

1951 – Mehmed and Amina Ajayoglu



Mehmed (Mahomed) Ajayoglu was born in December 1911 in Nursana, Caucasus. He was a Russian national and a teacher by profession. He was married to Asiya (Amina) Bostan who was born in April 1918 in the Caucasus and was a dressmaker.



In 1950 they were displaced persons living in Cairo, Egypt, waiting to be shipped to Australia for permanent settlement. They arrived in Melbourne per General W C Lanfitt in January 1950. When they were admitted to the Bonegilla Training Centre, Mehmed was classified as a labourer. The family moved

to Williamstown in September 1950 and in early 1951 they were in Ross Street, St Albans, to the south of Errington Reserve. In July 1954 they had moved to their permanent home at 37 West Esplanade. The property was an old poultry farm and Mohamed was now classified as a poultry farmer.

They had four children: Raziye was born in June 1941 in Narsarna, Baldan (Bella) born in July 1943 in Melitopol, Ukraine, Nazifa born in March 1945 in Regio Emilia, Italy, Ahmed born in January 1949 in Cairo, Egypt. They were accompanied by Fatma Ajayoglu was born in March 1935 in the Caucasus, and was a dressmaker. Their names and images are recorded on the Bonegilla memorial page.¹

Their two other children, who must have been born in Melbourne, were Ferida and Kemal Ajayoglu.

From Bonegilla, their initial home in Victoria, Mehmed was set to work at the Jam Factory Company in Melbourne, while Asiya (Amina) and the children were sent to the Immigration Holding Centre in Cowra, NSW.

The Ajayoglus had settled in West esplanade by the mid 1950s in what had been a poultry farm which they kept going at least until the mid to late 1960s.

However, Mehmed's background was much more than Australia's initial classifications of him as labourer and chook farmer. Salih Yucel, Associate Professor at Charles Sturt University, has written that Mehmed was a Pan-Turanist (Pan-Turkish), which was one of the three major philosophical and political groups before the fall of the Ottoman Empire. According to Yucel, Pan-Turkism ideology was based on secularism and nationalism, which aimed to unite all Turks under one flag:

The Ajayoglu family originally lived in the Karachai region, which was populated by the Muslim Turkic people of North Caucasus. Karachai is on the border of Russia near Georgia. When Germany invaded Russia during World War Two, the German army occupied Karachai. The people of Karachai lived under Ottoman rule before the Russian annexation of Karachai in 1828. However, they always resisted Russian domination and periodically established an autonomous state. Mehmet (Mohamed) was an activist and community leader in Karachai. The Ajayoglu family and others who remained behind in Karachai and did not resist the German occupation were branded as traitors by Stalin. When the German army began withdrawing from Russia in 1943, many residents of Karachai feared the Communist government's harsh punishments and fled with the German army. They were prepared to settle in any land where they would be safe, since those who remained behind would be executed or deported. However, they could not imagine it would take seven years to finally settle, nor could they imagine their final home would be Australia.²

The family came to St Albans in 1951 and soon established a small tuck shop on the corner of Ruth Street and West Esplanade, opposite the state primary school, which was a delight to the school children as they could buy soft drinks, potato chips, and the delicious Four'N Twenty - or were they Noon pies? For the Ajayoglu children, school was just across the road.

Mehmed and Amina obtained their naturalisation certificates in 1958, which seems to be the year that he transitioned back to his former profession as a teacher.



Between 1963 and 1968 Mehmed was listed in the electoral rolls as a farmer of St Albans, and Amina was listed as home duties. Amina no doubt managed the household but she also ran the family milk bar for decades. Mehmed might

¹ <https://idcards.bonegilla.org.au/search/p76>

² Salih Yucel, *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* Volume 3, Issue 3, 2018. "Sayyid Ibrahim Dellal: An Analysis of Untold Stories of a 'Living History' "

have technically been a farmer, but he was also working as a teacher, as he had started at St Albans High School with his educational qualifications from Georgia. He was teaching at St Albans High in 1958 when it was officially opened by Mr John Bloomfield, the Minister of Education.



Ajayoglu at St Albans High School 1958

Mehmed went on to teach at Sunshine High School by 1960 with his qualifications now including a Secondary Teacher's Diploma. He was there through to the late 1960s, as Barry Rayner, another St Albans High teacher remembers him being there.



Ajayoglu at Sunshine High School 1960

In 1972 Mehmed was still working as a teacher and Amina was still a shopkeeper, as their old tuck shop had been upgraded to a proper milk bar cum grocery store.

In 1977 the Ajayoglus were living in North Balwyn with Nazifa (teacher) and Kemal (student). At this stage Mehmed had retired in his late 60s. His community work became apparent as president of the Turanian Historical and Cultural Association. In 1977 they organised the Turanian Cultural Festival at Estonian House in West Brunswick.¹

¹ The Estonian House Co-operative formed in 1952.

² Australian Journal of Islamic Studies Volume 3, Issue 3, 2018

Mehmed is also cited as being a mentor for Said Samil, the grandson of Shaikh Samel who was considered a hero for Caucasian Muslims and an idol of nationalism in Beyazit Mosque, Istanbul.²



Mehmed Ajayoglu with Said Samil (centre)

Mahomed Ajayoglu passed away in March 1978 at age 66 and was buried at the Fawkner Memorial Park.

Amina Ajayoglu nee Bostan died in July 2019 at age 101 and was buried at the Fawkner Memorial Park:

The much-loved Melburnian Amina Ajayoglu recently celebrated her 100th birthday at Kathleen Syme Library and Community Centre in Carlton. Born in a small Russian village, Amina spent many years travelling through Europe trying to escape the war, before migrating to Australia in 1950. Here, Amina raised six children and ran a milk bar for more than 30 years. She is now a grandmother and great grandmother and enjoys an active life among family and friends. A lover of reading, writing, poetry and history, Amina has attended an activity group now located at Kathleen Syme for more than 15 years. The group was delighted to honour her birthday with cake, handmade decorations and a special poetry reading.³



Amina Ajayoglu celebrating her 100th birthday

³ <https://news.melbourne.vic.gov.au/happy-birthday-amina/>