



Bartolomeu Dias is recorded as the first European visitor to Lüderitz in 1487. He named it Angra Pequena ('Little Bay') and left his calling card in the form of a stone cross. The treacherous coastline protected the bay from further interference until the discovery of guano on the off-shore islands close-by. The guano rush lasted from 1842 to 1845. A second rush in 1861 precipitated the annexation of the islands to the Cape Colony. However, with the exception of a small trading and fish processing station in the name of Cape Town businessman Aaron de Pass, and a private settlement at Radford Bay in the name of his agent, David Radford, no serious attempt was made to establish a permanent settlement on the mainland at that time.

It was the arrival of Adolf Lüderitz, a Bremen merchant with ideas of establishing a trading post - and foothold for the German Empire - that finally placed Angra Pequena on the map. In 1883 Heinrich Vogelsang, acting on behalf of Lüderitz, negotiated two deals with local chief Josef Fredericks for the purchase of Angra Pequena and a significant stretch of the surrounding coastline. In 1884 this land was declared a German Protectorate. Lüderitz sold the land and rights to the Deutsche Koloniale Gesellschaft für Südwest-Afrika who, after his death in 1886, renamed the bay Lüderitzbucht in his honour.

Strong winds, encroaching sand, lack of building materials and absence of fresh-water supply hampered early development but in 1904 the Nama / Herero uprisings proved to be the catalyst that brought the struggling trading settlement to civic status. By 1907 peace was restored but Lüderitzbucht found itself somewhat better off than before the war as an independent district with upgraded port facilities and a railway line linking it to the interior.

In 1908, the town's future was assured when a sparkling diamond was discovered in the desert sands not more than 25kms away by a railway worker, Zacharias Lewala. What followed was a period of rapid development and economic prosperity for Lüderitzbucht. Introduction of building regulations in 1909 saw that the townscape took attractive and well-ordered proportions and the underlying urban plan was efficiently connected by a Stadtbahn (trolley system) instituted in 1911.

Despite changes wrought by WWI, Lüderitz continued to prosper under the South-West African Administration. All German diamond interests were bought and consolidated into the Consolidated Diamond Mines of South West Africa (CDM) and in 1922 four rock lobster factories were established. The little town prospered - its fate bound to the treasures mined on land and fished from the sea.

But in 1928 diamonds were discovered at the Orange River mouth and as mining interests shifted south, so the local economy shifted down a gear. Faced with the reality of its isolation and bleak economic outlook, the rallying cry of the Lüderitzbucht Foundation in the late 1970's was that "Lüderitz Must Live!" Concerted efforts were made to save buildings from demolition and to institute a conservation ethic culminating in the town's centenary celebrations in 1983 and the fifth anniversary of the Dias Landing in 1988.

Today in an independent Namibia, Lüderitz continues to face economic and development challenges - not least how to deal with its colonial past. Mining operations were re-established at Elizabeth Bay in 1989 and the fishing industry continues to be the main employer while the ground-breaking of the Lüderitz Waterfront Project in 2000 proved a significant boost for local tourism. Built on economic tides of boom and bust, the 2012 centennial celebration of the Felsenkirche (Church of the Rock) represents a beacon of hope and continuity in a town that has seen much change but still holds a special place in the hearts of Buchters and visitors alike.



Rhenish Mission Church (E. Laaf; 1907/11)

The Rhenish Missionary Society was founded in Germany in 1828. In the 20th Century, the Rhenish Mission Stations in Namibia were incorporated into the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN). The Rhenish Mission in Lüderitz was founded by Emil Laaf who designed the church and rectory buildings. The church was inaugurated on 5th of February, 1911, thereby pre-dating its sister church, the Felsenkirche, by one year. A new set of windows was designed and constructed by local artist Hermann Dirks in 1993. The building is a landmark on the North-Eastern corner of town with its spire forming a strong focal point within the townscape.



Old Customs House (Kais. Eisenbahnkommissariat, 1912)

The offices of the Lüderitz Waterfront Development Company are housed in the old Zollbeamtenwohnhaus (or Custom's Official House) overlooking the Lüderitz Waterfront and Harbour. Across the street is a similar domestic building (1909) which was originally owned by J. Kappelhof, a master carpenter in Lüderitz. It has been suggested that Kappelhof probably constructed the elaborate verandah filigree himself. On the other side of the harbour, sitting above the quay is the old Lüderitz Hospital which now houses the Ministry of Sea Fisheries. And further toward the point of Shark Island is the Old Pilot's House which originally marked the entrance to the Port.



Woermann House (F. Hoft, 1907)

In 1906 Woermann Linie, a German-based shipping company, established an agency in Lüderitz. Apart from aesthetic aspects, the management house is remarkable for its innovation: first, it was one of the first solid-constructed buildings in Lüderitz and second, due to the lack of freshwater, a sea-water pipeline serviced the bathrooms. Both innovations were adopted in subsequent buildings in Lüderitz. From 1921 the house was rented by the Deutsche Schulverein for use as a school and later as a boarding house. The house and smaller office building below are now private residences.



Old German School (Schachle, 1911)

The school building was built in 1911 for the Lüderitz Municipality. It was first home to the Lüderitz German School with 122 pupils. In 1921 the German Schulverein moved to the Woermann House so that the British School could take up occupation of the building. Although the original Jugendstil doors have been removed from the entrance portico, the building still contributes to the aesthetic character of Ring Street. It has been incorporated into the grounds of the Helene van Rijn Government School. The modern building on the corner was designed by Dixon & Twenlow for the SWA Administration in 1952.



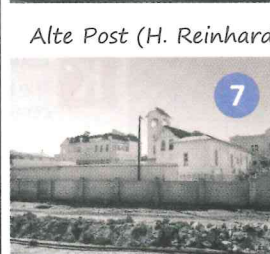
Lesehalle (O. Braune, 1912)

The Lesehalle (or public library) was built in 1912 as a living memorial to Adolf Lüderitz, the Bremen Merchant who established a trading post at Angra Pequena (Little Bay) which was later re-named Lüderitzbucht in his honour. Originally the windows to right of the entrance formed an open verandah onto Ring Street. The architect, Otto Braune, employed similar plaster detailing on the hospital at Shark Island however in the case of the Library, the chequered Jugendstil decoration has been better preserved. The building was renovated in 1982 by Stauch & Partners.



Turnhalle (O. Braune, 1912/13)

The Turnhalle was home to the Männer-Turnverein Lüderitzbucht. The gymnastics movement was founded in Berlin in 1811. The 'Four F' symbol over the entrance stands for the motto of their founder Friedrich Jahn: "Frisch, Fromm, Fröhlich, Frei, ist die Deutsche Turnerei". Construction of the Turnhalle relieved pressure on the Kapps Hall which served as the only other community hall in Lüderitz. Inauguration festivities took place on the 10th and 11th May 1913. The arched gable frontage was demolished as part of renovations in 1969 and the original windows have been replaced.



Alte Post (H. Reinhardt, 1908/10) & Bergamt (E. Krause, 1911/12)

Both the Alte Post (old Post Office) and Bergamt (old Mining Authority) have two facades: one facing onto Schinz Street, and the other onto the railway yard behind. Offices were located on ground level and officials were housed on the first floor. The Bergamt lacks the finer decoration of the neighbouring Post Office, but nevertheless the stark facade and mansard roof still lends the building some authority despite several years of neglect. The Bergamt was vacated by the Mines Department in 1928. The Old Post Office presently houses Namibian Wildlife Resorts and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.



Bezirksgericht (Kais. Eisenbahnkommissariat, 1910)

In 1909 Lüderitzbucht was awarded Bezirk status, as an independent district from Keetmanshoop. The Bezirksgericht (Regional Courthouse) was built in 1910 by the Brothers Bause. The building has an imposing facade with interesting hipped gable and half-timbering detail to the southern elevation. After WWI, under British rule, the building became the Magistrate's Court. It served this function until 1981 when the new modern Magistrate's Court building was constructed on Bay Road. The Bezirksgericht now houses Municipal Offices and is linked to the Rathaus (Town Hall) by the Willy Timm Memorial Garden.



Rathaus (Kais. Eisenbahnkommissariat, 1907 / 08)

The Rathaus (or Town Hall) was originally built as a school, but it was converted to municipal offices in 1910 subsequent to the recognition of Lüderitz as an independent Bezirk. The elevated front veranda overlooks a large open area which originally served as the school quadrangle. It now houses the municipal gardens with an anchor, symbol of Lüderitz, taking pride of place at the centre. The Council Chamber is located at the front of the building, behind the half-timbered gable on the left. The chamber is still furnished with original timber meeting table and chairs bearing the carved insignia of "Stadt Lüderitzbucht".



Bezirksamt (Kais. Gouvernement, 1906, 1909 & 1911)

The Bezirksamt on the corner of Bay Road and Mabel Street was originally the offices of the District Chief, or the official representative of the German Colony in Lüderitzbucht. The building was converted into a Police Station under British Rule after WWI. It continued to serve this purpose until 1980 with construction of the new police station next door. The building was originally much larger with additional bays either side but these have been demolished, together with the out-buildings, leaving a neat three-bay structure with central gable and front veranda overlooking Bay Street. The building now houses the Department of Works.



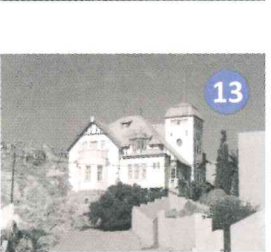
Bezirksamt House (Kais. Eisenbahnkommissariat, 1908)

Commanding panoramic views of Lüderitz, the Bezirksamt House was built as the official residence of the District Chief. (It was originally called Haus Böhmer after one of the District Commissioners that lived in it.) The building was designed and built in 1908 by the Imperial German Railway Commissioner's Office together with the two houses below which also served as housing for German Government Officials. Under British Rule, and later the South West African Administration, the house served as the Magistrate's Residence until 1944. All three houses in Mabel Street were sold in public auction in 1983 and are now private residences.



Krabbenhoft & Lampe (F. Kramer, 1909)

Established at Gibeon in 1880, Krabbenhoft and Lampe were prompted to move the headquarters of their trading enterprise to Lüderitz after the discovery of diamonds in the area. The shop stocked all manner of imported goods including clothes, toys, groceries and a delicatessen. Comprising two floors and an attic space, the building was proclaimed a National Monument in 1979 and is presently used for retail, offices and holiday accommodation. The neighbouring semi-detached houses on the corner of Berg and Zepelin Streets were built for Oskar Lampe between 1909 and 1912.



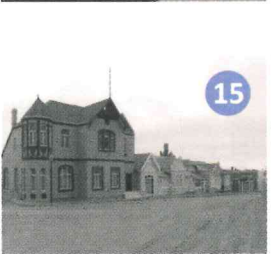
Goerke House (1910)

The house was built as private residence for Hans Goerke, manager of the Emilian Diamantengesellschaft mbH. The luxurious villa is indicative of the wealth generated on the nearby diamond fields. In 1920 the property was sold to the Consolidated Diamond Mines of SWA (CDM) who in turn sold it to SWA Administration in 1944. It served as the Magistrate's Residence (or Drostdy) from 1944 until 1981. In 1983 the building was re-purchased by CDM (now Namdeb) and fully restored under guidance of architects Edda Schaeffer and Dr. Walter Peters with the purpose of converting it to a VIP guesthouse and museum.



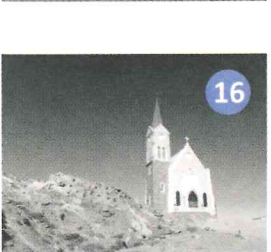
Kreplin House (F. Kramer, 1909)

The double-storey building was erected for Emil Kreplin - former manager of the local railways, mining magnate and first mayor of Lüderitz. Although the eaves line and windows have been altered, the building has retained some original details such as granite foundations and half-timbering on the front facade. But without the timber balcony to the first floor and the onion-shaped cupola over the drawing-room alcove, the building is a shadow of its former glory and as such reflects the story of its once proud owner who, ruined by war, flood and economic depression died tragically by his own hand in 1932.



Berg Street Houses (1909-1911)

The brightly painted houses in Berg Street form a picturesque group. House 'Glück Aull' was built in 1908 and was recently restored - the name is reference to a traditional miners salute. The blue house on the corner was designed by F. Kramer for Kreplin in 1910 and was once occupied by August Stauch. Next door was the home of Franz Eberlanz, founder of Lüderitzbucht Museum. The neighbouring orange house belonged to photographer J.C. Hubrich. Barrels Restaurant, originally depot for the local green-grocer, was later converted to a church and is now a bar! The old bakery chimney is just visible above the roofscape.



Felsenkirche (Albert Bause, 1912)

The Felsenkirche (Church of the Rock) was consecrated on 4th August 1912. It is therefore one of the oldest Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Namibia. Featuring proudly as a landmark on the Diamantberg, the Victorian Gothic church is notable for its stained glass windows which were a gift to the Lüderitz parish by the German Emperor Wilhelm II and Johann Albert Mecklenberg. Local artist Hermann Dirks spent two years restoring these windows from 1983 to 1984. The church holds regular services and the recent centennial celebrations were well attended with representatives from the whole of the Lüderitz community.



Pfarrhaus (H. Bause, 1909/10) and the 'Diamond Palaces'

The Pfarrhaus (or Rectory) is located adjacent to the Felsenkirche. The symmetrical front facade with prominent mansard roof and hipped gable is best viewed from Hoher Street. On the surrounding contours of the Diamantberg are several 'diamond palaces' - many characterised by the Jugendstil detailing which had taken hold of Europe at the time. Leading up to the church, on the corner of Kirch and Diamantberg is the old Meje House which was built in 1920 for Hermann Meje. The house is more modern in style to that on the opposite corner which was built in 1910 for local merchant Hermann Henning.



Old Powerstation (1911, 1913 & 1929)

The skeletal remains of the old Powerstation belie the innovative technologies it once housed and where electricity and desalinated water were produced up until the late 1970's. The original steel frame (consisting of twelve bays) was imported from Germany in 1911 by Stauch's company the Koloniale Bergbau-Gesellschaft. It was extended by an additional sixteen bays in 1913 due to an increased demand for power to the electrified plants on the diamond fields. The 3-storey building across the street was built in 1913 to house employees of the Electricity Works. The tower was added in 1929 by CDM.



Pupkewitz Building (Evers, 1908 & Seeliger, 1909/10)

Occupying a prominent site at the bottom of Bismarck Street is the Pupkewitz Building which was originally built in 1908 for the Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft. The second floor was added only later in 1909. For more than 80 years it was home to building merchants Meje & Ziegler, a company synonymous with the construction of buildings in Lüderitzbucht from 1906. Across the street is the Pletz House (1906) and the Albert Pletz Workshop where the Pletz Diamond Jig was developed and manufactured for specific use on the German South-West African diamond fields.



Deutsche Africa Bank (H. Evers, 1907)

The building was the first bank of solid construction in Lüderitz. It was built for the Hamburg-based Deutsche Afrika Bank in 1907. In addition to the banking hall and offices, living accommodation was provided on the first floor. The building is a fine example of early 20th century German architecture with rich articulation such as the rustication, roof to corner tower, slightly jagged gable and original wrought-iron work at street level. The building stands in contrast to more modern examples of mid-20th century German architecture such as the Station Building higher up Bismarck Street.



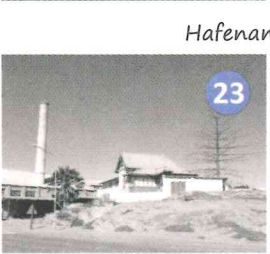
Bahnhof (Hafenamt Swakopmund, A. Lohse, 1913)

Bezirksamt Böhmer and Mayor Kreplin assisted in selecting a suitable site for the termination of the Keetmanshoop line. Although the railway was already complete by 1908, construction of the station was only completed in April 1914. As such, the Lüderitz Station was one of the last major buildings to be constructed in the German Colony prior to the outbreak of WWI. Although the building displays some Jugendstil motifs, (note the gable cartouche and oval-shaped windows) it is more consistent with the modern style which was emerging in Germany at that time.



Bödicker House (Emil Krause, 1912)

Built by Meje & Ziegler, the double-storey commercial building is associated with early trading in Lüderitzbucht. Carl Bödicker & Co. was a Hamburg-based import company selling all manner of provisions which were received in Lüderitz by ship. The symmetrical facade is emphasised by two oriel windows and a central roof lantern. What once might have been described as a 'quayside warehouse' is today completely cut off from the harbour by a concrete fence but the Bödicker Building still serves as a landmark on Hafen Street halfway between the Meje & Ziegler Building and the Woermann House.



Hafenamnt (for Hafenamnt or Harbour Authority, 1907)

The Hafenamnt was built by the Harbour Authority in 1907 to serve as offices and residence. The domestic-scaled building with stone plinth, half timbered gable wall and closed veranda forms a neat termination to the odd assortment of workshops and factories along the Insel Street edge and marks the entrance onto the old causeway which, prior to construction of the new quay, once served as a tenuous link between Shark Island and the mainland. Today the house forms part of the Namport property and is a private residence.



Old Hospital (Otto Braune, 1911/1912)

The hospital was built in 1911 and served as the state hospital in Lüderitz until the late 1980's. The site was chosen for its scenic views, lack of dust and relative isolation. The Lesehalle and the Turnhalle in Ring Street were also designed by Otto Braune. There are similarities in the plaster detailing across all three buildings although in this case, they have not been so well-conserved and the original chequerboard frieze below the eaves line has disappeared completely. Nevertheless it is an interesting building in terms of its situation, scale and original public function. It is presently used as offices for the Ministry of Sea Fisheries.

LÜDERITZ HISTORICAL BUILDINGS

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