

150th Birthday anniversary for Tassie genius named in the top 200 most important Australians

Few Australians could say they have influenced everyone from actors of the ilk of Dame Judi Dench and Hugh Jackman, and Aussie cricket royalty, to world famous musicians and iconic writer Aldous Huxley. One man set to be honoured in January in North West Tasmania did just that in an extraordinary career that saw him chosen in the pantheon of our nation's greatest individuals.

On January 20 1869, John and Betsy Alexander became the proud parents of their first child, Frederick Matthias Alexander. John was a blacksmith, Betsy the daughter of convicts. His grandparents – all four of them – were also convicts, as were his two great uncles. His birthplace, long gone now, was an early settle homestead on Table Cape in Tasmania. It was an inauspicious start for someone who would develop a pain relief technique used by people from all walks of life, and see them recognised as one of 200 People Who Made Australia Great, in the book of that title published for the Australian Bicentennial Celebrations in 1988.

Move forward 150 years from 1869 and teachers of the Technique from around the world, together with Alexander family members, will gather in Wynyard over the weekend of January 19-20, to celebrate the sesquicentennial of the birth of FM, as he is popularly known.

“To celebrate this milestone birthday near where he was born is a fitting tribute, both to the man and to this beautiful part of Tasmania which had such an impact on his life,” Hobart-based Alexander Technique teacher Penny McDonald said. “His early years there sowed the seed for what would become the Technique now being taught around the world by more than 4000 teachers.”

The Alexander Technique (AT) focuses on the unconscious habitual ways in which we function—our patterns of posture, movement, and responses to stressful situations—and teaches us how to have conscious control over these aspects of ourselves. “Learning this technique gives you the tools to use your body, do activities more efficiently and find freedom from pain or discomfort,” she said.

Movement and balance improves, anxiety reduces, and breathing coordination falls into a harmonic rhythm. Another major benefit is having the insight and awareness to respond differently to stimulus from the habitual pattern of use.

AT lessons reduce tension in repetitive and/or strenuous activities, such as bending, lifting or typing, and in skilled activities, including dance, music, acting and sport. “Scientific studies have demonstrated that applying the AT will consistently lead to reduction in chronic pain for people with musculoskeletal pain conditions,” Ms McDonald said.

Many great actors and top musicians have studied the AT, including Sting, Paul McCartney, Mr Jackman, Dame Judi Dench, Paul Newman, Barry Humphries, and Madonna, amongst others. “Australian Test cricket great Greg Chappell has learnt it, Victoria Beckham is a recent student, and the enlightened intellectual Aldous Huxley wrote a book about it,” Ms McDonald said.

The birthday celebrations, supported by the Waratah/Wynyard Council, are a chance for teachers to gather, and work with people in the local community who are curious about the AT. Those interested in the Alexander family history will have an opportunity to see the work done by local historians and researchers on developing the family tree of the Alexanders in Tasmania.

Australian Society of Teachers of the Alexander Technique (AUSTAT)

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