The Town Hall Fire 1932



The Town Hall Fire.

SENSATIONAL ALLEGATIONS IN COURT.

REMARKABLE EVIDENCE LED



The Town Hall Fire.

FURTHER SENSATIONAL DETAILS.

POLICE STORY OF TRAP.

Mr Nicolaas Baikovich (1875 Yugoslavia – 8 July 1943 Nigel) was arrested on a charge of arson in March 1925. It was alleged that he was responsible for burning the Town Hall, in early January 1932. The Solicitor for the defence, was Mr H. Cranko and 3 witnesses were Solly Mograbi, Solomon Weinstock and Moses Fleischman.

Rustenburg Herald:

1932-03-25 Mr. N Baikovich, who is well-known in town, has been arrested on a charge of Arson, it being alleged that he was responsible for the burning of the Town Hall, early in January.

1932-04-01 Bail Allowed for Baikovich. Before Mr. Bird, Assistant Magistrate, On Wednesday last Mr. Cranko on behalf of N. Baikovich renewed application that the accused be released on bail. Mr. Cranko pointed out that although the crime, the burning down of the Town Hall, with which the accused is alleged to have been concerned is a serious matter, Mr. Baikovich is a considerable property owner in Rustenburg and bears an unblemished reputation after many years residence in the Town. Baikovich was prepared, said Mr. Cranko, to agree to a condition that if released on bail he should be obliged to report daily or even twice daily to the Police. Mr. Nel, Public Prosecutor, said that at this stage he was not objecting to the accused being admitted to bail but suggested that the alleged offence was grave and large sums were involved in the matter. After some discussion Mr. Bird decided that he would admit the accused to bail in an amount of £600. Of this sum £100 was to be deposited in cash and the balance of £500 by two sureties for the sum of £250 each. We are informed that it is hoped that friends of the accused able and willing to sign as sureties will come forward. In the meantime, Mr. Baikovich remains under custody until the Bail can be arranged. Correspondence. Town Hall Fire.

1932-04-15 Sensational Allegations in Court. Remarkable Evidence Led. …. Nowadays it would seem to be the rule for the local Court house to be filled to overflowing almost daily. During the whole of last week the hunger of lovers of sensation was considerably appeased: from the crowd standing outside the Court building on Monday morning there seemed promise of yet further sensation, for as early as 9.15 two whole rows of benches inside the Court were occupied by men and women who seemed determined to occupy the most advantageous positions, and to stick to these posts Had there been "booking" one cannot doubt that the plans of the 'house' would have been filled the week before. These early comers were to be disappointed for a Police official announced that proceedings in the case Rex versus Baikovich were due to commence at 2.15 p.m. only. The majority of the crowd moved off, and collected into groups of two and three outside the Court* eventually to disappear completely - all but a group of five women who remained seated in Court and stuck to their guns for a further hour or so. At 2 p.m. scenes of almost incredible enthusiasm were witnessed. The court room was literally rushed. Everyone jostled through the half-open main entrance to the building, and there was a struggle for the best seats, What a contrast was presented when shortly afterwards the prosecutor, Mr. Nel, entered, unruffled and serene. Then Mr. Cranko, Solicitor for the defence, arrived, equally calm, equally unruffled. The

Preparatory Examination of Nicolaas Baikovich, on allegations of burning the Rustenburg Town Hall ….. Giving evidence, Solly Mograbi, detailed how he and Murray walked down the pavement in front of Wulfsohn's Store: There was a strong wind blowing—from south to north…. Witness had tried to force a door from which a lot of smoke was issuing.....Witness' brother, Joseph Mograbi and Constable Murray, gave corroborative evidence,

1932-04-22. A Johannesburg daily has said of Rustenburg that only two things happen in that dull dorp every day - the sun rises in the morning and sets again at night. Perhaps at normal times the informant may be correct, but during the past few weeks, if nothing else has happened beyond the closing of a mine or two, the roll of the local Magistrate's Court has at least been lengthy and extremely interesting. The sun, too, continues to rise and set! Last week the Court room had a "capacity house most days. At half past nine on Wednesday morning again, an enthusiastic crowd had collected and occupied the rows of benches completely, and even standing positions were taken up. Eagerness was written on every face. It would seem that these people were prepared to see the case through to the end, no matter how lengthy the evidence, no matter how tedious. There was always the possibility of an interesting witness entering the witness box, there always seemed a chance of a novel turn in events. The sensational allegations of the previous week had whetted the appetites of the 150 odd Oliver Twists present! At the shout of "Silence in the Court!" the case of Rex versus Baikovich proceeded with unabated vigour.

LENGTHY EXAMINATION COMMENCES.

… Then Mr. Cranko, Solicitor for the defence, arrived, equally calm, equally unruffled. The Preparatory Examination of Nicolaas Baikovich, on allegations of burning the Rustenburg Town found it empty.…….

More About the Paraffin.

Solly Wainstock, employed in Mr. Moses Fleishman's store, stated he was in the shop on the 31st December, when the accused purchased a gallon tin of paraffin for two shillings and nine pence, He could not recollect what brand of paraffin, but it was in a tin similar to the tin produced in Court. "I have not sold any paraffin to the accused before or since," stated witness. Moses Fleischman gave corroborative evidence and stated the tin in Court had contained Atlantic Paraffin, a brand stocked by him. He was a lessee of a shop premises owned by the accused.

1932-04-29

The Town Hall Fire Case Baikovich Committed for Trial. When Mr. A.V, Bird, Assistant Magistrate, went on to the bench on Monday morning, the final stages of the lengthy Preparatory Examination commenced. As usual the Court room was full, and one recognised amongst the audience many faces one had noticed at the previous hearings. But if any of the sensation fans present anticipated startling allegations at this hearing too, they were to be

disappointed, for the evidence led was formal in nature, and marked the conclusion of perhaps the most remarkable Preparatory Examination yet held in Rustenburg, Carl Friedrich Heyne, a contractor of Rustenburg, stated that he built a portion of the Town Hall in 1913. About 10 years later the building was extended by the Municipality under his supervision. Ho handed in a plan of the Town Hall dated 1913. He gave details of the construction of windows in the Hall. The sash of a window could be taken out without removing the frame, stated witness After a short cross examination by Mr- Cranko, the case for the Crown was concluded. The charge was put to the accused who was then committed for trial. Baikovich accepted short service. Bail was allowed in the sum of £100 cash, and two sureties ot £260 and the other of £100 A further condition was stipulated by the Court, namely that the accused had to report daily ot the local Charge Office at 9 o'clock in the forenoon.

National Archives South Africa: 1932 Criminal Case. The State versus Nikola Baikovich.