

BRIEF HISTORY OF NZMA

(NEW ZEALAND MUSLIM ASSOCIATION)

FIRST MOSQUE IN NEW ZEALAND



**Marhum Sulaiman Ismail Bhikoo
pouring the foundation**

On 30 March 1979, after the Jumuaah Salaat, Marhum Sulaiman Bhikoo was given the honour, as the first Chairman of NZMA, of pouring the foundation (at the mehrab).

“Laying the foundation was a very emotional event. Our elders and the Muslims who attended this function shed tears of joy when the concrete was poured into the trenches of the first fortress of Islam in New Zealand. A large crowd gathered to be part of this historic occasion,” said Abdul Raheem Rasheed, the then President of NZMA.

EARLY HISTORY

Marhum Sulaiman Ismail Bhikoo, the third eldest son of Marhum Ismail Ahmed Bhikoo, started trading from the premises on the corner of Napier and Franklin Roads, Ponsonby. In 1950 Marhum Sulaiman was inspired to fulfil the third Pillar of Islam. He started fasting in Ramadaan (month of fasting) of that year and when the moon was sighted for Eid-ul-Fitr, he closed his shop for that day and invited the 25 to 30 Muslims he knew in the area to come and celebrate Eid-ul Fitr (prayer) with him. The central area of his shop was cleared, blankets were laid out and the first Eid Khutba (sermon) took place in his shop. The Khutba and prayer were led by Marhum Yusuf Patel, who was visiting New Zealand at that time. The glory and Barakah of the first Jamaat salaah (group prayer) touched the hearts of those who participated. Their elated spiritual feeling led them into ideas of forming a more permanent Jamaat.

BIRTH OF NZMA

This exquisite feeling of ‘a salaah in Jamaat’ and the traditional 6 Eid takbeer of, “Allahu Akber (Allah is the Greatest),” torched their hearts and motivated them to have their first meeting in the same year, of all the Muslim brothers who were present. After a lively discussion of their dreams and aspirations the meeting terminated with some firm resolutions on hand. They had resolved to establish the New Zealand Muslim Association (NZMA). “Muslim organisation began in New Zealand in 1950 with the formation of the New Zealand Muslim Association in Auckland” (quoted by Prof. W Shepard - pp 153). This name was selected, as it was intended to serve all Muslims in New Zealand. They further resolved that a membership of 1 pound per year be levied and a collection fund was set up. Marhum Sulaiman Ismail Bhikoo was elected as the first Chairman and the very able Marhum Ismail Ali Moses (Grandson of Essop Moses) was elected as Secretary of this newly formed Association. The other

members present served as committee members. Some of the names in the first committee mentioned to me were Marhum Sekumia Tosammiya, Marhum Khalid, Marhum Kareem M Rasool, Marhum M Khan, Marhum Amrulamia, Marhum Kedarmia, Marhum Yusuf Bhikoo and Ebrahim Bhikoo, Hassan Bhikoo and Abdul Samad Bhikoo.

In 1956 NZMA achieved their first milestone by inviting all other Muslims living in Auckland to a meeting. This meeting took place in Pitt Street, Auckland and Muslims who were originally from Turkey, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Albania and from India attended it. They gathered under the banner of Islam. Lively discussions resulted in NZMA opening their membership to all with a 10 shillings per month membership fee. However due to unknown reasons the results of this venture ran into a cul-de-sac.

HARGREAVES STREET PROPERTY

A more notable milestone was achieved in 1957; with 1400 pounds in the kitty NZMA took a bold step and negotiated for a property in Hargreaves Street, Freemans Bay. The purchase price was set at 1500 pounds and the shortfall was made up by a loan from one of the brothers. NZMA occupied this house in 1957. Part of the house was used for Islamic activities and part of it was hired out to supplement the income.

Thoughts were now directed towards the Islamic welfare of their children. They invited a religious teacher (Molliesaab) from India to come and see to the religious needs of their children. As NZMA was not financially strong enough to sustain the wages of the Molliesaab they requested him to come to New Zealand to earn his own living while fulfilling the Islamic needs of the children. With this arrangement the first teacher that took up the challenge was Molliesaab Ahmed Said Moosa Patel. When he arrived in New Zealand in 1960 he was housed in Hargreaves Street. He arrived here in his thirties and was very determined to start the madressa classes. When he found employment at Donaghys, the rope factory, he was set to fulfil his mission in New Zealand.

The full atmosphere of Ramadaan (blessed month) was experienced in 1960 when the first Taraweeh prayer (Ramadaan prayer) was held at the centre. Every night during this month the taraweeh prayer was led by the Molliesaab and the 8 to 10 musallees (regulars) participated with enthusiasm and gratification. In later years some ladies also attended the Taraweeh prayer in a separate room at the centre. In 1966 the Molliesaab was registered to perform marriages under the New Zealand law (Prof W Shepard Pp213).

The 'salaat in jamaat' (congregation prayer) although not five times per day, became a more regular feature at this centre.

MUSLIM BURIAL GROUND

The NZMA approached the City Council in 1966 to acquire a special area reserved for the burial of Muslims. Their motivation in this direction stem from the fact that Muslims were buried anywhere in the Wycommittee Cemetery (Henderson) as well as two plots had to be purchased to fulfil the Kibla (direction) needs of the Janaaza (corpse). This permission was granted and a special area was set aside within the cemetery as a Muslim burial ground. The first Muslim to be buried in this area was a revert to Islam.

POMPALLIER TERRACE PROPERTY

With the growth of the Muslim population in Ponsonby the funds in the coffers of NZMA also grew. When sufficient funds were available a second property for \$ 4000 was purchased in Pompallier Terrace, Ponsonby. Here some alterations had to be made to accommodate the ever-increasing number of musallees. The Hargreaves property was now fully rented out and part of Pompallier Terrace was used to accommodate the Molliesaab.

In 1971 the Qur'anic ayah (62:9),

“O you who believe. When the call is proclaimed for the prayer on the day of Friday (Jumua Prayer), come to the remembrance of ALLAH and listen to the religious talk (Khutba) and pray.....” was given expression by conducting the first Jumua prayer during a public holiday. This event took place after a Jamaat (Group) from South Africa encouraged this event.

VERMONT STREET MASJID

Accumulated funds and the growth of the Muslim population forced NZMA to look for bigger premises for their ever-increasing needs. Negotiations for the larger property at 17 Vermont Street was under way. This property had a house, which was divided into two flats and a batch. The selling price was fixed \$22 000-00. The properties at Hargreaves Street (now Industrial) and Pompallier Terrace

(bought by the school for their needs) were sold to pay cash for this site. With the capital that was left over they renovated the front flat and converted it into a salaah area and wudu (ablution) facility. The second flat was used for accommodation.

Jumuah was regularly conducted with the five times salaah per day. Hafez Sidat who arrived from Fiji in 1971 conducted the Jumuah salaah regularly. In his absence Abdus Samad Bhikoo took over this task. The original plans for the new Masjid was drawn by Abdus Salaam, one of the early reverts to Islam. When Abdus Salaam visited the site together with Hafiz Sidat he decided on the circular shape of the Masjid as it would accommodate the maximum number of musalees considering the direction of the Kibla. At that time Abdus Salaam was working for the Auckland City Council. As it had to be approved by the City Council, the services of Abdul Aziz, working for the architects, James Stiffe & Associates were engaged for a full set of drawings.

On 30 March 1979, after the Jumuah salaah, Marhum Sulaiman Bhikoo was given the honour, as the first Chairman of NZMA, of pouring the first foundation (at the mehrab). "Laying the foundation was a very emotional event. Our elders and the Muslims who attended this function shed tears of joy when the concrete was poured into the trenches of the first fortress of Islam in New Zealand. A large crowd gathered to be part of this historic occasion," said Abdul Raheem Rasheed, the then President of NZMA.

With \$20,000-00 in the coffers of NZMA, Spur Construction and Development Company, owned by Br Feroz M Ali Khan was engaged to build this project. The Herald quotes a figure of \$500,000 while Hafez Sidat says it was in excess of \$1 million, which came from Australia, Malaysia, Pakistan, England, Saudi Arabia, and Fiji. Abdul Raheem Rasheed, together with the Treasurer, Hadjee Husen Shahib, and others were instrumental in obtaining finance from overseas.

"Another event that created a lot of interest was the lifting of the dome onto the walls of the Masjid. The speculation that the crane will collapse while lifting the dome brought the TV and the Newspaper media to the site. The dome came from the engineers in four sections to the site. It was welded together into one piece and the moment had arrived. The crane went into operation, hoisted the dome and much to the disappointment of the media it was placed in position without a problem," said Hafez Sidat. On a cold winters morning in August 1979 and with the help of a few heaters the first Taraweeh Salaah took place in the new Masjid.

The foundation stone for the hall was laid in 1984 and completed by 1990. Presently at Ponsonby they have the Masjid, the adjoining hall, a Janaaza facility for ghusal and a living quarters for the Imam.

OUR THANKS AND APPRECIATION

"I want to pass my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to my team of dedicated workers who saw this project through regardless of many, many difficulties. One of our biggest problems was to convince a group of people who preferred us to first build the hall instead of the Masjid. Their change of heart and the support we received from all allowed us to complete this project," were the concluding remarks of Br Raheem Rasheed.

We are aware that a number of other people played a very active and prominent role in the Ponsonby Masjid. Please forgive us if we have overlooked you and the valuable contribution you have made to NZMA. May ALLAH (Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala) reward all of you for your effort in fortifying Islam in New Zealand and also creating the first Dome of Islam. A symbol and reminder we are very proud of. To all those who contributed to this article we wish to say thank you for your cooperation and contribution.

PAST PRESIDENTS OF NZMA

We the Muslims of New Zealand pay tribute to the Past Presidents of the New Zealand Muslim Association. If we have omitted to include some of the names here please forgive us as we would like to include them. We were unable to place our hands on the actual records of NZMA but had to rely on the memory of the past Presidents and some of the Secretaries we interviewed.

We also tried to arrange them from the earliest to the recent serving President. Although their names appear once, some of the Presidents served for more than one term in office. Here too, we could not get

a confirmed order. If some of our readers have old records in their possession we would appreciate copies of them or access to them to update our History of NZMA.

1	Br. Marhum Suliman Ismail Bhikoo
2	Br. Abdus Samad Bhikoo
3	Br. Ebrahim Bhikoo
4	Br. Marhum Nazmi Mehmet
5	Br. Mazhar Krasniqi
6	Br. Mahmood Bhikoo
7	Br. Raheem Rasheed
8	Br. Imtiaz Bhikoo
9	Br. Mehboob Hoosain
10	Br. Haroon al Rasheed
11	Br. Faiyam Khan
12	Br. Muhammed Sahil