistrates Courts so that Gandhi could be acquainted with legal procedures. Gandhi entered the court wearing a turban and sat beside Dada Abdullah's attorney, without removing his turban. This displeased the magistrate who ordered him to remove the turban, which he refused to do. Gandhi then left the court.

The Natal Mercury of 26 May 1893 reported the incident as follows:

*"An Indian entered the court house yesterday afternoon and took a seat at the horseshoe. He was well dressed and it was understood that he was an English barrister, on his way to Pretoria, where he is reported to be engaged*

*in an Indian case. He entered the court without removing his head covering or salaaming, and the Magistrate looked at him with disapproval. The new arrival was courteously asked his business and he replied that he was an English barrister. He did not attempt to produce his credentials and, on returning to the horseshoe, was quietly told that the proper course for him to pursue, before taking up his position at the Bar, was to gain admission to the Supreme Court”.*

The incident was also reported in the *Natal Advertiser* under the heading "An Unwelcome Visitor". Gandhi wrote to the *Natal Advertiser* on 29 May 1893 in response to the article. He explained that, while it was true that he had not removed his head-dress nor bowed, he did not mean any disrespect to the Court, he further explained that "Just as it is mark of respect amongst the Europeans to take off their hats, in like manner it is in Indians to retain one's head-dress. To appear uncovered before a gentleman is not to respect him".

Gandhi explained that he was taken by the chief clerk to the interpreter's room and asked not to take his seat at the horseshoe the next time he came unless he produced his credentials. He asked the chief clerk whether he could retain his seat for the day and this was assented to. However, on returning to his seat he was told in open court that, in order to be entitled to that seat he had to produce his credentials. After this incident Gandhi considered replacing his turban with a hat so as to avoid further insults. However, Dada Abdullah argued that the turban sat well on him and that a hat would make him look like a waiter.

Gandhi is listed in the Natal Civil Service List of 1908 as a court interpreter and translator (Gujerati) from 1896, which implies that, apart from appearing in court in connection with the cases that he had taken on, he would also have appeared in the role of interpreter or translator. The Durban Magistrate's Court building now serves as a museum, the Old Court House Museum. The museum has an interesting collection of artifacts, photographs and documents relating to Gandhi's years in South Africa.



The Durban Magistrate's Court circa 1900. The Court was officially opened on 24 May 1866. On 8 April 1891 the north wing (towards Dr Pixley kaSeme Street (West St)) was added to the building providing new offices. Another court room was added to the south wing and opened on 16 November 1897. The building served as a Court House until 1912. Thereafter the Durban Municipality acquired the building. The Court House became home to the Local History Museum in 1965, and the building was declared a National Monument in 1975



Durban Railway Station circa 1890s. It was from here that Gandhi departed on his journey to Pretoria on 7 June 1893

### 3. Durban Station (Tourist Junction - Monty Naicker Road)



The old Durban Railway Station on the corner of Monty Naicker Road and Soldiers Way as it stands today. Two floors were added to the building in 1904. When the station moved to a new location in Umgeni Road, the building was retained and converted to offices

It was from Durban Station that Gandhi embarked on the fateful train journey that, in later years, he regarded as having changed the course of his life. He boarded a train at the Durban Station on 7 June 1893 in order to travel to Pretoria, where he was due to meet with Dada Abdullah's legal advisers. A first class seat was booked for him. The train reached Pietermaritzburg Station at about 9pm. A white passenger entering the compartment was disturbed to see it occupied by a 'person of colour' and returned with two officials who ordered Gandhi to move to the van compartment. Gandhi protested that he had a first class ticket and was therefore entitled to be in that compartment. A white constable was called, who took Gandhi by the hand and pushed him out of the train. His luggage was also taken out and the train continued without him. Gandhi spent the night in the waiting room. While he had his hand-bag with him the railway authorities had taken charge of the

rest of his luggage. It was winter and the weather was bitterly cold and, although his overcoat was in his luggage Gandhi did not ask for it, fearing further insults. Gandhi contemplated returning to India but decided that such a course would be cowardice. He vowed to stay and fight the disease of racial prejudice. In later years Gandhi claimed that that incident had changed the course of his life, stating: "My active non-violence began from that date".

In the morning Gandhi sent a telegram of protest to the Railway Authorities and also informed Dada Abdullah of what had taken place. Dada Abdullah met with the general manager of the Railway, who justified the conduct of the railway authorities but informed Abdullah that he had instructed the Station Master to ensure that Gandhi reached his destination safely. Dada Abdullah had also sent a telegram to some Indian merchants in Pietermaritzburg, who came to the station to meet with Gandhi and shared with him their own experiences of racial prejudice. A berth was reserved for Gandhi on the evening train and he resumed his journey which encountered further insulting impediments before ending in Pretoria.

*[Two further floors were added to the Durban Railway Station in 1904. With the construction of a new railway station in Umgeni Road part of the old Durban Station building was retained and converted into an office complex. It is one of the City's landmarks.]*



A bust of Gandhi in the foyer of the Old Durban Railway Station building. The plaque reads: "My Life is my message" Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi 1869 - 1948. The bust was presented by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and was sculptured by R V Sutar

#### 4. Sites related to Gandhi's membership of the Natal Indian Congress

On the conclusion of Dada Abdullah and Co.'s case in Pretoria, Gandhi returned to Durban in May 1894 and made preparations to return to India. Dada Abdullah gave a farewell party at his home in Clare Road, Sydenham, in Gandhi's honour, on Tuesday May 22, 1894. Gandhi was shown, while attending this party, an article in the Natal Mercury, entitled "Indian Franchise", which dealt with a Bill seeking to remove the right of Indians to elect members to the Natal Legislative Assembly. During discussions on the implications of the Bill one of the merchants present proposed to Gandhi that he cancel his return passage and stay on a month longer to help them fight the Bill. The merchants expressed a willingness to pay Gandhi barrister fees if he were prepared to assist them in opposing the Bill. Gandhi protested that he could not accept a fee for public work. He pointed out however, that funds would be needed for the sending of telegrams, printing of literature, travel, consulting of attorneys and the purchase of law-books.

The Indian merchants in Durban had organised themselves into the Durban Indian Committee from around 1891 and met on an *ad hoc* basis to discuss important political and other matters. The committee was headed by Haji Mohamed Haji Dada and Dada Abdullah. The committee had begun the first South African Indian political campaign in January 1891 when it sent a list of grievances to Fajalbhai Visram, a fellow merchant in Bombay. On behalf of the merchants Visram and the other merchants prepared a memorial which eventually passed through the Government of Bombay, the India Office, the Colonial Office, the Natal Colonial Secretary's Office and the office of the Natal Protector of immigrants. At the end of 1892 the merchants had also prepared the first pamphlet on Indian grievances in Natal, the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. They had also sent petitions to various persons, including Lord Ripon, Secretary of State for the Colonies; Dadabhai Naoroji, a leading member of the Indian National Congress and first Indian member of the British parliament; Queen Victoria and Lord Gladstone, who was Prime Minister of England at the time.

A meeting was held on 25 June 1894 at Dada Abdullah's house at which the merchants resolved to fight the Franchise Bill. Volunteers were enrolled among whom were many the local merchants such as Haji Mohamed Haji Dada, Mohamed Cassim Camroodeen, Adamji Miankhan, A.Kolandevelu Pillay, C. Lachchiram, Rangasami Padiachi, Amod Jiva and Parsee Rustomjee (Jivani Gorcoodoo Rustomji). A Number of Natal-born, mostly Christian youth, such as Mr Paul, Durban Court interpreter, Subhan Godfrey, headmaster of a mission school, also participated. The first undertaking of the meeting was to send a telegram to the Speaker of the Assembly, requesting him to postpone further discussion of the Bill. Gandhi drew up a petition to present to the Legislative Assembly and volunteers obtained signatures. However, the Bill was passed. A further meeting decided on sending a monster petition to Lord Ripon, Secretary of State for the Colonies. A number of volunteers travelled around Natal obtaining signatures and within a fortnight ten thousand signatures were obtained. The petition was submitted and ten thousand copies were printed for circulation and distribution. Gandhi sent copies to all the newspapers and publicists he knew. During the preparation of the petition Dada Abdullah's house served as "a caravanserai and public office".



Dr Yusuf Dadoo Street (Grey St) circa 1890s

The merchants and educated elite who had participated in the meetings now pleaded with Gandhi to remain in South Africa permanently. Gandhi argued that he could stay only if the members of the community could guarantee legal work to the extent of a minimum of 300 pounds per year. About twenty merchants gave Gandhi retainers for the year for their legal work. Dada Abdullah also purchased the necessary furniture, for Gandhi to set up house in Durban, in lieu of monies he had intended to give Gandhi on his departure. Gandhi now applied for admission as an advocate of the Supreme Court. In spite of objections from the Law Society, he was enrolled as an advocate.

Dada Abdullah, Gandhi and others decided that it was necessary to form a permanent organisation. Gandhi recommended that the organisation be called the Natal Indians Congress (NIC). The NIC was formed on 22 August 1894 on the premises of Dada Abdullah and Company. Seventy-six members joined the NIC on the day of its inauguration. Dada Abdullah was the first president of the NIC and Gandhi was elected the first honorary secretary. (Many writers mention Gandhi as the founder of the NIC. However, Gandhi pointed out in a letter to the Natal Mercury, on 25 September 1895, that "the Congress was formed chiefly by the efforts of Abdullah Haji Adam").

The NIC set up its offices on the premises of Moosa Hajee Adam, paying a rental of three pounds per month.

*[The General Borough Rate for the period August 1894 to July 1895 indicates that Moosa Hajee Adam occupied premises owned by Ramsammy Naidoo at 113 Grey St].*

In "The Second Report of the Natal Indian Congress", drawn up by Gandhi on 11 October 1899, he reported as follows:

"In April of 1896, as the funds of the Congress seemed to be in prosperous condition and as it became necessary to remove from Mr Moosa Hajee Adam's place, it was felt that the Congress might well take a step forward and be better housed. Accordingly, the spacious hall now occupied by the Congress

was rented at a monthly rental of 5 pounds, being an increase of 3 pounds per month over the rent previously paid"

This hall, in what was then Grey Street came to be known as Congress Hall (Ajmeri Arcade, 141 Dr Yusuf Dadoo Street). In the report Gandhi mentioned a number of community functions that were held at Congress Hall, including a ceremony to commemorate "the birth of a son to Mr Abdul Kadir", the opening of the Natal Indian Education Association's Diamond Jubilee Library, a dinner held for Captain Francis L. Younghusband, special correspondent of the London Times.

In the NIC report of October 1899 Gandhi also mentions the purchase of a property by the NIC. The report describes the incident as follows:

"About May 1896, after inspection of many properties and after much consultation and deliberation, the property registered in the name Niddha, a free Indian woman, with a brick house and store, was bought by the Congress for 1080 pounds".



The building at the corner of Dr Yusuf Dadoo Street (Grey St) and Dr A B Xuma Street (Commercial Rd) is where the Congress Hall was located. It was here that the Natal Indian Congress held its meetings and other events

Gandhi further reported that most of the tenants on the property were "Tamil people" and that the NIC received about 10 pounds per month. The property was in Umgeni Road.

*[The General Borough Rate (August 1895 to July 1895) indicates a property in Block AK Umgeni Road – no postal number indicated – belonging to Niddha at No. 1411. The Rate for the following year, August 1896 to July 1897, reflects the Natal Indian Congress as proprietor of the same property].*

Gandhi was also responsible for purchasing a property at 95 Dr Goonam Street (Prince Edward Street), on behalf of the Natal Indian Congress.

*[The Borough Rate for the period August 1897 to July 1898 shows that the property was owned by Fareed Shaik at that time. The Borough Rate for August for August 1897 to July 1898 confirms that the Natal Indians Congress had since purchased the property].*



95 Dr Goonam Street is where the building purchased by Gandhi on behalf of the Natal Indian Congress around 1897 was demolished. The site is administered by the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Trust, created by the NIC in 1953. The site has recently been developed by the Trust as the Mahatma Gandhi Memorial for use by all as a public space

## 5. Beach Grove Villa (Beach Grove)

An entry in Gandhi's diary for 17 July 1894 makes reference to a house in Beach Grove having been found for 8 pounds. Gandhi moved to the house in Beach Grove on 7 August 1894. In his autobiography Gandhi records that he thought it necessary to have a household in keeping with his position as an Indian barrister in Natal and so "had a nice house in a prominent location".



Beach Grove Villa, Harry Escombe's house in Beach Grove where Gandhi resided for a time

Beach Grove Villa has been described as "an unpretentious semi-detached, double-storey building with an iron front gate, a side entrance with a passage, and a verandah under the balcony facing the Durban Bay". The Attorney-General, Harry Escombe lived close to Gandhi. Gandhi's childhood friend, Sheik Mahtab travelled from India to live with him at Beach Grove Villa and Gandhi also employed a Gujarati-speaking cook.

*[The Borough Rates from 1894 up to 1902 confirm that Gandhi occupied a property in Beach Grove – no postal number given – owned by the Estate of C.G. Bales].*

Beach Grove Villa has long been demolished and the site now serves as a parking lot as indicated by a mosaic plaque at the Beach Grove site.

## 6. Wesleyan Church (Dr Pixley kaSeme Street)

An entry in Gandhi's diary for 26 August 1894 reads:

"Passed the whole day with Askew. I was introduced to his father-in-law Mr Watson who is a very kind gentleman. Attended the Wesleyan Church with him. Mrs Askew is an extremely kind lady. Had a long chat on vegetarianism. In the evening Askew preached in one of the Wesleyan chapels in West St."

O.J. Askew was an attorney and Wesleyan preacher who became friends with Gandhi. Out of a group of sympathetic whites who had been invited to attend one of the early meetings on the NIC, Askew was the only one to take up the invitation. On Sunday Gandhi would often attend the Wesleyan Church with the Askew family. He also often had dinner at the Askew house on Sundays. An entry in Gandhi's diary for 16 September 1894 reveals that he had seen the Askews at their house and Mrs Askew had objected



The Wesleyan Church in Dr Pixley kaSeme Street (West St) between Dorothy Nyembe Street (Gardener St) and Mercury Lane was demolished in 1968 and a new Central Methodist Church erected in Samora Machel Street (Aliwal St)

to him speaking to her children about vegetarianism or Buddhism. This incident brought an end to Gandhi's visits to the Askew house. The Askews lived in Chelmsford Road (renamed J B Marks Road). At this time O.J. Askew's legal office was at number 14 Mercury Lane.

One of the central Wesleyan Churches in Durban at this time was in West Street (renamed Dr Pixley kaSeme Street), lying between Mercury Lane and Gardiner Street (renamed Dorothy Nyembe Street), next to the Standard Bank Building. This church, was built in 1878 and had been regarded as the mother church of Methodism in Durban. It was probably to this church that Gandhi accompanied the Askews on Sundays.

*[The Methodist Church was demolished in 1968 and a new central Methodist church built in Aliwal Street, since renamed Samora Machel Street. Shopping and office complexes have been developed on the site of the old church.]*

*[The General Borough Rate (August 1894 – July 1895) for the period indicates that O.J. Askew occupied a house in J B Marks Road, formerly Chelmsford Road, and that his legal office was at 14 Mercury Lane.]*



The site of the Wesleyan Church in Dr Pixley kaSeme Street today, looking east towards Dorothy Nyembe Street with Mercury Lane to the right

## 7. South African General Mission Headquarters (Ash Lane)

While in Pretoria Gandhi had met Albert. W. Baker, an attorney and director of South African General Mission, who befriended him and hoped to convert him to Christianity. Gandhi admitted that, although born Hindu, he was in a state of religious confusion at that period of his life. He began to make a study of Christianity as well as other religions. On Gandhi's return to Durban, W. Spencer Walton, head of the South African General Mission, called on him and took a keen interest in him. He often invited Gandhi to attend prayer meetings at his headquarters in Ash Lane, off Point Road, since renamed Mahatma Gandhi Road. Gandhi had arranged for Vincent Lawrence, his clerk to teach Tamil to two missionary workers attached to the South African General Mission, Miss M. Day and Miss Elsie Hargreaves. The two missionary workers started educational work among the Indians at a location in Verulam, near the Phoenix Railway Station. Gandhi attended a meeting there in the second week of December 1897, where he promised, on behalf of Parsee Rustomjee, to build one of the tanks needed for the work of the missionaries.

## 8. Gandhi's Legal Offices

### i) 326-328 Anton Lembede Street (Smith St)

An entry in Gandhi's diary on 2 August 1894 reads: "Saw Coakes, gave him a cheque for 30 pounds for fees for advocates licence and interpreter's". Gandhi signed an agreement of partnership with attorney Coakes, on 4 August 1894. Their practice was based at 326-328 Anton Lembede Street, formerly Smith Street. Gandhi was admitted as an advocate of the Natal Supreme Court on 3 September 1894.

*[Borough Rate, August 1894 – July 1895, confirms that Coakes' practice was at 326 Smith Street at that time.]*



Anton Lembede Street (Smith St) looking west circa 1890s

### ii) Ferguson's Corner, 374 Dr Pixley kaSeme Street (West St)

Coakes had moved his practice to 388 Dr Pixley kaSeme Street (West Street) by August 1895. By this time Gandhi had in all probability set up his own practice, as he occupied an office at 374 Dr Pixley kaSeme Street. The building in which his office was situated belonged to Tucker and Button but was purchased by J.F. Ferguson in 1896 and came to be known as 'Ferguson's Corner'.

*[Ferguson's Corner has long been replaced by a more modern building which houses retail and commercial companies].*



Ferguson's Corner circa 1899/ Gandhi's law office was located in this building between 1895 and 1896

### iii) 53a Joe Slovo Street (Field St)

By August 1897 Gandhi had moved his practice to an office at 53a Joe Slovo Street, formerly Field Street, a property owned by J.J. Beningfield. Several letters written by Gandhi, including one to the Colonial Secretary, dated 21 July 1898, bear this address.

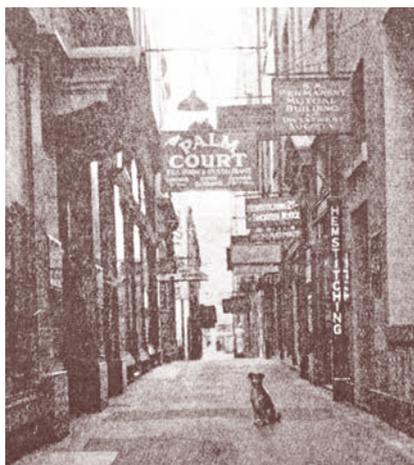
*[General Borough Rate, August 1897 – July 1898].*

### iv) 14 Mercury Lane

By January 1899 Gandhi had moved his legal practice to 14 Mercury Lane, opposite the Natal Mercury Office and printing works. He was later joined there by R.K. Khan who enrolled as an advocate of the Supreme Court of Natal in July 1899.

*[Mercury Lane has undergone many changes, the old buildings have been demolished to make way for new complexes.]*

*[General Borough Rate, August 1899 – July 1900]*



Mercury Lane off Dr Pixley kaSeme Street (West St). The Natal Mercury publishing offices were on the left and Gandhi's legal office on the right

### 9. Saint Aidan's Mission Hospital

Dr Lancelot Parker Booth who was responsible for the establishment of Saint Aidan's Mission lived at number 49 Cross Street in a large, iron-roofed bungalow which had outbuildings and was surrounded by a rusty corrugated iron wall. The house was at the intersection with Leopold Street (renamed David Webster Street), near the old bridge that connected Alice Street (renamed Johannes Nkosi Street), with Cross Street.

Dr Booth ran a clinic from his home and had also set up several make-shift wards, as there was no hospital in Durban catering for the Indian communities. The NIC raised a subscription in aid of the hospital and Gandhi's friend, Parsee Rustomjee also gave his financial backing to it. The Saint Aidan's Mission Hospital was formally opened on 14 September 1897. Gandhi was on friendly terms with Dr. Booth and spent one hour or more of his time each day administering to the sick at Saint Aidan's.

*[Saint Aidan's hospital moved to its present location in M.L. Sultan Road, formerly Centenary Road in 1935. The old mission hospital building has been demolished, only the foundation remaining and the site is used as a parking area.]*



Saint Aidan's Mission Hospital at the corner of Cross Street and David Webster Street (Leopold St) was the first hospital in Durban for the health and needs of Indian people. The hospital was founded by Dr Booth whom Gandhi visited regularly to assist in caring for the sick



The site of Saint Aidan's Mission Hospital. All that remains are the foundations of the building which today serves as a car park. Saint Aidan's Hospital was moved to the present location in M L Sultan Road in 1935

#### 10. Sites Associated with the anti-Indian Demonstration and attack on Gandhi in January 1897

In 1896 Gandhi returned to India to collect Kasturba and their children. While in India Gandhi sought support for the grievances of Indians in Natal. The English press put out an exaggerated report on Gandhi's position, which was also published in Natal. When Gandhi returned with his wife Kasturba, his sons Harilal and Manilal and his nephew Gokuldas (the only son of his widowed sister), they travelled on Dada Abdullah's ship the *Courland*, and were accompanied by a second ship, the *Naderi*. When the two ships reached Durban on December 18, 1896, they were both placed under quarantine, lasting for 24 days. The two ships crossed the bar on 13 January 1897. A crowd of 3300, made up mainly of white artisans, congregated at Alexandra Square (near where the Alexandra Hotel once stood, at the harbour end of Mahatma Gandhi Road, formerly Point Road) to prevent passengers from coming ashore. Gandhi was advised to land separately.

Mr F.A. Laughton, legal advisor to Dada Abdullah and Company boarded the *Courland* and, after some discussion it was decided that Gandhi should not "sneak into Durban like a thief in the night" but that he would land with Mr Laughton. Gandhi and Laughton then boarded a boat and travelled along Cato's Creek. (The Umgeni River had come down in flood in 1848, leaving a deep creek across land owned by Mr Cato, leading into the Bay. This waterway was appropriated by the port and named Cato's Creek. It was in the vicinity of the present day



Kasturba Gandhi and children 1898. From left: Gokuldas (Gandhi's sister's son), Manilal (seated), Mrs Gandhi, Ramdas and Harilal



Anti-Indian demonstration being addressed by Harry Escombe at Alexandra Square on 13 January 1897



The site today of the anti-Indian demonstration of 13 January 1897 located at the Point on the corner of Signal Road off Mahatma Gandhi Road (Point Rd)



The Alexandria Hotel circa 1890s, at the Bay end of Mahatma Gandhi Road (Point Rd), marks a nearby site where a crowd of white artisans gathered in January 1897 to prevent the Indian passengers of the *Courland* and *Naderi* from disembarking



Cato Square, the vicinity where Cato's Creek ran down to the Bay

Cato Square). In a letter to the editor, published in the *Natal Mercury* of 16 January 1897, F.A. Laughton, in describing the events of that day writes:

"He [Gandhi] might have kept to the boat at Cato's Creek, when he saw the crowd collecting to receive him; he might have taken

refuge in the police station; he said he was quite ready to face the men of Durban and to trust them as Englishmen”.

As soon as they landed some of the youth recognised Gandhi from the distinctive turban he wore and a crowd, comprising white youths and some elders, began to assemble. Mr Laughton attempted to get Gandhi to a rickshaw but the rickshaw puller was threatened that if he allowed Gandhi to sit in his rickshaw they would beat him and smash his rickshaw to pieces. The rickshaw puller then declined to take Gandhi and moved away. As Gandhi and Mr Laughton proceeded the crowd grew larger and soon stopped their progress. Gandhi has, in his Satyagraha in South Africa, described the subsequent assault on him as follows:

“A man of powerful build took hold of Laughton and tore him away from me. He was not therefore in a position to come up with me. The crowd began to abuse me and shower upon me stones and whatever else they could lay their hands on. They threw down my turban. Meanwhile a burly fellow came up to me, slapped me in the face and then kicked me. I was about to fall down unconscious when I held on to the railings of a house nearby. I took a breath for a while and when the fainting was over, proceeded on my way. I had almost given up the hope of reaching home alive. But I remember well that even then my heart did not arraign my assailants.”

The assault on Gandhi took place in West Street, in the vicinity of the Ship Hotel (where the Tudor House Hotel presently stands, at 197 Dr Pixley kaSeme Street).

Sarah Jane Alexander, the wife of Police Superintendent Alexander happened to be passing by at the time that the mob were assaulting Gandhi. She came to Gandhi’s rescue by opening her parasol and standing between him and the crowd. In the meantime an Indian boy, fearing that Gandhi would be killed, had run to the police station to report the incident. Some police constables arrived and escorted Gandhi down Dr Pixley kaSeme Street. Superintendent



The Tudor Hotel in Dr Pixley kaSeme Street (West St) now stands in the vicinity of The Ship Hotel where Gandhi was assaulted by a white mob on 13 January 1897



Medwood Gardens in Dr Pixley kaSeme Street (West St) now marks the location of the old Borough Police Station where Gandhi was given asylum in the upstairs Officers’ quarters following his assault

Alexander offered Gandhi asylum in the nearby Borough Police Station in Dr Pixley kaSeme Street (where Medwood Gardens presently stands). Gandhi was anxious to re-join his family who had proceeded to Parsee Rustomjee's house at 84 Field Street (now 110 Joe Slovo Street). However, an unruly mob gathered outside the house, demanding that Gandhi be handed over to them.

Fearing that Gandhi's family would be attacked and Rustomjee's house damaged, Superintendent Alexander arranged for Gandhi to escape disguised as a policeman. Gandhi then proceeded to the Borough Police Station accompanied by two detectives. Here Superintendent Alexander provided him asylum at the officers' quarters upstairs. Gandhi refused to press charges against the people who assaulted him.

*[The Borough Rates for the period August 1896 to July 1898 indicate that Parsee Rustomjee occupied premises at 84 Field Street. The property was owned by the Estate of Aboobaker Amod Jhaveri. Several adverts appeared in the Indian Opinion Newspaper up to 6 May 1905, for 'Jalbhoj Sorabjee Bros' indicating 84 Field Street as the address. From 13 May 1905, however, the 'Jalbhoj Sorabjee Bros' advertisements in Indian Opinion listed the address as 110 Field Street. The Borough Rates for August 1905 to July 1906 indicate that the Rustomjees occupied premises at 110 Field Street owned by the Estate of Aboobaker Amod Jhaveri. It is highly probable then that street numbers in Field Street underwent some changes during this period].*

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## II. Phoenix Settlement

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Phoenix settlement was established in December 1904 on a farm approximately 26 kilometres from Durban, close to the North Coast railway line. Phoenix had been owned by Thomas Watkins, whose first crop of sugar cane was destroyed by fire. Watkins had sugar cane

replanted in the ashes of the burned crop, inspiring him to name the farm Phoenix. Gandhi purchased the 100 acres, with a spring and few orange and mango trees, for 1000 pounds.

In his autobiography Gandhi recalls that as he was about to leave for Durban from Johannesburg, H.S.L. Polak had loaned him a copy of Ruskin's "Unto This Last". Gandhi read the book on his train journey to Durban and resolved to change his life in accordance with the principles set out in the book. Gandhi was particularly influenced by Ruskin's assertion that

"the good of the individual is contained in the good of all, that all work is equal and that the life of labour of the tiller of the soil and handicraftsmen is the life worth living".

The writings and example of Tolstoy, who gave up his wealth and took to a life of poverty and labour also had an important influence on Gandhi. A visit to the Mariannhill Trappist Monastery in 1894 had also left a deep impression on Gandhi. He described the monastery as follows:

"The shelter is a quiet little model village, owned on the truest republican principles. The principle of liberty, equality and fraternity is carried out in its entirety. Every man is a brother, every woman a sister. . . . They discard even eggs. . . . They take no intoxicating liquors. . . . None may keep money for private use. All are equally rich or poor. They believe in no colour discrimination. The Natives are accorded the same treatment as whites. . ."

The week before Gandhi's train trip on which he read Ruskin he had made a visit to Tongaat to see his cousin, Abhayachand Gandhi, who was a storekeeper. During this visit Gandhi was struck by the irony of his cousin's confined life as a storekeeper amidst the abundance of fruits that grew freely outside his shop. Gandhi had some familiarity with the north coast area. He had also attended the opening of the Hope Mission Station in the vicinity of Phoenix in 1897. His familiarity

with the north coast region probably influenced his choice of Phoenix Settlement for the site of his communitarian settlement.

Situated close to Phoenix Settlement was the successful rural commune, Ohlange Institute, set up by the editor of *Ilanga lase Natal*, the Reverend Dr John Langalibalele Dube. Dube's settlement included a school and training facilities for various trades. Gandhi and the Reverend Dr John Langalibalele Dube developed a friendship and mutual respect. They were both similar in many aspects of their lives. They were both involved in public work for their respective communities. While Gandhi helped to found the Natal Indian Congress in 1894, Dube helped to found the Natal Native Congress in 1900. In 1903 Dube launched *Ilanga lase Natal*, an African weekly in English and Zulu, and in June of the same year Gandhi began publishing *Indian Opinion*, a weekly in English, Gujarati, Hindi and Tamil. Gandhi also followed Dube's example of setting up a school and training facilities for various trades at his settlement. It is not known when Gandhi and Dube first became acquainted, but in August 1905 they met at the residence of Marshall Campbell at Mount Edgecombe, at a reception held for delegates of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Gandhi was impressed by Dube's speech at that occasion. Gandhi reported on the meeting in *Indian Opinion*, writing that Dube was an African "of whom one should know", there was frequent social contact between residents of Phoenix Settlement and Ohlange Institute.



Ohlange Institute in Inanda, established by Dr John Langalibalele Dube in 1901

Gandhi also saw Phoenix Settlement as a solution to the financial problems facing *Indian Opinion*. The decision to start an Indian newspaper had been made as early as 1896 during the early stages of organised Indian politics. However, it was only in 1898 that, at the suggestion of Gandhi, Madanhit Vyavaharik, an active member of the Natal Indian Congress, opened the International Printing Press in Durban. In 1903, with Gandhi's advice and encouragement, Madanjit began printing and publishing *Indian Opinion*. His editor was M.H. Nazar, the NIC joint secretary. Initially *Indian Opinion* served mainly as a mouthpiece for Indian merchants in Natal and the Transvaal. Before moving to Phoenix Settlement in 1904 *Indian Opinion* was based at 141 Dr Yusuf Dadoo Street (Grey Street). The premises were rented from Abdul Kadir. From the outset, the journal suffered financial problems, in spite of the fact that most of the workers on the paper were unpaid volunteers and that it was run on a non-profit basis. Advertising space was bought by merchants who were also expected to subscribe to the paper as well as try sell new subscriptions. By the end of 1904 advertising revenues had fallen drastically, there were only 887 paying subscribers and the paper's finances were in a chaotic state. Only one member of the press staff, Govindsamy, was prepared to move to Phoenix Settlement and became a settler. Govindsamy, also known as Sam, was the machine foreman at the International Printing Press at Phoenix Settlement.

Gandhi placed an advert for a tract of land near a railway station and close to Durban. Describing how he came to purchase the settlement land Gandhi said:

"An offer came in respect of Phoenix. Mr West and I went to inspect the estate. Within a week we purchased twenty acres of land. It had a nice little spring and a few orange trees. Adjoining it was a piece of 80 acres which had many more fruit trees and a dilapidated cottage. We purchased this too, the total cost being one thousand pounds".

Mr Rustomjee provided Gandhi with second-hand corrugated iron sheets and other building material and with the help of Indian

carpenters and masons who had worked with Gandhi in the Indian Stretcher Bearer Corps during the South African War, a shed was erected for the press. The shed was ready in less than a month. At first the settlers lived under canvas while erecting dwellings on the property. Gandhi described the place as being uninhabited, thickly overgrown with grass, infested with snakes and dangerous to live in. However the settlers were undaunted.



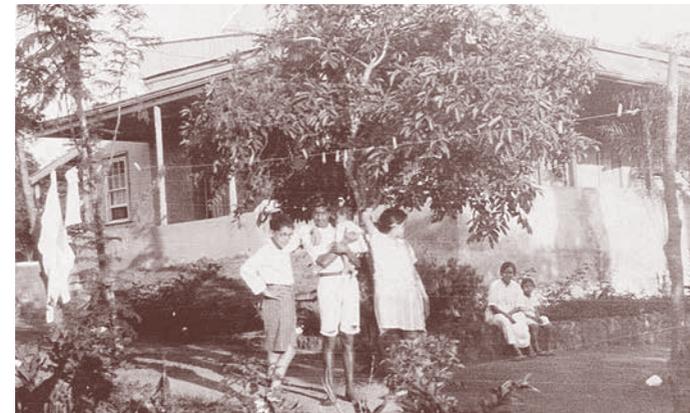
Indian Volunteer Ambulance corps Stretcher Bearers, South African War, Gandhi seated centre in the second row

In an *Indian Opinion* editorial in December 1904, Gandhi reporting on the decision to move the paper to Phoenix Settlement, argued that here "the workers could live a more simple and natural life, and the ideas of Ruskin and Tolstoy be combined with strict business principles".

The farm was founded on ideas of simplicity and equality of labour. Gandhi tried to persuade relatives who had come with him from India to join the settlement. Of those who agreed to join the settlement only his nephews, Maganlal and Chhaganlal Gandhi (who were brothers) stayed on, while the others returned to their business ventures. The Phoenix community was classified into daily workers paid an outright wage and the "schemers" who were given an acre of land each, a house, a monthly allowance of 3 pounds per month for working in the press and a share of the profits, if any. *Indian Opinion* was published



The roadway into Phoenix Settlement in the 1930s



Sarvodaya (Welfare of All), Gandhi's cottage at Phoenix Settlement. Ela Gandhi seated with her mother

on a weekly basis. An oil engine was installed for working the press as well as a hand-driven wheel. The engine proved troublesome and for some time the paper had to be worked with hand power only. In early stages all the settlers had to work late into the night before the day of publication. Every member of the settlement also had to learn the tedious work of type-setting and all had to help in folding and wrapping the page sheets.



Phoenix Settlement printing works where members hand printed the *Indian Opinion*

The plots at Phoenix Settlement were not fenced in and, instead, narrow paths and roads divided one building from another. Settlers constructed houses of corrugated iron. Within two or three months the settlers had built eight houses of corrugated iron with rough wooden supports. Gandhi's house, *Sarvodaya*, consisted of one big room which served as a living and dining room, two small bedrooms, a small kitchen and a rough bathroom. A hole was cut in the iron roof of the bathroom and a shower set up by balancing a garden watering can on a piece of wood; attached to the can was a piece of cord which was used to tip the water out of the can. Each house had its own little toilet where a bucket system was installed and each householder was responsible for the emptying of the bucket at a site set aside for that purpose. Apart from printing and agriculture, education became a vital service at Phoenix Settlement and a boarding school was later established with the help of Dr Pranjivan Mehta, Gandhi's friend from his student days in London.

Gandhi wrote in a letter to Maganlal Gandhi, on 24 November 1909 about the name:

"Phoenix is a very good word which has come to us without any effort on our part. Being an English word, it serves to pay homage to the land in which we live. Moreover, it is neutral. Its



*Sarvodaya*, Gandhi's corrugated iron cottage at Phoenix Settlement



*Sarvodaya* in the 1930s. The corrugated iron sheets were later replaced by asbestos sheeting

significance, as the legend goes, is that the bird phoenix comes back to life again and again from its own ashes, i.e. it never dies. The name Phoenix, for the present serves the purpose quite well, for we believe the aims of Phoenix will not vanish even when we are turned to dust."

When Gandhi moved to Johannesburg he left his nephew, Chhaganlal Gandhi and his friend, Albert West, in charge of the Settlement and the press. The Phoenix Settlement played an important role as spiritual centre and support base for the passive resistance campaigns led by Gandhi in 1907 and in 1913.

In 1913, Gandhi made a trust of the Phoenix property. When he left South Africa in 1914 Maganlal Gandhi and most of the other settlers also left for India. Mr and Mrs West and Mr West's sister, Ada West and Mr R. Govindoo and his family stayed on and contributed to run settlement and Indian Opinion. They found it difficult to cope with the tasks demanded by the running of the newspaper and wrote to Gandhi requesting assistance. In response, Gandhi sent his second and third sons, Manilal and Ramdas Gandhi from India. After a few years Ramdas returned to India while Manilal stayed on. In 1918 Mr West's and Mr Govindoo's families moves to town where their children could have access to higher education and Manilal Gandhi was left with the responsibility of running Indian Opinion and Phoenix Settlement.

Hermann Kallenbach, Gandhi's architect friend, was one of the Phoenix Settlement trustees and visited the settlement from time to time. He designed a house, Kasturbhavan, made of cement blocks, for Manilal Gandhi's family. Manilal Gandhi continued to run Indian Opinion and Phoenix Settlement until his death in 1956. Manilal's wife, Sushila, ran the settlement and Indian Opinion after his death. She decided in 1961 to close the newspaper, partly because of funding problems and a partly out of concern that it would not be possible to continue to run it according to the principles laid down by Gandhi.

The architecture of Phoenix Settlement underwent a number of changes in later years, for example, the iron sheets for Gandhi's house, Sarvodaya, were replaced with asbestos sheets. In 1952 the Kasturba Gandhi State Aided Indian School was established in memory of Kasturba Gandhi. In 1962 the Mahatma Gandhi



Manilal Gandhi in the Press Room at Phoenix Settlement circa 1930s



in 1895, during unrest in the Inanda area Phoenix Settlement was looted and torched

Clinic was set up to serve the Inanda area which lacked medical facilities. Between 1962 and 1969 the Gandhi Library and Gandhi Museum were built. Kasturbhavan was converted for the purpose of setting up a hostel for medical students attached to the clinic. During the 1985 unrest in the Inanda area Phoenix Settlement was looted and torched. Most of the buildings were destroyed and Sarvodaya was stripped by looters.

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## 12. Gandhi's Farewell in 1914

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Gandhi left South Africa in July 1914, having decided that his services were required in India. Farewell meetings were held in Durban, in other centres in Natal and elsewhere, in his honour. On 8 July 1914 a large farewell meeting was held at the Durban City hall to bid farewell to Gandhi and Kasturba. The Mayor of Durban, Mr W. Holmes presided and Gandhi and Kasturba were garlanded and presented with bouquets. A telegram sent by Kallenbach, who was unable to attend the farewell, was read out. Gandhi, in presenting a speech, began by explaining why he was dressed in traditional Indian dress. He explained that he had adopted the costume on discharge from prison as a symbol of mourning for the passive resisters who had been killed by police during the 1913 strike and, although the period of mourning was over, he had decided to retain the costume.

On 9 July 1914 Gandhi attended a farewell function organised by the Gujerati Sabha at the Surat Hindu Association Dharmashala in Victoria Street, since renamed Bertha Mkhize Street. On the same day he also spoke at a children's sports function organised by the Farewell Committee in Albert Park. A public dinner held in honour of Gandhi in Durban, on 11 July 1914, was attended by the Mayor and other prominent whites and about 30 Indians. Addresses were



Gandhi ephemera in the library and museum at Phoenix Settlement

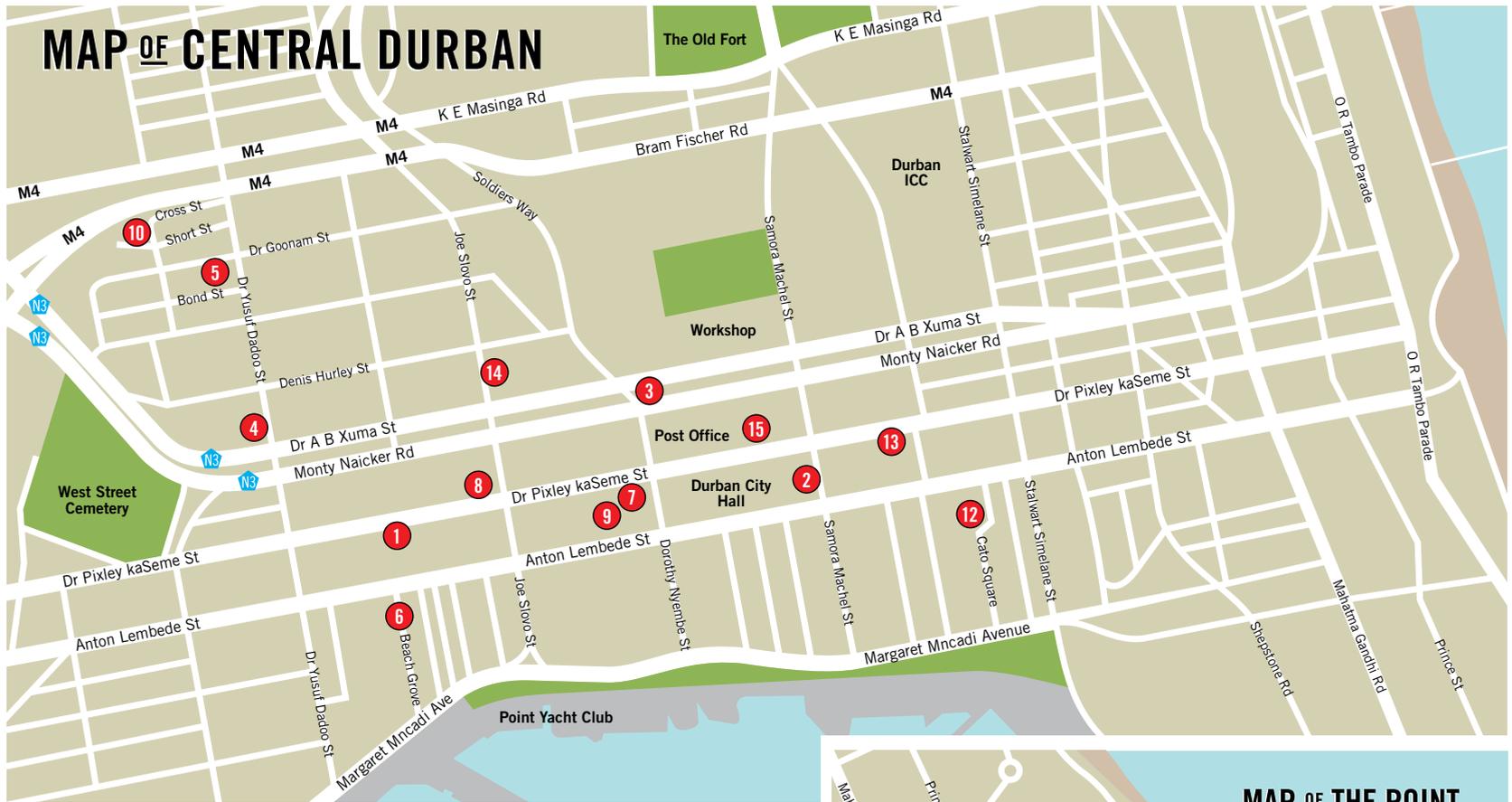


Gandhi addressing a farewell meeting in Durban in 1914

presented to Gandhi and to Sonjia Schlesin, Gandhi's Secretary, on behalf of the Farewell Committee. A farewell meeting was also held in Verulam, on 12 July 1914, where Gandhi addressed a crowd of about 5000 indentured labourers from the Verulam and Tongaat area, who had turned up to bid him farewell. On the same day he addressed a meeting of indentured labourers and other Indians, at the 'Indian Football Ground' in Durban. Gandhi then departed by train for Johannesburg en route to Cape Town, from where he embarked for Europe and ultimately India.



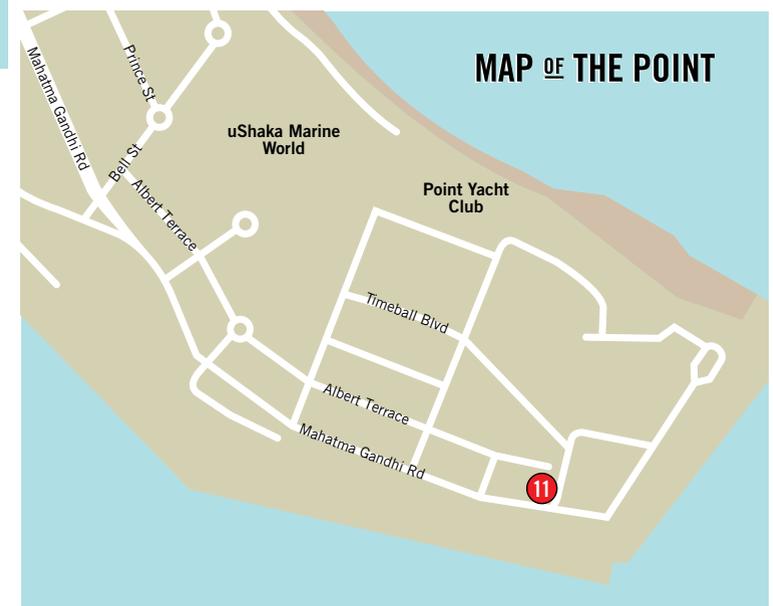
# MAP OF CENTRAL DURBAN



## GANDHI SITES IN CENTRAL DURBAN

- 1 427 Dr Pixley kaSeme Street (West Street), in close proximity to Greenacre's Passage, is the site where the firm of Dada Abdullah and Co. was located in 1893
- 2 The Durban Magistrate's Court was located in Samora Machel Street (Aliwal Street) from 1866 to 1912. The building was conserved and serves as the Old Court House Museum
- 3 The old Durban Railway Station building on the corner of Monty Naicker Road (Pine Street) and Soldiers Way. It was from here that Gandhi embarked, on 7 June 1893, on the fateful train journey that, in later years, he regarded as having changed the course of his life
- 4 Congress Hall, where the Natal Indian Congress held its meetings, was located at the corner of Dr Yusuf Dadoo Street (Grey Street) and Dr A B Xuma Street (Commercial Road)
- 5 95 Dr Goonam Street (Prince Edward Street), the site where Gandhi purchased a property on behalf of the Natal Indian Congress
- 6 Beach Grove where Gandhi rented a large cottage, Beach Grove Villa
- 7 The site of the Central Methodist Church, built in 1878 and demolished in 1968
- 8 The site of Ferguson's Corner at 374 Dr Pixley kaSeme Street (West Street), where Gandhi's legal practice was based between 1895 and 1896
- 9 14 Mercury Lane is the site where Gandhi had his legal practice in 1899
- 10 Saint Aidan's Mission Hospital, which was opened on 14 September 1897, was located at the corner of Cross Street and David Webster Street (Leopold Street)
- 11 Alexandra Square at the Bay end of Mahatma Gandhi Road (Point Road) marks the site where a crowd of white artisans gathered in January 1897 to prevent Indian passengers of the *Courland* and *Naderi* from disembarking
- 12 Cato Square, the vicinity through which flowed Cato's Creek, a narrow channel leading to the Bay, a site of the anti-Indian demonstration and attack on Gandhi in January 1897
- 13 The Tudor House Hotel at 197 Dr Pixley kaSeme Street (West Street) was the site of the Ship Hotel, the area where Gandhi was assaulted by a white mob on 13 January 1897
- 14 110 Joe Slovo Street (Field Street) is the site where Gandhi's friend and benefactor Parsee Rustomjee, had his residence and business in 1897
- 15 Medwood gardens marks the site of the Borough Police Station where Gandhi was given asylum in January 1897

## MAP OF THE POINT



200m 