

Labassa lives

Volume 1, Issue 1, April 2013



Return to Labassa

More than 135 people returned to Labassa on Sunday 24 February. A more precise figure proved impossible when former residents avoided the queue and simply appeared in the house – after all, it had been their home for years and they knew every entrance!

The majority were residents from the 60s, 70s and 80s. Descendants of employees of owners Alexander Robertson and John Boyd Watson II came, as well as the grand-children of Labassa's caretaker for more than 40 years, Mrs Emily Brearley. We were also able to reconnect with some of our earliest families – the Morgans (1920s); Sholls (1930s) Hodgens (1940s) and, Apfelbaums, Gruners, Traurigs and Whites (1950s).

Descendants of owners included families of John Boyd Watson II (1904-1920), Robert Hannon (1923-33), and Wolf and Hinda Kazer (1950-80).

People queued to visit the tower, cellar and servants' quarters, which are rarely



Owners and employee descendants: Back Row L-R: Keryn Lilley (Watson empl.); Lorraine Palmer (Watson); Margaret Campion (Watson empl.); Bob Maver (Robertson empl.); Meaghan Trenfield (Watson); Justin Lott (fiancée).
Front Row L-R: Jean Watson; Peter Watson; Margaret Watson

open to the public. Guests were also among the first to see a 1958 ABC documentary that showed tenant furnishings and original c.19th fittings.

There were a few unexpected highlights according to Rodney Ashton: "Without doubt one of the most intriguing parts of the day was when separate groups of people realised that they lived in the same room either decades apart or were the next/previous tenant."

There were many generous donations on

the day – more than 180 photos, an original brass stair rod and a collection of 1970s hippie clothes.

Copies of photos taken on the day would be greatly appreciated.

Vandal or artist?



Former resident, Susan Krongold (nee Gruner) points out the small artistic embellishments she made to Labassa's wallpaper in the 1950s.

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About this Newsletter

This newsletter aims to provide feedback on Labassa's social history. Stories, photos, information and corrections are very welcome.

Feedback on this first newsletter would be greatly appreciated. See p.4 for contact details.

Remembering the Halfords



Fred and Vera Halford epitomised Labassa's old world charm for many tenants of the 60s and 70s.

Fred had been a grazier and then goldminer in Papua New Guinea where he and Vera met. Vera was a racing car driver in the 1920s; a well-known interior decorator and milliner in the 1930s; a landgirl who trained women how to drive tractors

during World War II, and a military driver in the 1950s.

On shopping day, while Fred retrieved their 1951 Triumph Renown from the garage, Vera would glide down the main staircase beautifully dressed in a smart ensemble complete with fur stole, gloves, seamed stockings and stylish hat.

Following Vera's death in 1978, Fred gave resident, and friend, Ruth Bearlin several of Vera's haberdashery boxes including the preserved head of a bird of paradise, which had been used to decorate a hat!

Fred and Vera's niece Barbara Morley remembers visiting their apartment with its hanging velvet curtains, Oriental rug and collection

of antique furniture: "Uncle Fred was very happy there. He spent his days writing his memoirs about the family – from the early family days at Kongwak in Gippsland in the late c.19th, through the farming years and the two World Wars. He made good friendships among the other tenants and was quite accepting of the younger hippie set."



Peter Tarpey's Labassa family



The mystery of this c.1970 photo, published in *The Age* and *Sunday Herald Sun* to promote the Return to Labassa, has been solved.

Photographer, Peter Tarpey, explains how it came about: "I was studying photography at Prahran Tech and we were assigned to do a 'family portrait'. This is my family at Labassa. We set up outside on the veranda, set the self timer and I managed to get into the front."

The people in the photo have been identified as follows:

Back row left to right: John Varney, Julie Ryan, Fiona Colin, Brendan Power, Sergio Sill, Hartmut Erdman, Jessica Tarpey, George Varney (on pillar)

Behind bike: Sandy Sinnott, Peter Sinnott

Second row: Phil Speller, Judith Brooks, Jeff Black

Looking for . . .

We have been unable to make any contact with more than 100 people. Do you know anything about the following people and their possible whereabouts?

Stanley Bates; Mary Batten; Michael Bourke; Marie Brown; Edwin Brownbill; Marc Brunet; Reginald Cocks; William Cook; John Cotter; Carole Croke; I. Dent; Barry Diehl; Horatio Fentiman; Clifford Forde; Henry George; William Griffiths; William Grimshaw; Margaret Halloran; Gregory Hardman; John Hendell; David Innes; Peter Jacobs; Paul Jansen; Helk Jansen; Keith Jepson; Peter Johnson;

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Artists at Labassa: Sidney Morgan



Sidney Morgan: one of our earliest resident artists.

Sidney, with wife Eliza and daughter Merle were living at "Labassa Flats" as early as 1922.

While Sidney had worked as a warehouse manager and commercial traveller he had a keen interest in illustration. Both of these dated works are likely to have been



produced at Labassa before he died at home in November 1937 aged 71.



Bands at Labassa: The Chocolate



The Chocolate: Keith Matcham, Herman Marcic, Randall Bouchier, Rudolph Marcic with Mick Diggles squatting.

When Monash University music student, Randall Bouchier, moved into Flat 7 in 1969 he realised the Cellar was "a terrific space for playing music with the guys".

Some of "the guys" were members of The Chocolate, a band that had changed its name from The Creatures because its reputation for lighting fires on stage had made it difficult to get gigs.

Fanmail would regularly arrive at Labassa addressed to "Randy Choc" as well as the occasional girl who would just turn up on the doorstep.

Randall went on to play with a band called Luntch. One day, Michael Gudinski, who lived down the road and was just starting out in the music industry, came to Labassa to listen to one of the songs Randall had written for Luntch and chat about promoting the band.

Randall is currently a Pastor and teaches the piano.



Above: Flyer for *I'm An Animal* recording.

Right: Randall Bouchier rehearsing for Luntch.



Please send contributions, corrections, information, comments and articles, indicating whether or not they are for publication, to the following:

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PO Box 363, Chadstone Shopping Centre,
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Forthcoming events

Open days (3rd Sunday of the month, 10.30am – 4.30pm):

April 21
May 19
June 16
July 21
August 18
September 15
October 20
November 17
December (closed)

Upstairs downstairs



Alexander Maver, friend and business associate of owner Alexander Robertson, met his wife Elizabeth Pearce at “Ontario” (renamed by the Watsons as “Labassa”) where she lived and was in charge of the household linen.

Maver had followed a similar migration path to Australia as Robertson – both were of Scottish heritage and had lived in

Ontario, Canada before migrating to Australia. Maver established a successful business as a produce merchant in Brunswick supplying Cobb and Co. Coaches with horse fodder. Maver became friendly with Robertson and was a regular dinner guest at Ontario.

Alexander Maver and Elizabeth Pearce married in 1893 and had six children. Descendant, Bob Maver is pictured on p.1.

Coming issues

Mrs Brearley
Films made at Labassa
Resident musicians
Artists in Residence

Rare birds

We are still hoping to locate the whereabouts of at least one of the brolgas from Labassa’s roofline and garden.

The brolgas came in at least two sizes (see photos) and were a unique feature of Labassa’s Australiana.

The National Trust recently demolished the cream-brick garages at the rear of Labassa and discovered the feet of several brolgas.

Locating a brolga would enable the accurate reproduction of this iconic feature. We know at least one brolga spent time in the garden of a neighbour before disappearing.



Resident Gwen Westwood c.1943 on the roof.

Unidentified couple c.1943 in Labassa’s front garden.



Looking for (Continued from p.2)

Jim Kalvites; Frank Kennedy; Frederick Keys; John Knaggs; Thomas Lacey; Herbert Landstad; Reuben Lazarus; Karen Livingstone; Michael Love; Gary Maguire; Alan Martin; Alfred McIver; William McKelvey; Trevor Mein; H. Miller; Rollie Minski; Marie Nells; Marie O’Sullivan; Bernard O’Sullivan; Igor Persen; Eric Plofssen; Ron Quinn; Nydia Roberts; Alfred Rodseth; Paul Satchell; Leslie Schetzer; Stanley Simmons; Julie Skate; Les & Eva Smith; George Strickland; A. Tang; Roderick Thompson; Colin Timmins; John Warszawski; Evelyn Watson; Alexander Watson; Sue Watson-Knight; Alan Westrip; Peter Willcocks; Bronwyn Wood; Bruce Woodcock; Charlie Zarb