

LEVIE DEEN 1889-1973

Prepared and compiled by Martin Moen, grandson.

MY OPA



Louis Deen was a gifted and memorable individual. He influenced the design and manufacture of early 20th century Dutch furniture. He complimented the Amsterdam School of Architecture with his distinct and innovative approach designed to help the working class achieve an improved standard of living. Just as one wanders the streets of Amsterdam admiring its expressionist architecture, many furniture experts also find his works are distinct and recognisable.

Deen's expressionist furniture and timber objects are either displayed or held by several Amsterdam Museums. These include het Schip, the Amsterdam Museum and the Amsterdam Jewish Historical Museum. Other pieces are displayed in my study located in Perth, Western Australia. Until his passing in 2019, his son, Professor Lou Deen, also held his works including his **miniatures** that pre-date the Amsterdam School.

This memoir is a culmination of my experiences, perceptions and interpretations. To offer a coherent story about Opa's life, I have utilised my deceased uncle's recollections as well as articles published by various institutions in Amsterdam. I thank them for producing these important documents.

Appreciation goes to the management of Het Schip [Alice Roegholt & Ton Heydra] and the Amsterdam Museum [Jaap Boonstra and curator Thijs Boers] for their valuable time. In August 2017 they kindly showed me Opa's works and expressed an interest in receiving this unofficial biography.



Louis Deen was one of 9 children born in Amsterdam. His birth in 1889 was in very impoverished conditions not dissimilar to many poor Jewish people attempting to



scrape out an existence in the Netherlands. Despite these difficult beginnings he emerged as a respected 20th century expert in interior design architect and furniture maker.

AUSTRALIA

As their first grandchild I was favoured with special attention during my grandparents many visits to Australia. I remember a typical autumn evening in 1963 as we walked down the slope of the **long gravel driveway** that provided access to my parent's

weatherboard home. As the sun set over the Darling Ranges, Opa gesticulated... "*Daar schijnt het alchewikend licht!*" * [There shines the everlasting light] a quote from the famous Dutch poet Joost van den Vondel.



Opa could recite the many verses from Vondel whose works are considered as the most prominent Dutch poet and playwright of the 17th century.

It was during my youngest and most formidable years that I best recollect Opa. I remember his wit, charm and personality. His bespoke jokes, in Dutch, were legendary and took days to tell. His tenuous grip of the English language never stood in his way as he made friends with anyone and everyone who walked in his direction. Total strangers were always warmly greeted, in Dutch, with, "*beste maatje*", by this avuncular Dutchman. His charisma reinforced by his warm, broad and firm handshake.

Louis Deen was a gifted interior designer and furniture architect as well as a fine craftsman. I remember our mutual interest in technical and engineering drawing. Opa recognised my potential in drafting and arranged for a local Kelmscott carpenter, Bill Heron, to build me a large pine timber drawing board. For many years I used this board for my technical drawing assignments. And today I often deploy those same drafting skills when planning my glass making and timber building projects.

Many years later I discovered some of Opa's equipment that had been brought to Australia by him in 1954. They were left behind after Opa and Oma returned to the Netherlands a year later. From time to time they were used by my father on his farm and then stored for many years in a wood shed. In 2010 I designed and built a new home and arranged **Opa's tools** to decorate my home office. By that time, I had also collected a number of timber objects either designed and or made by Louis Deen. These are also displayed in my home office.

In 2016-17 I developed a keen interest in glass art and made several **glass art photos of Opa**. In 2019 I made **several timber copies** of Opa's clock which is displayed in "Het Schip Museum" Amsterdam.



Glass Art by Martin Moen 2017 based on works by Meijer Bleekrode [1896-1943]

Opa's escape from the grasp of Nazis collaborators is remarkable. And there are a few reasons for this observation. Firstly, his extraordinary and often naive approach to life was his unintended safeguard against the intent of the Nazi's when they invaded Holland. Secondly, although born and buried as an orthodox Jew he did not embrace or observe the religion. And maybe this approach also saved him from certain death. According to Erica, his daughter, he was a self-declared humanist first and foremost. Finally, and of significance, was his early and special relationship with a like-minded independent and community leader Jan van Zutphen. Undoubtedly this "family" friendship saved Louis and most of his immediate family from Nazi detection and certain death.



AMSTERDAM SCHOOL

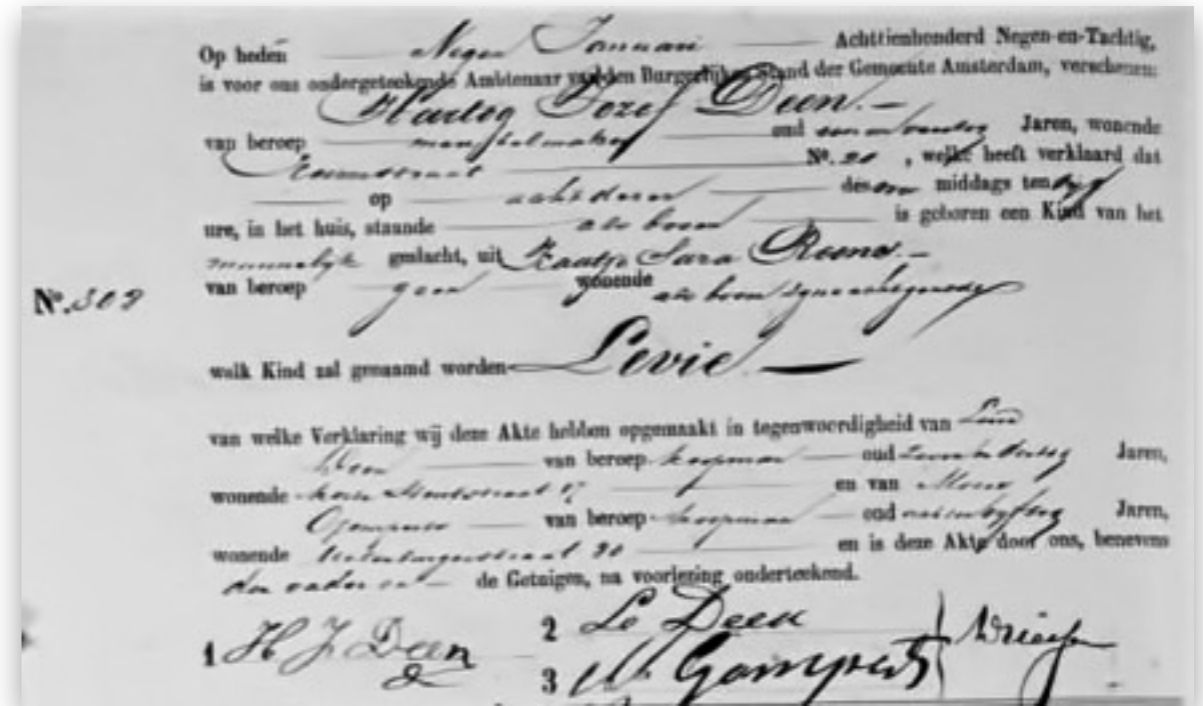


In 1880 Opa's father, **Hartog Jozef Deen** 1847 - 1911, left the peaceful northern inland sea town of Hoorn in search of work. His family was very poor and moved to Amsterdam to seek a better way of life. In October 1887 Hartog rented accommodation at 21 Keizersstraat. Two years later the family moved to 64 Ridderstraat and then again to Konings Straat, Nieuw Market. Hartog was a

cabinetmaker and had little experience of traditional

Jewish occupations in Amsterdam. He managed to find work at a furniture factory where he continued to practice his trade. It is said that Hartog was one of the first Jewish cabinetmakers in Amsterdam.

Opa was born on the 8 January 1889 in a basement apartment situated at Konings Straat close to the Amsterdam Waterlooplein. His **birth certificate** is signed by his father, and witnessed by his brother Levie Joseph Deen. Although little is known about his early childhood it is understood that he worked as a child assisting his father at his workplace. This was typical of the times when children were used to earn money to pay for limited food. Education was not considered important and that was evident in later years with



Opa's reluctant to write, especially letters to his grandson in Australia. However, it appears that he learnt much from assisting and observing his father at work. His father made very ornate furniture, as shown in the photo. Opa's son, Lou Deen, commented that Opa appeared to be gifted, "a genius", with the ability to make a piece of furniture without any drawings. Louis simply held the design in his head and made it accordingly.

At age 12 and after 5 years of primary school Louis was apprenticed to work in the same furniture factory as his father. Hartog's family battled to survive and used young Deen's earning to make ends meet. It appears that Louis continued his formal education by attending night school. Three years later he was presented a **pocket watch** engraved "LD" Louis Deen, 1904 Openbare Lagere Scholer 1st Klaase". It is currently held by my son Simon Moen. It was gifted to him by my mother. It seems that an award of this type to a Jewish child from such a poor family was somewhat unusual.



AMSTERDAM SCHOOL OF APPLIED ART AND DRAWING

Within a few years after commencing his initial apprenticeship Louis had mastered all the experiences that a furniture factory could offer. To progress his profession, he commenced further studies and in 1907 attended evening classes at the Amsterdamse Kunstnijverheidsschool Quellinus (Amsterdam School of Quellinus Applied Art and Drawing College). This school was to be the forerunner of the "Gerrit Rietveld Academie".

At the academy, Opa learnt more about furniture making and how it was practiced at various factories. After completing his training and additional apprenticeships, he established his own workshop where he produced furniture in the neo-imperial and other relatively accessible styles popular with customers.

The construction of the Shipping Terminal, between 1911 and 1918, at the corner of the Prins Hendrikkade was to change the traditional furniture styles. Designs by Michel de Klerk, Piet Kramer and Van der Meij, that relied on contemporary furniture styles had long

passed their peak. And, similar to many other craftsmen and artists, Louis Deen revised his style of furniture design and developed a new approach.

It appears that Louis was a little restless as in 1914 **he and a Jewish man Mr. Arond Stoppelman** made plans to walk "around the world". They were a new brand of Dutch thinkers signalling the rise of Socialism. And so, they would pay for their journey by working and earning money as they went. However, the outbreak of WW1 in that year put

an end to their Paris but were Amsterdam. Deen's chairs, picture mirrors and picture twenties, illustrate School. His visible elements of



plans. They travelled as far as forced to return to designs of furniture, such as frames, tobacco jars, trays, frames from the first half of the the style of the Amsterdam sideboards demonstrate the the Amsterdam School. This is

especially seen in the dark colouring (staining) of the pickled oak that gives a rather exotic appearance. And the wave at the rear elevation of his furniture is characteristic of his style.

Typical examples of his furniture designs and work can be found in the rosewood twisted knobs on drawers and cabinets. Other well-known architects, including Michel de Klerk and Piet Kramer, opted for experimental designs in which the emphasis shifted from shape and decoration to the practical aspects of furniture. They concentrated on exclusive

items of furniture that reached a small proportion of the population. Deen's furniture designs were however more adventurous. They combined tradition and functionality with fashionable elements and were cheaper to build using simple wood and ply construction. They suited the fashion conscious yet less wealthy citizens. Deen's furniture was also available at the "Bijenkorf" (Beehive) and contributed to the commercialisation of the Amsterdam School style making fashionable furniture more available to wider segments of the population. It is precisely this new style that from that time was referred to as the Amsterdam School that according to Deen had the purity which he had missed so much when crafting the earlier imitation Empire and Neolithic styles. The new style also changed the techniques of furniture making. Many solid oak furnishings were now finished with a layer of beeswax and sometimes coated with lacquer. Veneering and time-consuming polishing was unnecessary. The Amsterdam School style of furniture was just as expressive, decorative and artistic as the newly constructed architect designed homes. The inside and outside of homes were considered as an artistic whole. The low ceilings, designed to reduce heating costs, also challenged the need for a different kind of furniture. For example, *"grandmother's cabinet was no longer suitable"*. And therefore a new style of furniture design was required. Deen did complain that, *"the downside of this style of furniture is that it is designed and built for mass production. You do not achieve purity of design from mass production"*. He was not the only one of his time to comment about this trend.

At the Gerrit Rietveld Academy there is furniture allocated to an area known as the Louis Deen room. On this upper floor of the "Museum Het Schip" Louis's enthusiasm for his own unique style is combined with the rich shapes and forms of the Amsterdam School. His famous wall clock donated by his son is also on permanent exhibition. Typical of the work of Louis Deen, the Rosewood twisted knobs on drawers and cabinets with many of his furniture designs can be found. His furniture designs were very successful, and he won several exhibition prizes where he received honourable mentions. Louis Deen was awarded



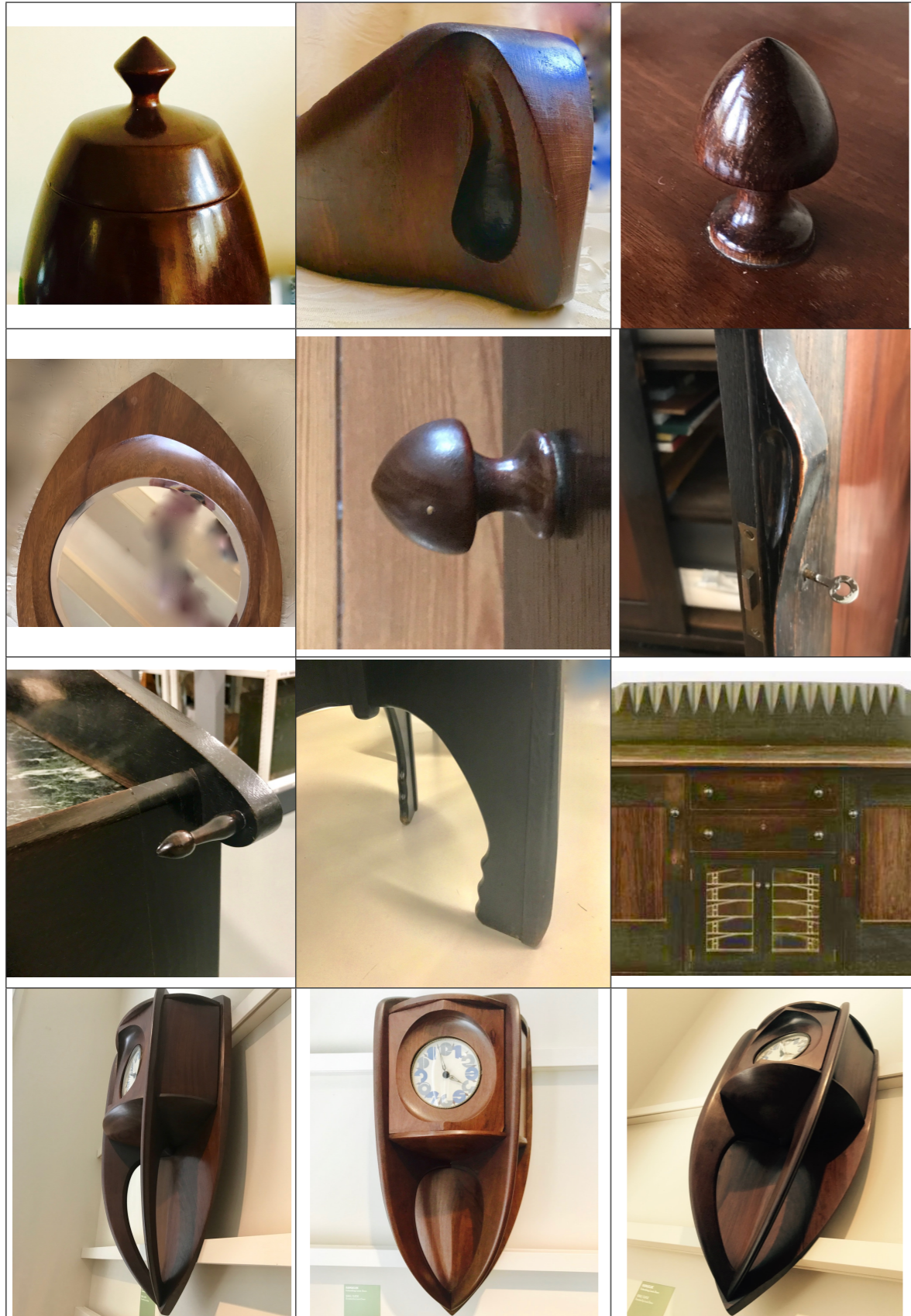
this **exhibition prize at the 1921** Amsterdamsche Tentoonstelling van Woninginrichting [Amsterdam Exhibition of Home Furnishings]. On Saturday 11 June 1921 a newspaper the "Algemeen Handelsblad" article

"Tentoonstelling van Woninginrichting" wrote "Exhibition of Interior. Architecture" following a presentation evening organised by the exhibition committee, which held one lecture on "The meubileering" by Mr. Louis Deen, interior architect. Both lectures can be attended by everyone and afterwards consists opportunity to visit the exhibition."

Louis experimented with shapes other than the Amsterdam School, as seen in the chair with 3 legs.

During his time there Louis Deen befriended **Meijer Bleekrode 1896-1943**. He was a Jewish artist and in 1923 **painted a portrait of Louis Deen**. The entire Bleekrode family worked in the diamond industry. Although Meijer learnt to polish diamonds, he felt drawn to





the art world. He wanted to do something different. Everyone could see that he had a talent for drawing. It was well known that this was not enough to make a living and so he had to stay in the diamond industry. It was through discussions and advice from his friend, Louis Deen, [at page 11 of Book cover] that thankfully Meijer the Quellinus School and



continued to perfect his work. After completing his education in art at the Quellinus School and Rijksnormaal School, he decided to use his artistic talents for the socialist cause. His graphic art designs for the S.D.A.P. and the Algemeen Nederlandse Diamantbewerkiersbond [Diamond Workers' Union] included posters and book covers. Sadly, Meijer and his wife, ended their lives on the same day at Sobibor

Extermination Camp in 1943.

On the 11th November 1920, Louis married **Marianna [Marie] de Jong**. Marianna's family had lived in Amsterdam since the 17th century and were employed in Amsterdam diamond industry. For a short time, they lived at 49/1 Muidergracht, Plantage where they had their first child Sonja.

A COMPILATION OF LOUIS DEEN'S WORK CAN BE FOUND AT ATTACHMENTS - [LOUIS DEEN FURNITURE AND OBJET D'ART](#)

LOOSDRECHT, HILVERSUM

By 1921 Opa saved enough money to purchase a piece of land in Loosdrecht, north of Amsterdam. Around that time his small family moved from the dank basement of their Amsterdam apartment in to the healthy outdoors and freedom of the country. In 1923 Deen in conjunction with two other Jewish families, the Waterman's and Duites, moved to more permanent accommodation where his second child, Harrold, was born. Around 1929-30 he constructed, with the assistance of Loosdrecht carpenter, Jas Daams, a timber house at 130 Raweg, Loosdrecht. The house was very special for that time and had double walls with an inside and outside layer of timber. All the material came from a timber office located on a barge operating on the Amsterdam canals. It is understood that the timber was moved by barge from Amsterdam to Loosdrecht.

Louis and Marianna Deen lived there with their six children until their next move. Adjacent to their home Deen also constructed his cabinet making workshop in a factory building. The Deen family was well known and popular. Deen is described as an extremely handy man with several strings to his bow. He was a real tradesman, who made wonderful, huge cupboards. When visitors came, the children had to sit on the stairs as there were simply not enough chairs. However, in the 1930's people found life difficult and were fortunate to

have one pot belly stove at their disposal. It seems that despite these conditions the Deen's house was very homely.

During those times Louis often worked outside and was constantly distracted by people walking past who wanted to talk or discuss matters with him. However, this did not help bring food to the table. His daughter, Erica, remembers receiving instructions from her mother to remind her father to "stop talking and do some work". Unfortunately, Deen found it difficult to attract enough work and an increasing level of debt forced him to sell his special wooden house and land. He, like so many others became the victim of the 1930's depression and sold his house and property to his business partners **A.C. Bouwman and A.J. Dreise**. They ran a carpentry business.



In 1935 the family moved to nearby Nootweg, Nieuwe Loosdrecht, opposite the Military Training Camp (MOK), to a house named "Pinnewaarte". [My mother recalled that not long after liberation by the Canadians and after her return to Hilversum, she was offered temporary accommodation there. The home had been taken over by the Dutch Resistance. They learnt about the Deen's problems and allowed them to occupy Pinnewaarte. Opa was waiting to reoccupy and continue the pre-war lease over De Nieuwe Brug. It appears that Pinnewaarte was a holiday home owned by two married Jewish doctors named De Beers who lived in Amsterdam. According to Erica her father designed their house. After the war the Germans had left it in a very dirty state and Erica it before sharing it with her mother and remaining family. The De Beers were captured and sent to the Polish death camps.]

In 1937 Louis and Marianna Deen took a lease over a hotel the **De Nieuwe Brug**, Oud Loosdrechtsedijk, Loosdrecht. Opa again established a furniture making business at the rear of this establishment while the remainder of the family, for good or bad, tried to keep the hotel operating. Marianna Deen had several lodgers including Hans Sittig and several Jewish German girls and boys seeking refuge in country Holland before travelling to Palestine. She also looked after Jan van Zutphen & his daughter Ingrid who briefly stayed at De Nieuwe Brug Hotel and Restaurant. Some years ago, my mother recalled some memories of her father. *"Some people who knew my father remember him as an honest, upright and fine individual. He had a pleasant personality, was helpful everybody and knew his own mind and thoughts. He often and willingly advised people on a variety of*

issues. Special topical matters were his favourite and he often voiced his dislike of issues that affected one's health. He stressed the importance of non-smoking, physical fitness, non-consumption of intoxicating liquids of any type. He strongly believed that one should wear natural fibres, such as cotton, against one's skin. Cotton underwear was a must. As a young child I remember the importance my father placed on washing with cold water, especially one's private parts. The shock of the sudden cold water gave revitalisation to the body. To this very day I enjoy a cold shower".

Levie Deen was a member of the Loosdrecht first aid group and taught the subject. He was involved in life saving, swimming and provided sailing instruction to clubs and the scouts.



The Deen's enjoyed a reputation reserved for the well-educated dignitaries of the district. It was and still is Dutch tradition to greet people by their surnames, but for the Deen's it was Mynheer and Mewvrouw [Mister and Missus.] Deen such was the respect they were given.

Louis Deen was gifted with a keen memory and one of his contemporaries, Yac Muir, can remember him reciting a poem of some 300 sentences "Adam in Ballingschap" by the well-known Dutch poet Vondel. In Loosdrecht Deen was very active in public life and took the position of the S.D.A.P. on the local council.

De Nieuwe Brug Restaurant hotel represented some degree of stability to Louis and Marianna Deen. Just 3 years later their lives were turned upside down as Adolf Hitler came to power and invaded the Netherlands.

WORLD WAR 2

At the onset of World War 2, the Germans threatened to open the dykes and flood Holland if the Dutch did not surrender. As a response a number of local coordinators were allocated to manage transport and housing plans. Louis Deen was made responsible for evacuating people from Loosdrecht to higher land in far north-east Holland. He arranged this using trains and many people were moved there. The German threat was effective, and the risk of flooding lifted. Residents were able to return home safely by train.

In 1942 the Nazi's commenced a more aggressive approach to capture and transport the Jewish citizens of the Netherlands. By that time, they knew, through the Hilversum Burgomaster, exactly where the Jewish people lived and their personal details. Even though Loosdrecht was in the country, with no Jewish facilities, and represented some element of apparent safety, this would not spare the Deen's. First call up papers were sent out by special delivery on Sunday 5 July 1942. It is clear that news about the deportations was known as on the 7 June 1942 Louis left his wife and family and went into hiding.

For many years after the war details about his hiding place and information about his protectors were sketchy. However, in 2015 after exhaustive enquiries important details emerged. This information was provided by Raymond Schütz of the Noord Holland's Archief. Louis Deen was hidden for most of the war at **210 Kleverparkweg, Haarlem**. The

owner of that address, from 30th April 1937 until 1950, was Jacomina de Haan. She shared the house with her sister Maria (Rie) E. de Haan. On the 10 May 1945 and after three years in hiding Louis Deen left his protectors and returned to his home in Loosdrecht. He discovered that the owners of the De Nieuwe Brug Restaurant had assumed that neither he nor his family would return. So, they had taken over and occupied the premises. It was clear that Deen had a fight on his hands should he wish to



continue the lease that he had over the De Nieuwe Brug Restaurant. After some persuasion and assisted by his friend Jan van Zutphen, he decided to go to court and win the right to resume his Lease. [A great great granddaughter of Jan Van Zutphen, Brita Falk, advises that either a cousin or a nephew Gerrit Hennipman and his wife Sjaantook took over the Deen's restaurant during the War. Whether it was this family that was taken to court is unknown although it seems probable.] Louis was 56 years old when freedom

was finally restored by the Canadian Army. It was a very unpleasant time as Deen's shattered family finally reunited. The Second World War was to have a dramatic and lasting impact on Louis Deen's family.

Unfortunately, my Opa's brothers and sisters were not so lucky. 6 of his 8 siblings were taken to various concentration camps in Poland and never returned. Not a word of their murderer was ever mentioned until I discovered it for myself in the 1990's.

War Restitution: JOKOS Reference 30311

Jan van Zutphen arranged for Louis Deen to escape into hiding on the 7th June 1942. Shortly after, on the 18th August 1942, his "handmade" furniture was stolen from the Nieuwe Burg hotel. It is unknown who took the furniture, but likely that it was arranged by Puls, the official arm of the Nazi regime, tasked with entering Jewish homes and taking furniture and valuables for distribution to the German people. [The Claim refers to "Datum van het pulsen".]

Interestingly the farmer situated behind the hotel secretly stored Deen's furniture and returned it after the War. That farmer would have been severely punished had his secret been discovered by the NSB.

In 2014, I discovered, that in 1955 one of Deen's children (Ellen Frankenhuis - Deen) encouraged her father to apply for monetary compensation for furniture stolen during the family's time in hiding. It is unclear how the estimates for his stolen furniture were

calculated. However, the German Government in 1960 awarded 7,873 Deutsch Marks to Louis Deen. This is about 4013€ in today's currency [2017: 1 DM=0.51€]

The processing of survivors, and in particular Deen's claim, was delegated by the German Government to the Dutch-Jewish organisation known as JOKOS. They are the legal successor to JOKOS and have responsibility and ownership of all information related to claims for furniture stolen during the Nazi occupation. Opa's claim is JOKOS Reference 30311. The following events offer interesting details.

On 5 May 1945 the Canadians liberate Northern Holland ending the war enabling Louis Deen to return freedom. On 10 February 1958 Levie Deen registers a claim for stolen furniture. On the 2 March 1960 Levie Deen writes to the authorities regarding the progress of his claim. He has not heard anything for 24 months. He asks if a notarise is required and advises that he is now 70 and does not work anymore and needs the money. On the 9 March 1960 he receives a response and on the 12 May 1960 the claim is settled. Typical of the times neither Louis nor Marianna Deen sought financial compensation for their wartime experiences or the murder of their children Harrold and Rebecca.

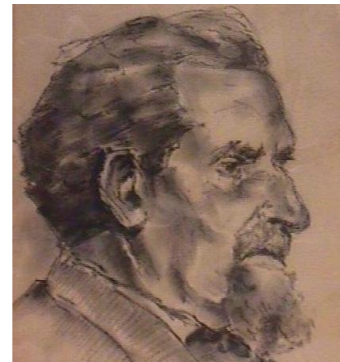
AFTER THE WAR

Louis and Marianna Deen visited Australia many times. The first was in 1954 when they took all their possessions to Bedforddale, Western Australia to escape what they believed there would be another world war in Europe. The Hungarian people revolted against their government and its Soviet-imposed policies and lasted from 23 October until 10 November 1956.

They stayed for 13 months and returned for several months in 1963, 1970 and 1973. The last visit was by Oma in 1977.

During those times I showed an interest in collecting stamps and many Dutch "First Day Covers" were sent to me by Opa and Oma.

In **1961 Eli Meijer**, a Jewish musician and artist and friend of Louis Deen, drew a striking charcoal image of Deen's face. I have made several glass images of this sketch.



LEVIE DEEN PASSES AWAY

On 27 May 1974 a local newspaper published the following article about the passing of this Old-Councillor

Loosdrecht - On Saturday morning, Mr. Louis Deen died at the age of 84 years after being ill for a few weeks. He is a person who will leave good memories behind especially with the older inhabitants of Loosdrecht.

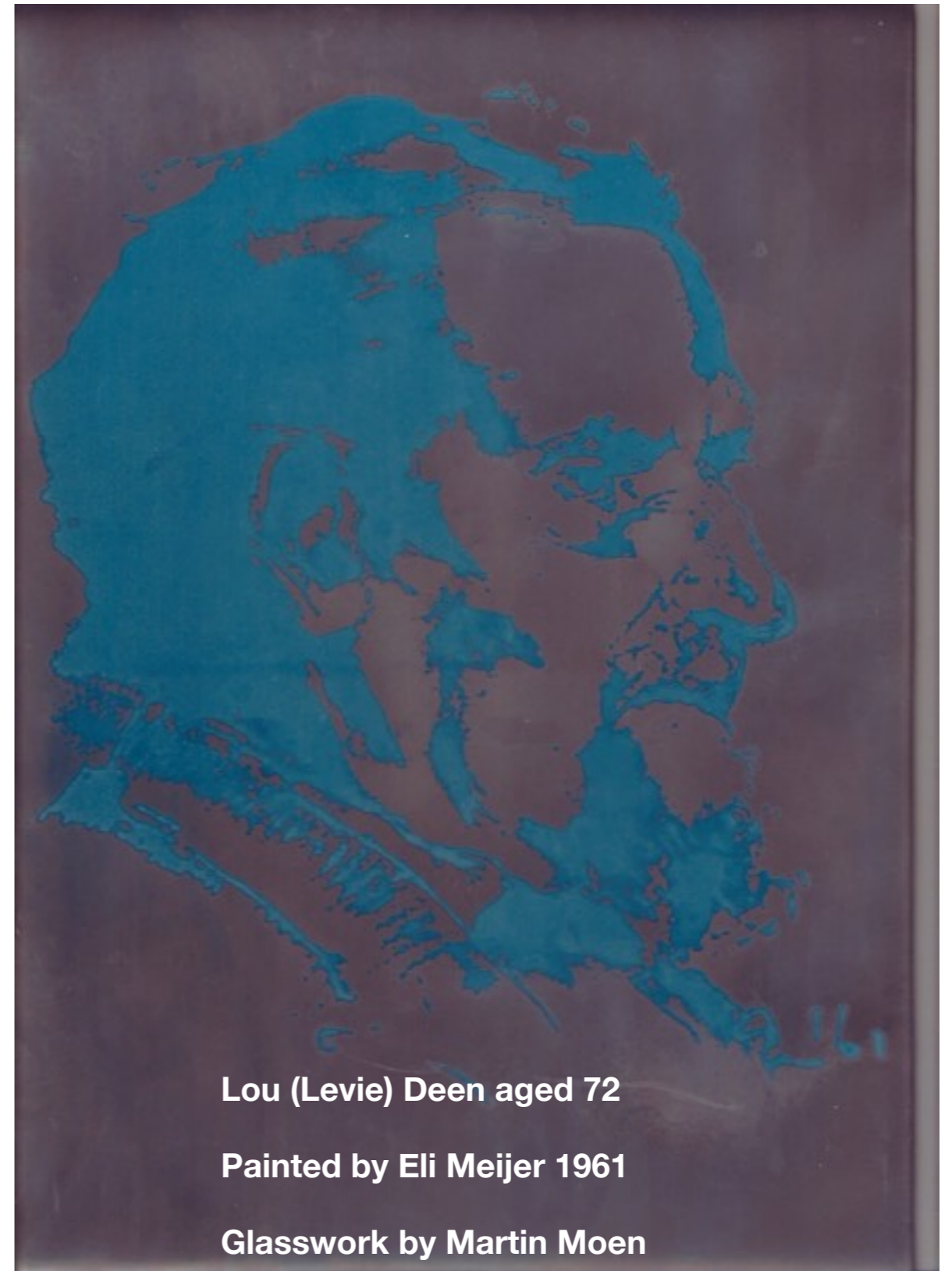
Before the War Mr. Deen represented the SDAP in the town council. He was born in Amsterdam, and soon after his marriage in Amsterdam, on 11 November 1920, settled down as a cabinetmaker and antique restorer in Loosdrecht. Shortly before the War he decided to change his career and moved into the hospitality industry by leasing the cafe restaurant "the Nieuwe Burg". He was held in particularly high esteem in the then country like atmosphere of Loosdrecht where everything happened in a casual and relaxed manner. He was popular with everyone. However, the War was to change all of that as dark clouds gathered over the Deen family, as the non-Aryans work become increasingly difficult to find. The well-known Jan van Zutphen and his friends took care to ensure that the family could go into hiding. Unfortunately, because of an act of treason two of the five children (Harold and Rebecca) were discovered on a farm in Haarlemmermeer and did not survive the War. Typical of his character Mr. Deen never tried to find out who the traitor was that betrayed his children.

After the War he and his wife lived for a few years in Loosdrecht. Later and after a 12-month stay in at Bedforddale Western Australia, they moved to Hilversum where Mr. Deen enjoyed a reputation as an antique consultant. For the last few years, the couple lived in the humanistic home "Het Gooiers Erf" in Loosdrecht. That home will hold a warm place in their heart for Mr. Deen.

Raweg 130 Demolished

18 years after his death his Opa's timber house was demolished to make way for a housing project. Fortunately, I visited the home in 1990, courtesy of my uncle, Peter Moen, who arranged a tour with the owner A.C. Bouwman. According to Mr. Bouwman "Everything was wood. I also remember that the house was always drafty. Actually not, because earlier people could tolerate the cold better than now." It

is worth noting that the demolition contractor for Rading 130 commented that real professionals nailed the house together. The Wooden House at 130 Raweg, Loosdrecht made way for a number of prefabricated houses.



Lou (Levie) Deen aged 72

Painted by Eli Meijer 1961

Glasswork by Martin Moen