

## HAVELOCK NORTH FUNCTION CENTRE - GRAND PIANO

Following local authority amalgamation in 1989, the loss of the Havelock North Borough Council chambers meant a community asset and meeting place was being lost to the Havelock North community and the idea of building a Community Centre (next to the library in Te Mata Road where the Primary School had once stood) was born. The Havelock North Community Centre Trust was formed and chose Paris Magdalinos to design the Community Centre which was to be built next to the Library, with the cost being mainly met from community fund-raising.

The Community Centre (subsequently renamed as the Function Centre) was opened in 1994. One of the obvious potential uses for the new Centre was for concerts. I dreamt of having a good piano, and, soon after the Centre was opened, we learnt that the Meissner family had a Steinway Concert Grand piano which we might acquire. The piano had an interesting history:



- Frank Meissner, who had been born in Austria, was in the United Kingdom in his early 20's and was in ill-health, and he was advised by his doctor to move to a better climate, so he came to New Zealand at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After a period in Poverty Bay, he moved to Hawke's Bay, and eventually established an orchard on Te Mata Road, east of Havelock North.
- Sometime in the late 1950's Mr Meissner had enough money either to make a trip back to Austria (where he had been born) or to buy a grand piano (he was a keen pianist). He chose to buy the Steinway. This piano was, apparently, the first Steinway Concert Grand piano purchased for use in a private home in New Zealand. It was, reputedly, played at the Meissner home by Lily Kraus during a tour around New Zealand.
- In 1959, before retiring for the night, Mr Meissner played his favourite Chopin music, locked his piano as he always did, went to bed, and died in his sleep. He was survived by two sons and a daughter, none of whom ever married and none of whom played the piano. His daughter continued, faithfully, to polish the piano regularly (in the process removing much of the French polish from the edges of the piano case!).
- In 1991, his sons and daughter were moving out of the family home and piano dealers in Wellington and Auckland were keen to buy the piano. The family, however, preferred to have the piano stay in the Havelock North community, and through a pianist friend we learnt that we might be able to buy the piano (and we paid about a third of what the Meissner family could

have sold it for!). When the piano was checked by a local piano-tuner it was found to be pretty much in tune, but about half a note lower than it should have been.

- To enable the piano to be moved from room to room in the Function Centre, a platform on wheels was designed and constructed by a local man, Harold Stewart.
- Eileen von Dadelszen initiated “Round the Piano” concerts on the first Wednesday of every month apart from January, charging a koha to pay off the loan, and she achieved that goal within a year.
- The monthly “Round the Piano” concerts are still held, and are very popular.

Mark von Dadelszen, May 2022