

**Date of interview:** Tuesday, 20 Nov 2018

**Venue:** Masjid Omar Kampung Melaka

**Name of Group Members:** Nur Fateema, Ummu Kulthum, Humaira Dewi, Basyirah, Nur Raihah, Nur Izzah, Nur Adibah Nasuhah, Siti Aisyah

**Name of person interviewed:** Syed Alwi Bin Abdullah Aljunied

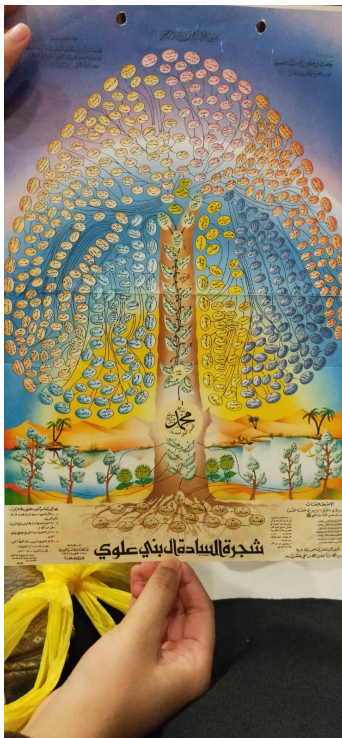
**Age of interviewee:** 73

### **Aljunied:Origins**

If you were to hear the word 'Aljunied', what is the first thing that comes to mind? The MRT station? The school? The neighbourhood? Did you know that it is actually the name of an old Arab family?

Did you know that there are still descendants of the original Aljunied in Singapore?

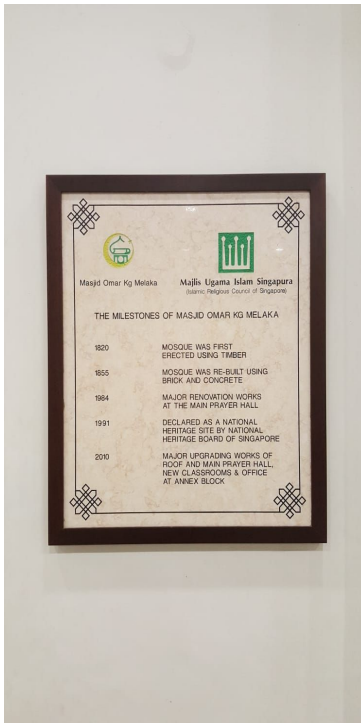
Mr. Syed Alwi Bin Abdullah Aljunied was born in 1945. He stayed for 18 years at Saudi Arabia and has been working at Masjid Omar kampong Melaka for the past 15 years as a trustee of the mosque with his brother. He carries on the legacy of his ancestor, Syed Omar Ali Aljunied. Syed Omar Aljunied was a highly respected philanthropist that contributed a lot to the development of Singapore.



Syed Omar Ali Aljunied was born in 1792 at Tarim, Hadramaut in Yemen. He was an Arab merchant descended from the prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him). He originally conducted business in Palembang, Sumatra in Indonesia which was under Dutch ruling at the time. He moved to Singapore in 1820 when the British rulers invited him. He saw more opportunities to trade in Singapore's free port without the taxes of the Dutch rulers. As such, he brought everything he owned with him to establish his family in Singapore. He and his uncle, Syed Mohammed Bin Harun, were among the first to migrate to Singapore.

There are no pictures of him as back then cameras were not as common as they are today and the Muslims of the olden days did not like to have pictures of faces. As such, there are no pictures of the Aljunied family until the third generation after Syed Omar.

Even though Habib Omar was extremely wealthy to the point where he could buy out the cargoes of entire ships, he was not miserly and never hesitated to give to charitable causes, even to those that were not Muslims.



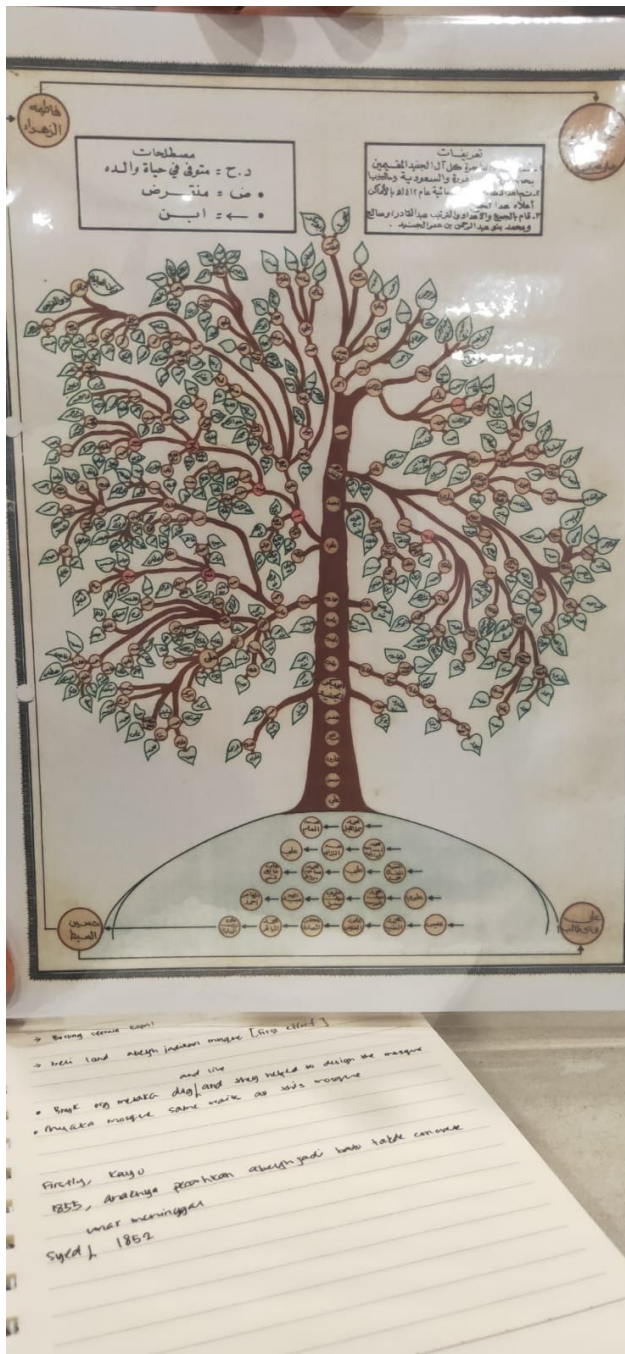
As a Muslim, he believed that any wealth he was blessed with could not have been attained without the help of God, and anything that he gave to charity would be multiplied in heaven for him. Thus, he donated plots of land to build St. Andrew's Cathedral even though there was nothing he could gain from it in this world. He also donated a plot of land and helped to build the pauper's hospital that would later be known as Tan Tock Seng hospital.

He established the first mosque in Singapore in 1820, Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka, after buying a plot of land for it. The majority of people in the area at the time were from Malacca. They contributed to building and designing the mosque and made up most of the worshippers there. As such, the mosque was named Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka ('Omar' after Syed Omar and 'Kampong Melaka' after the Malaccans). The original building of the mosque was made of wood but it got revamped later on with stone. In 2010, the mosque was expanded to further accommodate more worshippers. Even though the mosque had been revamped and renovated many times over the years with the most recent renovation being in 2010, the current building's timber beams are the same as the ones from the original building from the year 1855. Like most Mosques in Singapore, it is run through donations from the public.



Today, many activities are conducted at the mosque outside of the usual obligatory prayers such as Maulid celebrations, Quran memorisation classes (or *tahfiz*), and Ramadan events. There used to be around 150 sacrifices made every year for Eid Al Adha but due to the new regulations that have been passed regarding the matter, the event could no longer be held because the area was too small.

Other than masjid Omar Kampung Melaka, Syed Omar was also the founder of masjid Bencoolen and his descendent Syed Abdul Rahman Aljunied founded the second oldest Madrasah (or Islamic school) in Singapore, Madrasah Aljunied Al-Islamiah. He set aside a plot of land as Wakaf (public property) to make it into a Muslim cemetery. He was buried there after his passing. In 2014 his tomb was moved to a place near Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka.



Syed Omar is fondly remembered today for all the legacies he has left behind, with an entire suburban area, a school, an MRT station, and a mosque named after him. He passed away in 1852 at the age of 60, leaving behind many descendants who continue to uphold his name as a philanthropist. He had left his sons the responsibility of becoming trustees of Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka and the tradition has carried on all the way to the current day and age with his 5th generation descendant Syed Alwi Bin Abdullah Aljunied.

In conclusion, Syed Omar Ali Aljunied is a role model to all Singaporeans. He held the true spirit of Singapore, looking beyond race and religion to help those in need, and inspired many Muslims to follow in his footsteps. All in all, everyone should strive to emulate his example of excellence.

## Introduction to project members:



Nur Fateema  
Sec4 Student of Madrasah Aljunied  
Has a funny sense of humour  
Loves anime and drawing  
Is a procrastinator  
In this project, her role was to record Mr. Alwi

Ummu Kulthum  
Sec4 Student of Madrasah Aljunied  
Likes to think she is witty  
Loves ice cream and books  
Is a procrastinator  
In this project, her role was to write this report

Humaira Dewi  
Sec4 Student of Madrasah Aljunied  
Likes to study hard  
Loves chocolate chip cookies  
Is a procrastinator  
In this project, her role was to take down notes

Basyirah  
Sec4 Student of Madrasah Aljunied



Is really good at deadpan humour  
Probably loves eating cake  
Is a procrastinator  
In this project her role was to take down notes

Nur Raihah  
Sec4 Student of Madrasah Aljunied  
Is a hard worker and very helpful towards others  
Aims to be able to learn many musical instruments  
Relative to everyone else is not a procrastinator  
In this project,her role was to take down notes

Nur Izzah  
Sec4 Student of Madrasah Aljunied  
Friendly and funny  
Diligent in her studies  
Is a procrastinator  
In this project,her role was to take pictures of the interview

Nur Adibah Nasuhah  
Sec4 Student of Madrasah Aljunied  
Very kind and caring towards others  
Strives to do her best in everything  
Is a procrastinator  
In this project her role was to interview Mr.Syed Alwi

Siti Aisyah  
Sec4 Student of Madrasah Aljunied  
Friendly and kind person  
Does her best in everything  
Is a procrastinator  
In this project her role was to take down notes

### **What did you learn from this experience**



First of all,the fact that the Aljunied family has been in Singapore for nearly 200 years completely blew our minds.To put it into perspective,Syed Omar was in Singapore at the same time as Sir Stamford Raffles!

Secondly,the Aljunied family can trace its roots 1400 years back all the way back to the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) himself!

Many things that we take for granted nowadays like the abundance of Mosques would not have been achieved without someone taking the initiative to take the first step. Therefore, we should follow the example of Syed Omar and BE the change in the status quo.