

DANISH CONNECTIONS

THE WILDSOET FAMILY of MISSION BEACH



KEN GRAY

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Author: Ken Gray. *Editors:* Margaret Remilton, Rhonda Jarvis, and Diane Bull.

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Cover Image

The Little Mermaid Statue, Copenhagen Harbour, Denmark. This was donated to the city by the heir to the Carlsberg brewing empire, Carl Jacobsen. It depicts the siren, Ariel of Hans Christian Andersen's famous fairy tale, 'The Little Mermaid.'

VIKINGS AMONG US

In the tropical heat of Mission Beach, far from the cobblestoned streets of Denmark or England, two families have kept their roots planted for more than a century. Only the Porters and the Wildsoets can claim ancestors of the same name who arrived here more than 110 years ago. Both settled here in 1908 in a landscape that must have seemed impossibly foreign to eyes accustomed to Nordic or English horizons.

The Wildsoets brought with them more than their belongings. They carried Danish resilience, a willingness to start over, and skills that would prove essential in carving out lives in the unforgiving North Queensland bush. Today, three streets bear their name: one in Wongaling Beach, another in Tully, and a third in Burbank, Brisbane; quiet monuments to a family that should never be forgotten.

But why did so few families stay long-term in Mission Beach? The answer lies in the isolation that still defines Mission Beach to some extent today. Far from employment, far from facilities, far from family *down south*, the region has always demanded much of its residents. The climate brings cyclones that can erase a lifetime's work in a single night. People come and go like the tides, but the Wildsoets stayed, their story woven into the very fabric of the district.

A FAMILY FLEEING TRAGEDY

The story begins not with hope but with some darkness. On Langeland Island near Denmark's coast, in the heritage market town of Rudkøbing, a place of cobblestones and church spires dating to 1287, Johan Andreassen Wildsøe took his own life in 1869. He was merely 51 years old. Whether his two sons, Marcus and Lorentz (Lars), fled the grief or the constant European wars or simply the struggling economy of their island home, we cannot know. But in August 1870, they joined the crew of the *Christianshavn* and sailed toward Queensland, leaving behind everything familiar.



Rudkøbing, Denmark.



No 3 Smedegård, Rudkøbing (from Google Earth) where Catherine Wildsøe lived for some time with her mother.

Marcus was 24, Lars (Lorentz) just 18. Marcus worked as a cook and steward. Two years later, in 1872, they sent for their mother, Catherine Maria Jacobson, who had been selling fruit in Rudkøbing's markets. Imagine her courage, a widow in her fifties, boarding the *Humboldt* to cross the world to sons she hadn't seen in two years.

The family name itself would evolve in this new land. Wildsøe, with its Nordic ø, became Wildsoet, easier for Australian tongues, if less melodic. After exhaustive research, including a journey to Denmark to walk the streets their ancestors walked, family historians Kaye Vernon and Billie Jacobsen determined that every Wildsoet in Australia descends from these two brothers who arrived as young men on a ship.

Marcus and Lars made their living as seamen on coastal traders, learning the treacherous waters of North Queensland. Marcus became a boat pilot with his own vessel, supplying settlers along the coast. In 1880, he married Penuel Smith, a Scotswoman from near Inverness who had her own story of migration and loss.

They settled in Cardwell initially, where Catherine married Joshua Dransfield, who owned land at Five Mile Creek near the Hinchinbrook Channel. When Joshua died in 1884, he left Catherine nothing; everything went to his son from a previous marriage. But Catherine's legacy remained in a different form: mango trees she planted at Five Mile Creek still grow there today, silent witnesses to her presence at her wonderful new home.

Marcus and Penuel had six children, Johan (Joe, 1881 – 1961), Christian Magnus (Chris, 1883 – 1966), Adolph Ludwig Robert (Lou, 1885 - 1933), Catherine Mary Jacobine Sophie (Carrie, 1887 - 1937), Lorenzine Penuel Caroline (Lorraine, born 1890) and Marcus Walter (Walter, 1892 – 1898).

Tragedy stalked the family. While Marcus was clearing a trail for the phone line from Kennedy to Mt Surprise, he cut his foot with an axe. The wound festered. In an era before antibiotics, infection meant almost certain death. Marcus died of septicaemia in 1894, only 48 years old, leaving Penuel with their young children.

After Marcus Wildsoet died, Penuel married Gilbert Hilliar who was 11 years her junior and they had a daughter, Amy at Bedford Creek, south of Tully. Penuel's name lived on in several of her descendants' middle names, including in the Garner family.

Lars fared no better than Marcus. Yet another premature death at only 33. He drowned trying to cross a flooded creek just three months after his son was born in 1886. His wife Annie fought on, running the Royal Hotel in Cardwell while raising four children alone, before eventually remarrying William Watkins.

CHRIS WILDSOET: THE BRIDGE BETWEEN WORLDS



Left: Proud timber man, Chris Wildsoet. Image from Dawn Todd nee Wildsoet – granddaughter of Chris.

Right: Image from *Ancestry.com*: Maud and Chris Wildsoet.

The first Wildsoet to truly claim Mission Beach as home was Christian Magnus, Chris, born in Port Douglas in 1883. He was enrolled to vote at Bedford Creek in 1903. News reports show he was working and living in the Hull River area close to South Mission Beach in 1908 with his timber getting brother-in-law, Jack Bunting. In many ways, Chris became the bridge between the old world and the new, between Indigenous and settler, between the violent past and the uncertain future.

Growing up near Aboriginal children, Chris learned what few white settlers bothered to learn: he spoke three Aboriginal dialects fluently. This wasn't just impressive; it was rare and precious. On his 82nd birthday in 1965,

an anthropologist named F. P. Woolston knocked on his door at 7pm, unannounced and eager to record Chris's knowledge before it was lost forever.

That interview, published as *The Wildsoet Interview: Some Recollections of the Aborigines of the Tully Area*, is an important historical document.¹ Through Chris, we hear the Indigenous testimony about the horrific massacres that followed the wreck of the *Maria* in 1872. He had befriended Aboriginal people who witnessed or knew of these violent events, stories that might have died with them.

Chris was also friends with the legendary Ted Banfield of Dunk Island fame. Together they went fossicking, and Chris made remarkable discoveries: a shield on a tree presumed to be from Edmund Kennedy's doomed 1848 expedition, and a rusted rifle in the sand at Kennedy Bay where the largest Djiru massacre occurred. Chris gave the rifle to Banfield, who had experts examine it. They determined it was the firearm the Captain of the *Maria* used to fire on the Djiru people, physical evidence of the violence that he had initiated.

But Chris was more than a keeper of dark histories. In 1910, he married Maud Mary Ann Bunting, daughter of local timber getters, and began building a life. Starting as a timber getter himself with the Buntings, he soon had his own bullock team. He selected 350 acres near what's now East Feluga in 1912, hoping to get a cane assignment when a sugar mill opened. The cane farm never happened, but Chris found other work, as timber inspector for the mill, then bridge foreman for Council and Main Roads.

Chris and Maud had four children, Edna, Albert (Mick), Phyllis, and Edward. The four children all went to the Banyan Provisional School when it opened in 1924. The school was originally located on the Beatties' farm four miles from Tully towards Mission Beach at Merryburn, but that became untenable due to the boggy roads. The school was no palace: it was built with an iron roof and shutters and hessian walls with a damp dirt floor. There were initially two teachers and 70 students ... all packed into a 40 foot by 30 foot tin shed. What would that be like in summer!?

In 1916, Chris organized a crucial board of enquiry meeting for the sugar industry at his brother-in-law Jack Bunting's home nearby. Forty-two people were *ably catered for* by Maud Wildsoet and Margaret Bunting. Imagine the work of feeding that crowd in 1916, without electricity or running water.



Right: Tully Younger Set c 1940, Phyllis Wildsoet President, sixth from left. State Library of QLD.

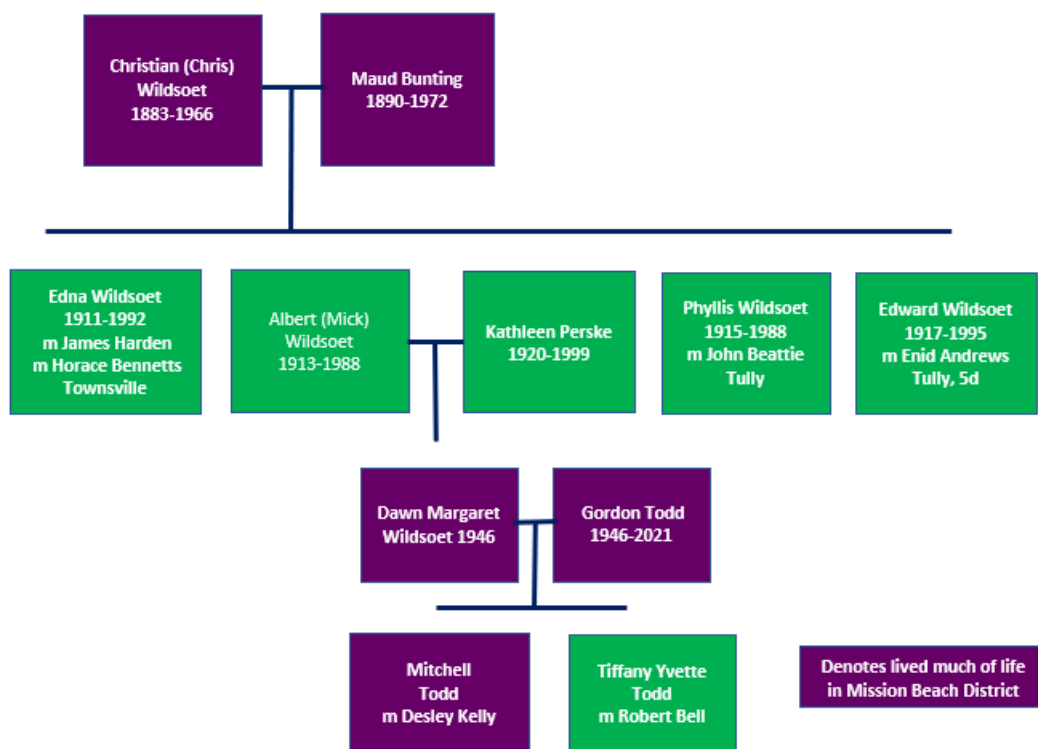
¹ F. P. Woolston and F. S. Colliver, *The Wildsoet Interview – Some Recollections of the Aborigines of the Tully Area* by, Queensland Heritage Vol. 3, Issue 3, pp. 3-14.

When the devastating 1918 cyclone smashed Mission Beach, Chris was working in Townsville. He rushed back, landing at Dunk Island and immediately checking on the Banfields. With George Webb, he was first to arrive at the Hull River Aboriginal Settlement, organizing an emergency transfer of the severely injured Mrs Kenny (wife of the settlement's Superintendent) to Townsville Hospital by ship.

The couple moved to Tully in 1926, where Chris became a pillar of the community; on the Ambulance Brigade advisory board and serving in the Voluntary Defence Corps during WWII. In 1959, he was chosen as one of two residents to hold the ribbon at the opening of the Banyan Bridge. He helped Council find the route for the road to Mission Beach, and the saddle they followed on his advice still bears his name: Wildsoet Gap.

Chris died of heart failure in 1966, aged 83. Maud followed him six years later, aged 82.

Chris and Maud's Offspring



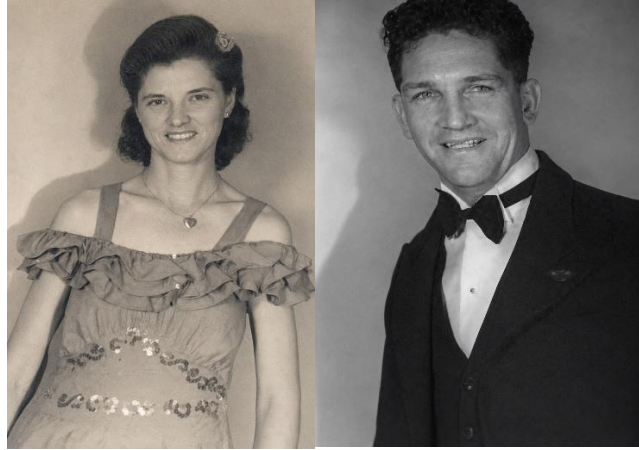
THE NEXT GENERATION: DAWN'S STORY

Chris and Maud's son Albert Marcus, always called Mick because of his St. Patrick's Day birthday, became a Holden mechanic in Tully. He married Kathleen Gwen Perske, and they had one daughter: Dawn Margaret.

Dawn's story takes us from small-town Tully to the Royal Navy and back again. After working in a solicitor's office and then at Tully State High School, she enlisted in the Royal Navy in 1966. She met Gordon Todd at the recruiting school. Gordon had a remarkable career serving on multiple ships, including six trips to Vietnam aboard the destroyer HMAS *Vampire*, escorting the troop carrier HMAS *Sydney*.

Dawn originally lived in a house at 8 Graham Street in Tully, where the swimming pool was later built. Mick and Kathleen remained there for life.

But it's Dawn's later role in the community that reveals the true Wildsoet character. When Mission Beach desperately needed a swimming pool, Dawn became one of the fiercest advocates, her hand always up at community meetings when action was needed. She wrote to Prime Ministers at one stage pleading the case. This wasn't someone seeking attention; this was someone who believed a community deserved better and was willing to fight for it.



Gwen (Kathleen) and Mick Wildsoet. Images from Dawn Todd.

Dawn's memories of family holidays at Chris and Maud's beachfront holiday home at South Mission Beach capture a vanished world: a corrugated iron house accommodating 20 or more people, kerosene lamps, green mosquito nets, and baths in an enamel basin with water heated on a wood stove. Her uncles, aunts, and cousins ... gathering, building magical memories that would last lifetimes.



Dawn Wildsoet before her marriage to Gordon Todd. On the steps of Chris and Maud's South Mission Beach holiday home. Rear: Ted Wildsoet, Jack Beattie, Middle row: Edna Wildsoet nee Harden, Maud Wildsoet (grandma), Phyllis Beattie with Fay Beattie on her lap. Front row: Joy Harden, daughter of Edna, Brian Beattie, June Harden.



Left: Gordon and Dawn Todd, 2016. Right: Mitch Todd rear with two sons and Dawn and Gordon: 2018 Anzac Day.



Wildsoet holiday home South Mission Beach remains on Kennedy Esplanade in 2026.

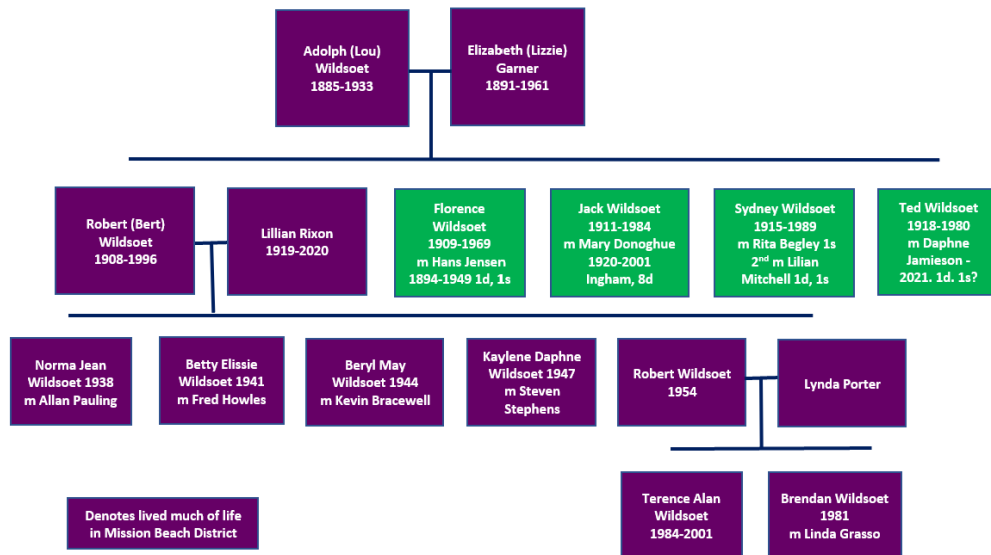
Today, Dawn's son Mitchell and his wife Desley live in South Mission Beach with their three children, not far from where Dawn herself lives part-time. Four generations are connected to this place. Her daughter Tiffany became Australia and New Zealand Director and Chief Financial Officer of the international project management group, Turner and Townsend, working in Brisbane, proof that Mission Beach can raise children who conquer the world, even if they don't always return.

THE GARNERS BEACH CONNECTION: LOU AND CARRIE

Three more of Marcus Wildsoet's children claimed Mission Beach as home: Joe, Carrie, and Lou. The latter two would marry into the Garner family, binding two pioneering families together.

Lou Wildsoet was a skilled blacksmith who married Lizzie Garner in 1908. They had five children: Bert, Florence, Jack, Sid, and Ted. Lou came with the Garners in 1909 to help set up and operate the Cutten sawmill. But Lou's story ended far too soon; he died of cancer at only 48, leaving Lizzie with the five children on her own. They're buried together in the heritage-listed Garner Family Cemetery at Garners Beach, where the families they built remain intertwined.

Their eldest son Bert (Robert Andrew Edward) was just ten years old when the monstrous 1918 cyclone struck. His memories, recorded in 1989, give us one of the few firsthand accounts of that nightmare: the house blown to pieces until only the floor and stumps remained, their water tank later found at Kurrimine Beach, the boat flipped upside down in the yard. They survived on half a bag of wet flour while Ted Garner senior went to Innisfail for supplies, only to have the police commandeer his boat, leaving the family stranded and desperate.



Cuttan case mill – the boy in front of the pallet is Bert.

Bert.

But Bert was made of stern stuff. With only three years of schooling, he went to work at Wangan Timber Mill at 12 years old. By 16, he had his own bullock team hauling timber. He preferred the bullocks to the new-fangled trucks that arrived later. He became a champion axeman in wood chopping competitions and an accomplished rugby player who thought nothing of running from Garners Beach to El Arish to play, then running home after the game. This is a photo of his 1933 rugby league team that was never beaten.



El Arish Rangers Football Team Unbeaten Premiers Tully Rugby League 1933 and Winners Liberty Cup. Bert Wildsoet front row right end, his cousin, Frank Garner middle row, right end. Image from Robert and Lynda Wildsoet.



Bert's bullock team. Image from Robert and Lynda Wildsoet.



Left: early logging truck used by Bert Wildsoet and Frank Garner. Image from Kay Stephens. Right: Frank and Bert with new machine for logging. Image from Robert and Lynda Wildsoet.

In the early days, Bert used his bullock team to cart a stamp head battery to Jordan Creek in the Palmerston goldfields, using block and tackle at every creek crossing. It was brutal, patient work in an unforgiving country.

Bert lived initially with his wife Lillian May (nee Rixon) in a house he built himself on the southern headland at Garners Beach, above the home of Ted and Edith Garner. He was in timber almost all his working life, even when he had a farm. He worked often in the Tully district hauling logs to the three local timber mills and mainly supplying the Hewitt's Siding mill. He met Lillian in Tully where her father worked as the steam engineer at the sawmill.

In 1954, the family moved from Garners Beach to a farm on the north headland of Brookes Beach (the beach south of Garners Beach). Bert purchased a home from his Aunt Nell which was on the road leading to the McConnell's house at Garners Beach. After some time there, they purchased a 300 acre farm and moved the Brookes Beach house to the northwest side of the Cedar Creek bridge. In 1958, they purchased the Post Office and store as well as a sawmill from the Rick family. Lillian Wildsoet became post-mistress at Mission Beach. Bert remembered a time when someone in the district was expecting a child, and Lillian stayed home to operate the phone exchange. He had a sawmill on Doug Campbell's land near Porter Promenade but had to retire in 1966 after he sustained a severe injury when a tree fell on him.

They lived in the old house beside the Post Office until George West built them a weatherboard home behind the Post Office using timber from the Wildsoet mill. After several years there, they retired and lived at Clump

Point near Perrier Walk. After selling that home, they lived on Boyett Road. There was a forestry plot between their house and the house that their son Robert built after his marriage to Lynda Porter. In 2010, Lillian went into the nursing home in Tully and lived there until she was over 100 years old. She died in 2020.

Bert and his family loved to go fishing. He built a red cedar boat using a hurricane lamp at night, and they used this to go out to the Barnard Islands.



Left: Bert on his boat powered by an early Anzani outboard, daughter Kay in the water. Right: The Wildsoet girls at the Bingil Bay farm. Images above and below from Kay Stephens.



Lillian Rixon.



Lillian Wildsoet nee Rixon.



Lillian with Betty and Norma.

Bert and Lillian's four daughters all attended Mission Beach State School in its opening year, 1953. They scattered to the winds as children do: Norma to New Zealand, Betty to Herberton then Cairns, Beryl to El Arish, Kay to Innot Springs, but they carried Mission Beach in their hearts.

Norma Jean Wildsoet obtained a job in Taylor's grocery store in Tully after she finished school and when she was around 23 years of age went to New Zealand on a trip with Betty. Norma married New Zealander Allan Pauling and remained in New Zealand.

Betty Elissie Wildsoet – Elissie is misspelt on some images, Betty's memoir is related later below.

Beryl May Wildsoet left school at age 13 to care for her three-year-old brother, Robert. She worked in the Post Office on the phones before Betty did and left the district when her family sold the Post Office. She met and married Kevin Bracewell and lived thereafter at El Arish.

Kaylene Daphne (Kay) Wildsoet went to Tully High School and when she left school, worked at See Poys shop at Innisfail. Kay married Stephen Stephens and lived in the Tablelands and remains there today at Innot Springs. The couple moved to Undara to work at the Lava Tubes where Kay was a guide and Steve a chef.

Kay is an accomplished researcher of family records and has many old family photos, so she has been an inspiration while piecing this family history together. Kay and Steve have three children: Brett works at the Mareeba sugar mill and has two daughters. Troy spent 10 years in the army as a chef and works now as a chef on the Atherton Tableland at the Lotus Glen Prison. He married and they have two children. Sharon married a diesel fitter and moved to Mackay. She is also a chef, and they have two children.



Left: Robert Wildsoet junior at Wildsoet family home behind the post office, home no longer there. Right: Bert Wildsoet senior as a boy.

The Wildsoet family home behind the post office became the home of Eric and Jean Bull when they took over the post office. Diane Bull, their daughter, recalls living in the home from 1985 until 1987. The house was later moved to Southward Street in the 1990s.

Lillian and Bert's son, **Robert Wildsoet**, was the youngest of their children and was sent to All Souls High School in Charters Towers against his will. He became a plumbing apprentice at Innisfail after school, then worked for Pat Dineen as a plumber. Pat had married Cathy Garner, Robert's cousin. Robert married Lynda Porter, the eldest daughter of Joan and Laurie Porter. Laurie had worked in the Wildsoet sawmill for some time. Robert and Lynda had two children, Terence and Brendan. Terry was tragically lost at an early age in a car accident when he was a member of a newly formed band. Brendan married Linda Grasso, and they live today with their children in South Mission Beach.

When Terry died, Robert and Lynda moved from the house they had on Boyett Road to live in the Tablelands at Tolga.

Bert's Siblings

Florence (Flossie) Wildsoet, the only daughter of Lizzie and Lou, also married and remained nearby at Djarawong near Tully. She renewed the family's Danish connection when she married Dane, Hans Jensen, at Tully. They had two children, a daughter named Kamma (married Stan Evans) and a son named Kevin (married Maureen Rollings.)

Henry John (Jack) Wildsoet, the second son of Lizzie and Lou, was a wharfie living at Ingham and married Mary Catherine Donoghue in Tully and the couple had eight children, all daughters: Marilee (married Victor Amory), Janice (Gary Hooker), Patricia, Jacqueline (Michael Welch), Beverley (Brian Hooker), Cherrill (Darryll Whittington), Karen (John Gallo) and Laurel (Raymond Whittington).

The third son of Lizzie and Lou, **Sidney Edmund Damond Wildsoet**, was a pastry chef in Sydney and married Rita Doris Begley and they had a son, Kevin John who married Margaret King. Sid then married Lillian May Mitchell and they had a son, Edmund Gordon who married Ashlyn Field. Later Edmund married Vivian Griff. Sid and Lillian's daughter, Evelyn Olive, married Geoffrey Burns.

Edward (Ted) Wildsoet, the fourth son of Lizzie and Lou, married Daphne Jamieson and lived on a cane farm at Gordonvale. They owned a 160-acre lot at Wongaling Beach, just south of Porters Creek in the 1930s, lot 110 which was first selected by Bernard Holland in 1914. Holland worked the lot for six months in 1926 but did not live there.

BETTY'S MEMORIES: A CHILDHOOD AT LAND'S END

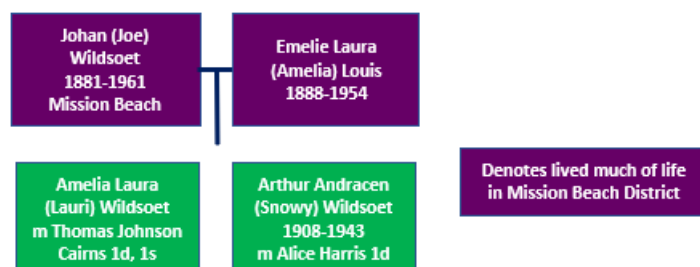
Betty Howles, née Wildsoet, still living in Cairns in 2026 at 84 years of age, paints a picture of what life was like. Born in 1941, she remembers Garners Beach when she was five, and Brookes Beach where they farmed pineapples and bananas, milking four cows every morning before the hour-long bike ride to school. She said that Brookes Beach was known as *Sunshine Beach* when they lived there and they purchased the property from the original selector, Mr Bradfield (or Bradford). They sold the property to Dorothy and Bernie Brookes and moved to a farm beside Cedar Creek for a while before buying the Post Office from the Rick family and moving to Mission Beach.

We had a wonderful childhood at Bingil Bay with no phones or electricity, she recalls. *We made our own toys and games and had such good fun.* Later they got a generator for power at night, luxury! She remembers Sunday school at Mrs. Donkin's home in Donkin Lane, and the excitement of weekends when they'd ride on the back of Dad's truck to El Arish for the movies. The old chair placed on the truck bed wasn't even fixed down. Two shillings bought a box of Jaffas and a small ice cream - pure joy.

At 20, Betty worked the phone exchange at the Post Office. There were only eight phones in the entire district. Mission Beach's ring code was short-long-short. After-hours calls required writing a ticket and charging one shilling and sixpence. She remembers the codes: one long ring for Tully, four short rings for El Arish. Her mother's family demonstrated the longevity that clean living and hard work sometimes bring: Uncle Bert Rixon was 102 in 2024, Uncle Stan 97. Betty married a relieving teacher, Harry Frederick (Fred) Howles, whom she met when he was temporarily teaching at Mission Beach. They left in 1965 for Herberton then to Cairns in 1970, where she became a teacher's aide. Betty and Fred have three children: Michael, Susan and Megan.

JOE: THE FISHERMAN

Joe Wildsoet lived most of his life timber getting and fishing in Mission Beach. The photograph below shows him with a giant groper he caught and had to tow behind his heavy wooden rowboat, an act that would rightly horrify conservationists today but reveals the different relationship people had with the reef in those days.



Joe married 16-year-old Emilie (Amelia) Louis in 1905. They had two children, Amelia Laura (Amy or Lauri) and Arthur Andracen, but the marriage didn't last. Their son Arthur, called *Snowy*, enlisted in WWII in 1939 and was killed on the Kokoda Track at 34; another Wildsoet life cut short by tragedy. Joe married Emilie Martha Laura (Amelia) Louis in 1905



Left: Image from *Ancestry.com*: Joe Wildsoet beside fish. Right: Joe Wildsoet with Bill Andrews drying their nets, Mission Beach 1951.

Joe was a chain smoker who went barefoot everywhere. Once he was stung by a stonefish and endured a long, agonizing hospital recovery, the price of living intimately with a landscape that could turn deadly in an instant.

Snowy Wildsoet married Alice Burke Harris who became a legend over her long lifetime in Brisbane. They had one child born in 1930. Alice was a pioneer in child care, starting one of the first kindergartens in Queensland. She opened the centre to care for children of women who had joined the land army during the war.

Alice was born in Capalaba in 1898 and at school she was an excellent cricketer. She became a nurse and wrote poetry and painted. Her first marriage was to Sergeant Barton of Longreach. They relocated to South Africa where he died, and Alice returned to Australia and lived in Redland where she was a hairdresser. Alice was known as *Aunty Jonnie* by the many children she fostered over the years. Wildsoet Street in Burbank, Brisbane, is named after Alice Wildsoet.



Left: Snowy Wildsoet. Right: Snowy's wife, Alice Wildsoet nee Harris.

CARRIE'S SHORTENED LIFE

Catherine Mary Jacobine Sophia, always Carrie, married Ted Garner junior in 1908 and had eight children: Edward Christian (Ned) married Joan Shaw, Francis John Bicton (Frank), bachelor, Alfred Marcus (Stumpy) married Thelma Smith, William Arthur (Bill) married Gloria (Glo) Tilse, Nellie Edith Penuel (Nell) married

Spenser (Wayne) Smith, Raymond Kinross (Ray) married Hazel Butcher, Stanley Douglas (Stick) married Elsie Cooper, and Valma Mary (Val) married twice.

Ted married again five years later to Gertrude (Gerty) Victoria Cooper who had five children of her own.

Carrie's life was cut short in 1937 when she was 49 years old, dying tragically in a car accident on the Bingil Bay-El Arish Road. There was an inquest.

THE WIDER WEB

The Wildsoet family spread beyond Mission Beach, though they kept their connections. Marcus' second daughter, Lorraine, married Jack Masters of Ingham and had seven children.

Chris's daughters Phyllis and Edna made lives elsewhere, while his son Ted ran a news agency in Tully for 13 years before taking up banana farming. Ted's daughter Christine earned a doctorate in optometry, researching myopia in the United States, a far cry from the bullock teams and timber mills her grandfather knew.

ENDURING LINKS

Kay Stephens, née Wildsoet, now living at Innot Springs, has traced the family back through 70 generations to Danish royalty, and even further to Trojan kings near 500 BC. Whether you believe such genealogical reaches or not, what's undeniable is that this family, these Vikings who landed in the tropics, left an indelible mark.

When Dawn Todd loaned us her cherished copy of the family history, *What's in a Name? The History of the Jacobsen, Buckley and Wildsoet Families* by Kaye Vernon and Billie Jacobsen, she was entrusting more than a book. It contained journeys to Denmark, visits to grave sites, exhaustive research through churches and registries. Vernon and Jacobsen left no stone unturned, literally walking the streets of Rudkøbing where it all began.

Today, Brendan Wildsoet and his family remain the only family in the district bearing the name Wildsoet. He works as a carpentry contractor in South Mission Beach with his wife Linda and their children, the latest generation building rather than felling, creating rather than clearing.

Dawn Todd, née Wildsoet, and her family also remain, the connection unbroken since 1908. When you walk through Wildsoet Gap, named for Chris Wildsoet's guidance in finding the route through the range, or walk down Wildsoet Street in Wongaling Beach or Tully, you're walking through more than geography. You're walking through a story of resilience, tragedy, adaptation, and stubborn refusal to surrender to isolation, cyclones, or the sheer difficulty of making a life at land's end.

The Wildsoet family endured much sadness ... at least 13 family members died before age 50 over four generations. They came from an island and settled near islands. They left cobblestones for mud tracks, markets for bushland, the known for the unknown. And they stayed, not because it was easy, but because some people, once they've claimed a place, become part of it. The land takes them as surely as they take the land.

In Mission Beach, where people come and go like the tide, the Wildsoets became the rocks, weathered, enduring, essential to the landscape itself.



Fun times with tennis in the 60s. Betty Wildsoet, Nancy Wheatley, Beryl Wildsoet, Dot Hathaway and Theresa Haack.
Image from Diane Jago, Mission Beach Tennis.

Acknowledgements

This story was made possible by the generous input of stories and images by Wildsoet girls, Dawn Todd, Kay Stephens and Betty Howles. Dawn loaned me a copy of the published family history to allow us to make the Danish connections accurately and Kay visited us from Innot Springs on the Atherton Tableland to fill in many gaps in our knowledge of her family. Betty provided a memoir, recalling her happy childhood clearly.

Some images have been enhanced using *Luminar Neo*, *ChatGPT* or *Google Gemini*, and these AI tools improve damaged old photos immensely when carefully instructed and scrutinised to avoid distortion of content. Occasionally, we colourise black and white images, but the colours are a raffle on AI. We use equally valuable tools like *Ginger Writer* and *Claude AI* to ensure that our spelling and grammar are satisfactory, yet our wonderful editors still detect a few errors. AI is not used to generate our content.

WILDSOET FAMILY TREE | MISSION BEACH BRANCHES

