David Alexander De Maus (it rhymes with 'paws') was a notable figure in late-nineteenth century Port Chalmers. As a successful photographer, he captured significant moments in Port Chalmers' history as well as the everyday life of its residents. De Maus was also a talented musician who composed humorous sketches and songs for any and every occasion. De Maus was also deeply involved with the local community through his political career. He served as mayor of Port Chalmers four times between 1899 and 1913 and had connections with several prominent national politicians of the period.

David Alexander De Maus was born in Edinburgh on 8th August 1847. His father David, a hatter by trade, had moved to Scotland in the mid-eighteenth century. David senior was of French Huguenot descent, which accounts for his rather un-Scottish surname. De Maus' mother, Elizabeth (nee Oatley) came from the port town of Ayr in south-west Scotland.

David's education included both music and art, and for a time he worked in his father's business. Older brother James' career choice was quite influential for the younger David. James had a photographic business in Edinburgh, and in 1864 he chose to move to Dunedin, where he set up another photographic studio. When David turned nineteen in 1866, he decided to join his brother in gold-rich Dunedin.

In May 1866, James De Maus purchased the Tait Brothers' 'Royal Caledonian Portrait Rooms' in Princes Street in Dunedin, and upon David's arrival he joined his brother at two pounds per week. James was not a successful businessman and he was eventually declared bankrupt. To discharge the debt to David for unpaid wages James transferred the business property to David who sold it and used the proceeds to set himself up in the thriving Port Chalmers.

In 1878 David married Anne Cooper Buchan from Ballarat and they had two sons and four daughters, only two of which survived their childhood. One son died aged three and a half, a daughter died of croup at four years and five months, an infant daughter died aged three weeks, and another son died aged one year and seven months.

By the mid 1870s, David De Maus was running a successful photography business and also putting his musical talents to use for the benefit of the community.

From his studio at 62 George Street, Port Chalmers he took portraits, baby and wedding photographs, family groups, sporting and social clubs, and photos of the port at work, and photos of ships. In 1861, with the gold rush, Port Chalmers was the third largest port in Australasia after Melbourne and Sydney.

De Maus was appointed official photographer for the New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition held in Dunedin in 1889. He was still taking photos in 1921, but in 1925 he died on 17 July aged 77. A large crowd attended his funeral and he was buried in the Port Chalmers new cemetery alongside his four infant children.

Strangely, and sadly, for one who was so passionate about images all his life, and for one who was such an interesting character, his gravesite has no memorial. It would be nice for the local community to remedy this.

Prepared by the Historic Cemeteries Conservation Trust of New Zealand (www.cemeteries.org.nz) from a book recently published by the Port Chalmers Museum entitled "Capturing Port – D.A. De Maus: photography, music, and community spirit in nineteenth-century Port Chalmers"