

112.Mavis Alexander

Featured image painting done by local artist Kobus van Dyk showing Concordia school in background

Source of the following article: Montagu Museum

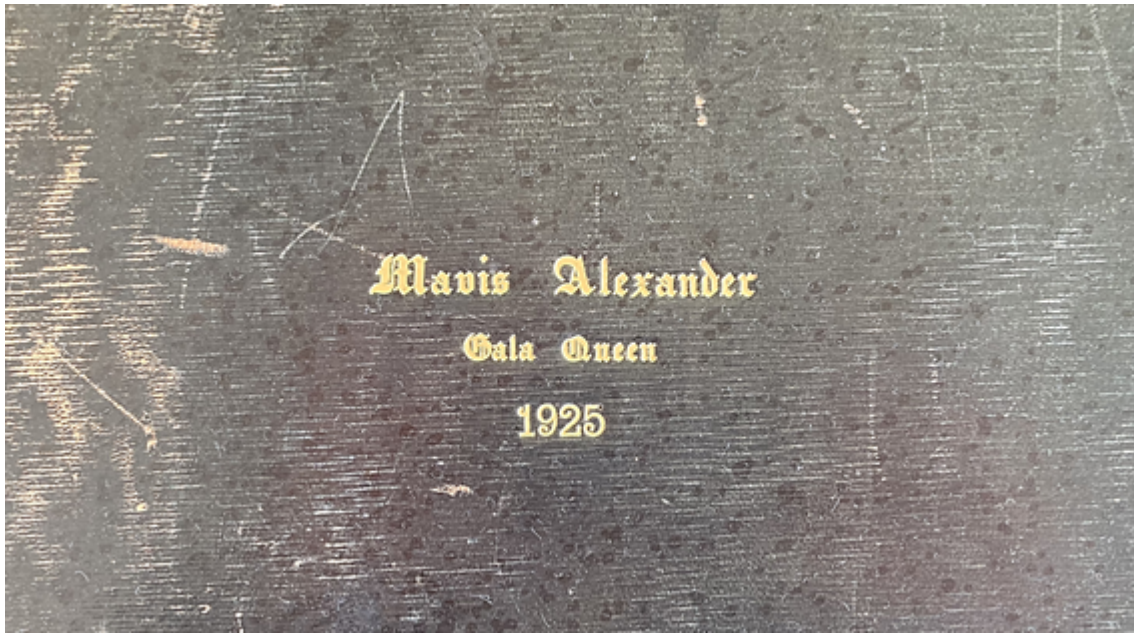
Was Mavis Alexander SA's first BEAUTY QUEEN?

(Written by **Mrs Bee Jordaan** and which appeared in THE ARGUS on 24 April 1971)

In the archives of the Montagu Public Library there is a large dark blue leather album titled, in gold lettering "MAVIS ALEXANDER – GALA QUEEN – 1925", Mavis was the first beauty queen in South Africa. (see below)

On October 9, 1925 the Weekend Argus printed the following notice: "Pretty girls in the Peninsula are invited to send in their photographs as soon as possible." The search for the country's first beauty queen had begun.

The Press ran riot. "Are the Cape girls the prettiest in South Africa?" they asked. "Of course," said the Mayor of Cape Town, Mr W.F. Fish, Gwelo Goodman the artist, Iris Hoey the actress and Bernard the hair-stylist. Names long gone, but perhaps not forgotten.



By October 11, 783 photographs had been received and were on show in The Argus building. From 10.30 a.m. right through the day the hardest worked man in town was The Argus lift-man. The public were to be the judges and in one day 2 000 votes had been recorded and 3 000 visitors had tramped in and out of the building.

By October 14, 22 000 people had seen the exhibition and by the 25th entries had been whittled down to eight Cape "pretties".

Apparently a large majority of the voters were “against the shingle” (hairstyle) and seven of the finalists had “uncut hair”.

Excitement reached fever pitch. The finalists appeared at the old **Tivoli** theatre where a “photo drama de lux” called “The Beloved Brute” featuring Victor McLaglen and Marguerite de la Motte (“the blonde screen beauty”), was showing. The Tivoli evening prices were 4s., 2s. and 1s. 6d.



The Tivoli Cape Town large building back right

At last the names of the eight finalists were published.

There were Miss C.M. Alexander, Miss W. Comys, Miss B. Jeary, Miss J. Koonan, Miss D.O. Lategan, Miss N. Neave, Miss J. Stevens and Miss E. Whitlow. Of these, Miss Koonan was a former resident of Montagu and Miss Alexander was teaching at Concordia (Koo) village school.

On November 14, the gala queen was chosen from the eight finalists. First was Miss Mavis Alexander, "the little school-teacher". Second was Miss Jean Stevens "the charming young dancer from Miss Kirsch's Academy", and number three was Miss Olivia Lategan, "from Plumstead".

On November 19, The Argus arranged a gymkhana and garden party at Kenilworth race-course, where Miss Alexander appeared in the Crossley car which had been used for the recent visit of the Prince of Wales. Garlicks arranged a mannequin parade and there was a donkey derby and many sideshows.

When Mavis returned to the Koo "the whole population turned out to greet and congratulate her". A ball was promised for December in her honour and the local Farmers' Association decided to name the famous Koo apple after her.

Mavis was driven to and from the farm in an eight cylinder Hupmobile which travelled at the amazing speed of 108 km/h on the straight. The driver, a Mr. H.P. Rose, was "very careful" with his precious passenger and felt only the strain of keeping awake on such a long run. It was 240 km.

Beside the 25-guinea Argus cheque and the Prince of Wales car lent to Mavis for a whole weekend, her prizes were numerous and somehow much more personal than the thousands of Rands paid out today.

A dinner dance was given for her by the Queen's Hotel and a "box and the theatre" (name not given). She received a camera, a hat, a summer frock, three pairs of silk stockings,

shoes and a sunshade. A firm invited Mavis and five friends for afternoon tea for a whole week, and a salon gave her six months "permanent wave dressing".

An orchestra was "lent" to her for an evening, a firm presented a special frame for her winning photograph, a Mr Adriaanse gave Mavis an easy chair, a jeweller a "solid gold wrist watch" and a dancing studio "a course of tango lessons".

Mavis was a very tired girl that Christmas. She was very glad to spend her holidays peacefully with her mother in sorting out her "Press" and sticking all the hundreds of cuttings into the blue leather album.

S.A. SE EERSTE KONINGIN?

Berig deur Tienie Botha wat verskyn het in die Byvoegsel tot die Burger op 27 Maart 1971



Oorkant my sit sy rustig en so tussenin kom die hele storie uit. Dit klink soos 'n storie. Dis die verhaal van 'n plattelandse meisie wat Suid-Afrika se eerste skoonheidskoningin geword het en toe van die toneel verdwyn het om onderwyseres te wees. Dis die verhaal van 'n beeldskone nooi wat ondanks daardie oorweldigende roem van daardie oorwinning onder die land se skoonstes in 1925 en wat 30 jaar gewag het om met die man van haar drome te trou, en om hom nege maande later weens longkanker aan die dood af te staan. Vandag is sy mev. Mavis Mitton, een van die Strand se baie weduwees.

Maar laat ek voor begin.

Mavis Alexander was van jongs 'n mooi meisie. Sy is op die plattelandse dorpie Winburg gebore. Haar vader was een van die baanbrekers op Kimberley se diamantvelde. Later het die gesin na die Strand toe verhuis.



South Africa's first beauty queen Mavis Alexander in her gala outfit – a modest laurel wreath, a lace and georgette dress and a vast bouquet

Pictures: Montagu museum

In 1925 was Mavis Alexander onderwyseres in die Koo, 'n stuk of twintig myl anderkant Montagu in die bergdele na Touwsrivier se kant toe. Daar het sy stokalleen die kinders van sub. A tot by standerd 6 geleer wat hulle moes weet. Dit was haar eerste skool.



Not the school above. The building that houses the present day (2024) Laerskool Koo was only built in 1934



In 1925 the building above at Concordia in the Koo housed the school. The building was still standing in 2024

Haar skoonheid was nie net uiterlik nie. Sy was 'n nooi met diepte en met karakter.

Toe sy vir die September-vakansie van daardie jaar Strand toe kom om tuis te rus, het sy 'n foto saamgebring wat 'n fotograaf 'n ruk tevore geneem het. Dit was 'n mooi foto. En toe die Engelse middagblad kort daarna met die aankondiging kom dat hy 'n groot skoonheidswedstryd gaan hou om die vakansieseisoen in die Skiereiland 'n bietjie aan te wakker, is Mavis Alexander van alle kante aangeraai om haar in te skryf, maar wou nie.

Maar sy wou nie. Eers toe sy teruggaan Montagu toe, het Mavis Alexander net van alles vergeet totdat 'n vriendin in die Kaap later aan haar geskryf het om te sê sy sal twee weke lank in die Skiereiland moet kom woon om vir die wedstryd te

kwalifiseer. Die koerant het ook gesê hy is besig om reëlings vir so 'n verblyf te tref en het ook al die Onderwysdepartement gepols oor die nodige verlof.

“Die nuus het my soos 'n bom getref. Ek het nie gedink dinge gaan so ver vorder nie. Maar daarby het alles verder soos 'n legkaart gepas. My suster en haar man het in daardie tyd vir twee weke by vriende in Kalkbaai vakansie gaan hou en het gesê ek kan by hulle kom inwoon.

“Die onderwysdepartement het my twee weke spesiale verlof gegee en 'n spoggerige motor is uitgestuur Montagu toe om my te kom haal”.

In daardie stadium was Mavis Alexander reeds onder die agt finaliste van die wedstryd. In 'n groot saal het die foto's van byna agthonderd deelnemende meisies gehang. Die publiek is genooi om daarheen te kom en die agt mooiste meisies per stembrief te kies.

“Die foto's was gewone kop en skouer-foto's. Daar was nog nie sulke dinge soos baaibroeke en parades nie.”

Op Saterdag, 24 Oktober 1925, het die agt finaliste se foto's in die koerant gepryk. Die openbare belangstelling was geweldig. Op Saterdag 14 November 1925, het die koerant die wenner aangekondig: Mavis Alexander. Met altesame 6 990 stemme het sy die tweede nooi, Jean Stevens (4 348 stemme), ver geklop.

Toe sy die nuus van die oorwinning kry, was sy nog by haar suster-hulle in Kalkbaai. Die reaksie weens hierdie oorwinning was geweldig vir 'n beskeie meisie wat op die platteland as't ware in afsondering skoolgehou het.

Haar pryse was altesame sowat £100 (R200) werd en het naas 'n kontantbedrag van 25 ghienies van 'n koerant ingesluit, 'n kamera, 'n hoed by 'n bekende winkel, 'n somerrok by 'n ander winkel, drie paar sykouse, 'n paar skoene en 'n reis deur die

Tuinroete.

In alle soorte klere, selfs 'n destyds modieuse baaipak wat alles netjies toegemaak het en by alle moontlike geleenthede is Mavis Alexander afgeneem. Sy was koningin van die Karnavalseisoen, die mooiste meisie in die Skiereiland.

Maar ná die opwinding van alles is sy terug Montagu toe om vir die kinders van die Koo te gaan skoolhou. Eers in die Desembervakansie van daardie jaar het sy die reis Tuinroete toe onderneem, saam met haar broer.

Hoe voel sy vandag oor daardie oorwinning van haar en oor skoonheidswedstryde in die algemeen?

“Dis 'n ondervinding wat ek betreur. Dit bring 'n meisie in baie groot versoeking, veral wanneer die meisie nog jonk is. Jy is nie gebalanseer nie en kry soveel aandag. Die mans wat aangelok word, is die verkeerde soort. Vandag is ek 'n Christen en wat ek vir Hom kan doen, is wat van belang is.”

Sedert 1925 het Mavis Alexander tot groot hoogte van die toneel verdwyn, In die Koo het die mense haar aangestaar en die kinders haar bewonder. Maar met die verloop van tyd het dinge weer rustiger begin gaan.

En in 1931 het sy teruggekeer nader aan die huis in die Strand. Dit was terwyl sy by Faure skoolgehou het dat sy haar aanstaande man ontmoet het. Hy was 'n ingenieur by die Kaapse Munisipaliteit en het die pype van die Steenbrasdam gelê.

In dieselfde jaar het hulle verloof geraak, maar sowat twee jaar later is die verlowing gebreek. “Ek het my moeder gehad om te versorg en het nie kans gesien om my aandag tussen die twee te verdeel nie. Buitendien wou ek graag onderwys gee.”

Maar kwaai-vriende was hulle nie, die verhouding het voortgeduur. Die Kaapse ingenieur het geweet Mavis Alexander is die nooi van sy drome en sy het geweet hy is die prins op

die wit perd. Hulle sou wag.

Maar dit was nie voor 1960, byna dertig jaar nadat hulle ontmoet het, dat die twee tot trou gekom het nie. In daardie jaar is Mavis Alexander se bejaarde moeder oorlede. Mitton was toe reeds 'n afgetredene en het op Bloubergstrand gewoon.

Dit was 'n heuglike dag met die lang uitgestelde huwelik. Dit waarvoor albei so lank gewag het, het uiteindelik gebeur.

Maar hul geluk was van korte duur.

Kort ná die huwelik het Mitton, wat altyd gehoes het en 'n strawwe roker was, 'n hol hoesie ontwikkel. Mavis het daarop aangedring dat hy 'n dokter gaan spreek.

“Dokter, my vrou sê julle moet 'n X-straalfoto van my neem,” het Mitton skertsend aan die dokter gesê. Op die plaat was 'n duidelike kol op die long. Binne nege maande ná die huwelik is Mitton begrawe.

“Ons het so lank gewag om die geluk te vind waarvan ons altyd gedroom het en toe kom die einde so skielik. Maar ek berus in Sy wil”.



Picture: Anita Miller

Oorkant my het Mavis Alexander een hondjie, Trixie, toegelaat om op haar skoot te spring. Hulle is groot maats, veral wanneer hulle deesdae gereeld vir swemuitstappies gaan. Mev. Mitton speel ook golf, was al voorsitter van die Strandse

vroueklub en rolbal.

Vandag woon sy alleen in die huis op die erf wat haar man haar gegee het nog voordat hulle getroud is. Oral in die huis is dinge wat haar aan hom herinner en aan 'n leeftyd van wag en 'n kort nege maande van getroude geluk.

Dit dan is die sprokiesverhaal van Mavis Alexander. Kyk na die foto hieronder. Is sy nie nog mooi genoeg vir enige skoonheidswedstryd van vandag nie?



Picture: Montagu museum

ROTARY PEACE CLOCK ON STRAND BEACH FRONT



Speech given by Anita Miller

Good morning. Thank you for inviting me here to tell you about the Clock on the Beach Front in the Strand.

I am an honorary Rotarian of the Strand Rotary Club. Prior to 1988, when Women were first admitted to Rotary and for some years afterwards, I was a Rotary Ann since my husband, Ronnie was the Rotarian.

The Strand Rotary Anns were a happy and active group and apart from assisting the Rotarians in their projects we had projects of our own. Amongst many other we started Charity Shop in the Strand, the "Junk Trunk", in 1986 which is still operational today. The proceeds of this endeavor enabled the Rotary Anns to do many various projects in the area.

My story is going to start with a love story.

Few of the many people who pass the clock tower on the Strand beach are aware of its poignant history. For that we must go

back to the 1920's, also known as the Roaring Twenties. It was the era of not only of the Charleston, but of the jazz songs like Everybody Loves My Baby and Irving Berlin's love songs, like the waltz, Always, that he composed in 1925

That was the year that Mavis Alexander became the first Miss South Africa. – although the beauty contest was not referred to as such at the time. Conducted by the Argus newspaper, it was simply a nationwide search for the most beautiful woman in South Africa. More than seven hundred contestants entered by sending in their photos, which then went on public display in the Tivoli Theatre in Cape Town. Mavis was crowned "Gala Queen."

The winning prizes, modest by today's standards, included a cheque for twenty-five guineas, theatre seats, a camera, lunch for six people for a week and armchair, dance lessons and a photo frame for her winning photo. Also, various accessories considered essential for women of that era: a hat, a dress, silk stockings, shoes, a watch as well as a perm. She was also afforded the privilege of being driven around Cape Town in the ultimate Crossley 25/30 car that the Prince of Wales had used in Cape Town shortly before the contest.

It must have been a dream come true when she went to Hollywood and featured in two silent movies. Mavis, a schoolteacher from Montagu, returned to teaching at the end of her reign and spent 26 years teaching the Standard 2 class (grade 4) at the Somerset West Primary School.

But it is her personal life that grabs the imagination as one of the most enduring love stories. In keeping with the romanticism of the time. Bertie Mitton to whom she was engaged, waited for 35 years for her to marry him. It is unclear why it was such a long engagement. But eventually after her mother's death, they got married on April 30, 1960. She was 55 years old.

Bertie passed away a few years later and Mavis continued to live in the Strand where she became heavily involved in charity work and with the Methodist Church. She passed away in the historic year 1990 and bequeathed a sum of money to the Strand Rotary Anns. The money was invested while consideration was given to a project by which Mavis could be remembered.

During the pre-election campaign in May of 1993, Rotary Ann Jacqueline Lester had a strong feeling about time being limited and a great desire for PEACE IN OUR LAND.

She had the vision that a CLOCK TOWER for all to see on the Strand Beach Front with the theme TIME FOR PEACE – TYD VIR VREDE – IXESHA LOXOLO – A vision she conveyed to the Anns.

The Anns were enthusiastic about the idea. Architect and former Strand Rotarian, Danie Pienaar's opinion was sought. Plans were drawn at no cost to the Anns. The Strand Town Council were approached. They were delighted and offered a site. Ironically, it is opposite where the Da Gama Hotel stood that was the venue for the Charter Dinner of the Strand Rotary Club on 22 June 1953.

A resident of the Strand, Brian Lesar, designed and made a beautiful Peace emblem of a dove for the column using semi-precious stones.



Messrs. Clock Time of Cape Town designed the clock face and

installed the mechanism.

The total cost of the project was R42,273

This project is not only regarded as a tribute to Mavis, but we, the present and past members of the Strand Rotary Club, believe that it stands as a reminder to all who pass by of the deep desire for PEACE IN OUR LAND.



Pictures: Anita Miller

During the second week of December 1994, the clock was handed over to the Town Council and the residents of the Strand by the Strand Rotary Anns. It was the year Mr. Mandela became President. We did send him an invitation to the hand over celebration, but he had to decline.

I know that everyone who has seen the clock would like to know why it is not working. Sadly, a few years ago it was vandalized, and the electrical pipes and parts of the mechanism were stolen. As it now belongs to the City of Cape Town, the Strand Rotary Club no longer have a say in the

maintenance thereof. Efforts were made a few times to fix the clock but to no avail. The Club has offered to assist with the cost, were it possible to fix the clock, but there are several problems. The promenade or pavement along the beach is being upgraded and currently is completed a short distance from the Clock. It is apparently a long-term undertaking, and the possibility exists that the clock might be in the way thereof and will either be removed or shifted to a new position. The club has found someone who is willing to fix and restore it to its former glory, but an assurance from the City of Cape Town is needed that it would be completely burglar proof, and preferably that it would remain exactly where it is standing now. Ken Lester has been in numerous conversations with the council and a lot of correspondence has gone on about the clock. Truthfully, there are just too many different people in the Council's employ who do not care or are not aware of the significance of the donation the Strand Rotary Ann's made to the people of the STRAND

Who knows what will happen or when it will happen? At 85 I doubt if I will be around to see it happen. Is it a cheek for me to ask – Is there anyone here that will at least try to make it happen.

Coincidence (2024)

A short story of coincidence. The du Toit family recently purchased a home in Joubert Street Montagu. The house was once owned by more than one generation of an early Montagu family the Millin's. While doing renovations they discovered the picture below.



Mavis Alexander with her signature at the bottom right hand side dated (14/02/ 27) St Valentine's day.

Picture: Claire du Toit

Further investigation lead to the two pictures below



Back seated on chairs P.C. le Roux and Mavis Alexander. Front Bessie le Roux and Arnold Millin



L/R: Mavis Alexander, Arnold Millin, Bessie le Roux, Pietie le Roux and one unidentified lady.

Pictures: Montagu Museum

Both above pictures were taken at the Joubert Street (Cypress Villa) home of the Millin's. It seems likely that Mavis socialised in Montagu during her free time. Pietie le Roux was married to Bessie who was a Joubert coming from another early Montagu family.

Contributions: Irma Jordaan and Anita Miller