

Names in the Dutch Australian Society 'Abel Tasman' Inc (DAS) newsletter

Dutch migrants in Tasmania

The DAS produced a newsletter from its inception in 1972 until its demise. The date of the later is difficult to define - it was with a whimper rather than a definitive bang.

This study has extracted every name, when mentioned, from each issue, together with the date of the issue and the reason for the mention of the name. The study will provide an incomplete history of the group. However, as a history, it will be accurate as to names and functions and dates, eliminating the role of memory from relating the record.

Essentially, the list produced by this study shows the names of the people involved in the DAS, and of those who came to the attention of the Society. The group of people involved is a small sub-set of the total Dutch migrant group in Tasmania.

Those people involved may have had various motives, which are not immediately obvious. The beginnings were probably made more possible by Federal Government initiatives in that era, the Labor party targeted the ethnic vote. That is the subject of a separate study, beyond the scope of this one.

DAS and Religion

From time to time it has been suggested to this writer that the DAS was an initiative and province of non-Reformed migrants. That it was a place where Dutch language and customs could be exercised and enjoyed. The contra discussion noted that Reformed people were too involved in their own projects (church, school, aged care) to have time for the exercises of the DAS.

It has often been argued that the Catholics had access to infrastructure that was already in place - churches, schools, aged care. Dutch Catholics could come alongside Catholics of other national heritage to expand facilities already in place. To the best of my knowledge, this subject has not been examined in depth.

On the other hand, the Reformed heritage migrants, at least those that were discontent with the Australian churches, if not disappointed with the Presbyterians and Methodists, were determined to build the infrastructure they needed from scratch. This involved enormous sacrifice in time, labour and money. In this situation, protecting Dutch language or customs was seen as frivolous.

All of the above is moot for this study because the DAS never asked or recorded the religious status of the members, just like the Australian government. The government asked migrants many questions, including their health, occupation and racial descent, but never asked about religion. Not in the migration process, and not in the naturalisation process.

A study of the names on this database, cross-referenced with a study of gravestone information, and of tribute notices in the Tasmanian newspapers, may yield sufficient information to make a tentative claim about the role of religion in the behaviour of the migrants associated with the DAS. These databases do not exist, and the task of researching and constructing them is quite large. The prospect of obtaining useful information at the end is dim, and may not be useful.

In summary, I contend that it is not possible to discern the role of religion in the motivation of DAS members to be involved with that organisation.

DAS and language

The DAS persevered with the use of the Dutch language until nobody with Dutch language skills could be found to compile the newsletter. At the same time it was argued that the newsletter should be displayed in members homes in such a way as to intrigue the next generation, to arouse their interest in the activities of the DAS. This was a generation that lacked reading Dutch skills, so it was imperative to use the English language to succeed in communication. This discussion is not documented, but readers can be assured of the veracity this explanation by the writer of this paragraph, then the centre of the discussion.

In short, my written Dutch did not pass muster, and there were no other volunteers to produce the newsletter, so it had to be English.

In the early 1950s there was a Dutch Australian Society based in Hobart. It focussed on sharing information. Speakers were organised to explain child endowment policies, and insurance, and naturalisation procedures and other topics migrants needed to know. Names and addresses were shared, skills were advertised. Most of the articles were written in Dutch, because most of the audience was recently arrived. The Australian government became concerned - what were the migrants discussing amongst themselves?

It became compulsory for migrant newsletters to have a minimum of 25% English content, a policy enforced by ASIO that lasted a year or two before it was relaxed, before it was decided that the migrants had good intentions towards Australia. The DAS persevered for approx. 5 years, and then faded away - people were too busy building their new lives, to be Australian. With encouragement from the youth, the migrants were becoming proficient in English. Young men were marrying Australian girls. Tradesmen who had learned their craft using metric measurements had switched to imperial.

DAS achievements

The second iteration of the DAS was a useful organisation for a very small number of migrants. It grew and flourished for about forty years, before it faded into nothing. In that time it made good contributions to the members (families), and to the general community.

For the members and their families the DAS promoted aspects of Dutch culture, especially with the annual celebration of Saint Nickolaas (Sinterklaas). This was organised in imaginative ways. Sinterklaas arrived on horseback, on various yachts, in an American WWII jeep and on the *DUYFKEN* (replica ship). The references to these events in this names list are scant.



There are references to other member activities - pot luck dinners, fishing trips, ladies nights, Miss Dutch Community, Drama Group, Dutch Benevolent Fund, International Wall of Friendship.



For the Dutch migrant community at large, the DAS organised radio broadcasts on community radio. This included broadcast of Dutch news from tapes mailed from the Netherlands - every aspect of that technology now superseded, but a significant achievement then.

There is a brief reference to the Tulip Festival, then a major community event in the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens for many successive years. The reference to the Tasman Monument, a gift to the people of Tasmania from the Dutch migrant community, is equally brief. Strangely, Queen Beatrix does not get mentioned for unveiling the monument.

The DAS nurtured a Dutch folk dancing group for a number of years. They were provided with suitable costumes, learned a number of dances and displayed their skills in various public events.



Together with a local Council (Kingborough) which was a sister city with Grootegast (Gr), the DAS ran an Art Prize for senior high school students. It was run alternately in each country, the winner receiving an air fare to the sister city and three weeks hosted accommodation. There is only one reference to this major event in the names list.

In summary, this list only gives hints to the achievements of the DAS. The names of people involved are listed, a note in passing. Members got involved, worked together, avoided publicity. A successful outcome was sufficient reward.

DAS and the migrant community numbers

The number of names listed (1297) is no reflection of the size of the Dutch migrant community.

Research in Department of Immigration records suggest approx. 3500 Dutch migrants came to Tasmania, mostly in the 1950s. How many of them stayed, how many moved interstate, how many returned to the Netherlands, is not known.

How many moved from interstate is not known either, so perhaps for the moment 3500 could be a useful number. In the 1970s and onwards, that number is probably many more assuming that many children were born, and the number of deaths was still low. From documents I have seen, I estimate the total Dutch migrant community - dutch born or born locally with at least one dutch born parent - at about 10,000. Again, this is the subject for a separate study.

The names list records every instance of a name being written. Some names are only mentioned once. Some names are mentioned several times, with spelling variations e.g. Gerrit and Gerald Betlehem are the same person. Less obviously, John & Titus Steenhuis are the same individual. Some people are noted by initial in some instances, and by name in other editions, or with their spouse.

Many individuals are listed multiple times because they are quite involved in the DAS activities, or are repeatedly elected to office. E.g yours truly is elected multiple times to a number of different positions, and consequently is mentioned 25 times.



Many people who had no involvement with the DAS remembered their Dutch heritage when there was a real visit.



The list names 538 individuals. Some of these are mentioned as hosting VFR, or related to some others on the list, and thus only incidentally linked to the DAS.

This means that about 500 individuals were involved in some way with the events and functions of the Society. Some of this group were married to a Dutch born individual, but their number is not statistically significant.

In summary, about 500 of the migrant population of 10,000 were actively involved in some way with the DAS. In other words, about 5% of the Dutch migrant population was involved with the Dutch Australian Society, and can take all the credit for the achievements, of which the Abel Tasman monument in Salamanca Place, Hobart is the most visible and most significant.

