

POT POURRI

Still going Dutch

Growing up in Dee Why in the 50s, a highlight for a couple of years was the Christmas concert that Warringah Council put on each year in the Civic Centre car park on the corner of Pittwater Road and St. David's Avenue. A modest temporary platform or stage was erected and the populace simply stood around it.

While the infrastructure was low key the entertainment was top notch. The MC was George Foster. He was a well-known radio personality and script writer - a contemporary of Jack Davey and Bob Dyer - who lived in Dee Why, Dee Why Parade I think. His children were pupils at Dee Why Public School.

Standout musical performer was Gus Merzi, an equally well known piano accordionist and entertainer. He was to feature quite a lot on television when

it began to broadcast a year or so later and is now remembered (he died just a few weeks ago) for his organising and performing roles in the various concerts that were held in Vietnam for the Australian and US troops. I had the impression that he was also a local at the time of the Dee Why concerts but I note that later in life he lived at Bondi. Perhaps he knew George Foster.

There were various other performers but one I had forgotten until I read Keith Amos' article on the Maas family that is in this issue, was a young Dutch woman, in beautiful national dress, also playing some sort of accordion. She may have also sung.

Actually it was not the reading of Keith's article that triggered this long lost memory but the viewing of one of the photographs in it. Presumably the woman was Mikie Maas. With her radio work she probably knew both George Foster and Gus Merzi. At the end of the concert she and all other performers figured in a Christmas-themed jam session led by Gus Merzi.

All very simple in presentation but quite exciting for a nine or ten year old growing up in an equally simple Dee Why. The concerts only ran for a couple of years, presumably killed off by the coming of television.

Richard Michell

Performance pioneer

If you are interested in more on Gus Merzi then his recent obituary in the SMH outlines a very full and productive life that included being a pioneer in the move to bring live music into Sydney hotels in 1954 (when the photo on this page was taken), playing on the original Skippy TV series theme tune and undertaking an amazing 24 tours as musical director and producer for Australian and United States Armed Forces fighting in Vietnam, as well as troops from many nations stationed in Japan, Korea, Malaysia and the Sinai. In Vietnam, he shared the stage with Bob Hope and other US and Australian celebrities including John Wayne, Robert Mitcham, Nancy Sinatra, Ricky May, Little Patti and Col Joye. He was asked to play at the 40th-anniversary concert to commemorate the battle of Long Tan, at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra in 2006. In 1987, he was honoured by the RSL with the Anzac of the Year Award, and in 1994 he received the Vietnam Logistics Support Medal.

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/accordionist-entertained-vietnam-troops-and-played-on-skippy-theme-20200623p5559y.html>



Vocalist Nellie Small and accordionist Gus Merzi perform at the Hotel Castlereagh on August 20, 1954. Of West Indian heritage but Sydney-born, Small was described in the papers of the time as a "male impersonator", SMH



Gus Merzi with Pat Kennedy, Dinah Lee, Lorrae Desmond and Little Patti in 2006, Canberra

ARTICLE

The Maas family: Dutch migrants at Dee Why

Further to recollections of the Dutch shop in Dee Why is the following migrant experience of Mientje and Marinus Maas, the first couple to build a home in a street named after them at Dee Why Heights (later Dee Why West, then Cromer) in 1951.

Mientje's name before she was married was M.A.A.S. Maas - her first names being Mientje Adriana Anthonius Septimus, which she shortened to Mikie, and her family name being Maas. She was born in 1923 in the Netherlands town of Alkmaar and experienced World War II whilst living at Loosdrecht, 75 km from Rotterdam. With similar-minded patriots, she was a member of the Dutch underground resistance to the German occupation of Holland during the war. (1)

Marinus (Rien for short) Maas was born in Rotterdam in 1921. During the war he was in the Rotterdam Marine Corps evacuated to the United States. His unit trained with the US Marines in readiness for amphibious landings against the Japanese in the Dutch East Indies (today's Indonesia), however the war ended before these landings were needed. (2)

As a folk singer/composer on guitar, accordion and piano, Mikie was on tour with a Dutch Army unit entertaining Dutch troops in the Indies when she met her husband-to-be at Sourabaya in 1946. As both were surnamed Maas, Mikie's surname stayed the same when they married in Holland. Returning to Indonesia in 1948, Marinus worked with a firm of chartered accountants and Mikie as a guest performer for Radio Djakarta. Then, after their son Nicolaes was born in 1949, they decided Australia had better prospects and in 1950 were on their way by plane to Sydney. (3)

Marinus (Max in Australia) found work with a chartered accountancy firm and Mikie had some radio performances, aiming for a career in entertainment. Looking around Sydney for a home site, they settled on an elevated 70ft x 90ft block facing an unsealed, nameless road at Dee Why Heights, on sale for £520. Surrounded by gumtrees, wildflowers and sandstone outcrops, it had glorious bush views spanning from Narrabeen Lakes to Frenchs Forest. Little Nicolaes helped install a small plaque in the brick foundation marking their first work on their house: 'Nicolaes Maas, 10/5/1951'.

A Dutch builder erected the home's ready-cut frame, then Mikie and Max finished the rest themselves in little over a year, including a garage made of stone quarried on site. As work proceeded they 'camped' in the unfinished house, sheltered by awnings and cooking on an open fire. Max went to the office each day on his motorbike and studied at night for the qualifying exams to practice accountancy in Australia. Mikie kept little Nicholas occupied, did the household chores, carted rocks, mixed cement, laid roof-tiles, assisted with the carpentry and did all the painting.

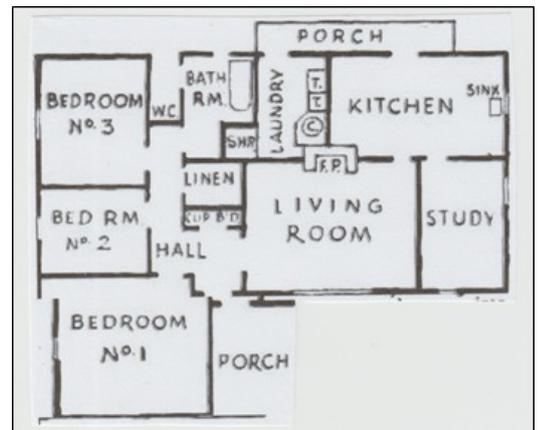
The finished product was a three-bedroom weatherboard home painted gleaming white, with sunflower-yellow window frames, orange-red guttering, and a green-tiled roof. The sunny front porch had sweeping district views, the living room a fireplace, and off the kitchen was an extra room, or study. Mikie mixed the inside paint colours herself: a cream living room, green and yellow kitchen, green and white bathroom, pink and blue main bedroom, biscuit-coloured doors, and light-chocolate skirting boards.

There was high revelry at the home's 'grand opening' in December 1952, most guests being local Dutch friends building their own homes in the same manner. Dutch food and wine were served, along with folk dancing and singing amidst the gumtrees and wildflowers.

Mikie requested that the street be named Maas Street in honour of her husband's forebear, Nicolaes Maas (or Maes) - the Dutch artist who was one of Rembrandt's most famous pupils. When this was approved, another party was held to celebrate the street's official opening. Sydney's lord mayor Alderman O'Dea officiated, at a gathering attended by federal MP William C. Wentworth, the NSW premier's wife Mrs Askin, the burgomaster of Amsterdam, friends and neighbours. Commenting on the event, *Sunday Herald* hoped that Maas Street would be remembered as having derived its name from 'a plucky hard-working couple of New Australians'.



The newly finished home in Maas Street, Dee Why c.1952 - Maas family photo



House plan - courtesy Maas family

Michael and Marina Bonaventura, both born in the 1950s, completed the Maas family. Mikie continued her singing career, Max his accountancy, and both their active membership of Manly New Settlers League. After nearly twenty years at Dee Why a country move away from the 'big smoke' won favour, and Gunnedah was chosen. They bought a 500 acre farm there and on Mikie's suggestion named it 'Costa Vale' - which she explained to the children was Dutch for 'cost too much'! The idea was to make their living from a mixed farm: wheat, pigs, poddy calves, some goats, etc. It turned out harder work than expected, but an enriching life experience. (4)

Mikie and Max became enthusiastically involved in Gunnedah's civic activities and, over the years, much-respected citizens. For example, Mikie promoted the idea of a Gunnedah statue in honour of Dorothea Mackellar - whose father's local property, *Kurrumbede*, had inspired some of her classic poems including 'My Country'. Mikie was instrumental in raising \$30,000 for a very fine statue. She also personally began an annual Dorothea Mackellar Poetry Award for schools, which in 2013 attracted 10,000 entries from 700 participating schools across Australia. (5)

Sixty years after migrating to Australia, Max passed away at Gunnedah aged 87 in 2009; Mikie died two years later, aged 88. When the statue's park setting was upgraded in 2013, tribute was paid to Mikie and Max as fine citizens who had 'embraced the Australian way of life with great patriotism' (6) - aptly said of this exemplary Dutch-Australian couple. They were fortunate, Mikie used to tell the family: 'We had the opportunity to pick this country'. (7)

Notes:

1. Women's Museum of Australia, Alice Springs: wmoa.com.au/collection/herstory-archive/maas-mientje-adriana-anthonius-sept
2. Marina Maas, told to writer, June 2020; and see 'Netherlands Marine Corps', [wikipedia.org/wiki/Netherlands Marine Corps](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Netherlands_Marine_Corps)
3. For their migration and settling at Dee Why: *Yass Tribune-Courier*, 1 Sept 1952; *Sunday Herald*, 2 Nov 1952; *Manly Daily*, 15 June 2006
4. Marina and Michael Maas, told to writer, June 2020
5. *Namoi Valley Independent*, 8 & 11 Oct 2013
6. *Ibid*, 11 Oct 2013
7. Michael Maas, told to writer, June 2020. About 70% of 160,000 Dutch emigrants between 1940 and 1970 chose Australia: daaag.org/node/dutch-australian-migration-history/

Acknowledgement:

Sincere thanks to Marina and Michael Maas for their information and photographs

Keith Amos

Post script

Gunnedah's Dorothea Mackellar connection has been in the news recently. Whitehaven Coal's plans to expand their nearby mine are potentially putting the Mackellar homestead *Kurrumbede* at risk. A hearing at the Independent Planning Commission was held a few weeks ago but the outcome is not yet known. *Ed*



Mikie in Dutch national costume, and son Nicolaes, on the porch of their Dee Why home, 1950s - Maas family photo



Max and Mikie, c.2007 - Maas family photo



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Surfwear

I was recently contacted for information on Platt's surfwear. In the late 1950s, 15 year old Kevin Platt's mum made him some board shorts. His friends were so impressed that she soon had a small cottage industry going from their home in Freshwater.

The endeavour grew and the Platt's opened a factory on Pittwater Road, Dee Why - near Dee Why oval, adjacent to Dee Why Creek, a carpet showroom today - and a surf shop, also in Dee Why, on the corner of Sturdee Parade, opposite the hotel.

Does any one have any information or reminiscences involving the Platts and their surfwear business? Does anyone have a pair of vintage shorts? *Ed.*



Kevin Platt outside his surf shop in
Dee Why c1965

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