

# AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL



VOL XI 1992

PART 4

**AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.**

*Founded 21 August 1938 (Incorporated 1988)*

**Patrons**

M. H. Kellerman, O.B.E., B.Ec., M.A.C.E.  
The Honourable Sir Asher Joel, K.B.E., A.O.

**President**

Dennis R. Bluth, B.A., LL.M.

**Vice-Presidents**

Suzanne D. Rutland, M.A. (Hons), Dip.Ed., Ph.D. (NSW Journal Editor)  
Nate Zusman

**Honorary Secretary**

Rita Jaffe  
c/o 166 Castlereagh St., Sydney, NSW 2000

**Honorary Treasurer**

Miriam Solomon, J.P.

**Honorary Auditor**

G.A. Marx, F.I.S.A., C.P.A.

**Committee**

Anne Andgel  
Helen Bersten, B.A., Dip.Lib. (Honorary Archivist)  
Bruse Le Bransky, B.Com (Hons), M.Ec. (Newsletter Editor)  
Sophie Caplan, B.A., M.Ed. (Hons)  
Professor Sol Encel, M.A., Ph.D.  
Noni Guthrie  
Julius Mayer, Dip. Law, S.A.B. (NSW), Dip. Juris (Wits), A.J.L.A.  
Louise Rosenberg (Honorary Historian)  
Sylvia Rosenblum, B.A., M.Ed (Hons), Dip.Ed. Dip.Museum Stud.

**AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY – VICTORIA INC.**

*Founded 9 August 1954 (Incorporated 1989)*

**Patron**

Right Honourable Sir Zelman Cowen, A.K., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., Q.C., D.C.L.

**President**

Howard A. Freeman, B.D.Sc., L.D.S.

**Honorary Secretary**

Mrs Beverley Davis, Grad.Dip Arts  
P.O. Box 255, Camberwell, Victoria 3124. (Newsletter Editor)

**Honorary Treasurer**

Serge I. Liberman, M.B., B.S.

**Committee**

Paul R. Bartrop, B.A. (Hons), M.A., Dip.Ed., Ph.D.  
Harvey A. Cohen, B./Sc., Ph.D.  
Trevor S. Cohen, LL.B. (Immed.P.P.)  
Rabbi John S. Levi, A.M., D.D., M.A.H.L., M.A., Dip.Ed.  
Hilary L. Rubinstein, B.A. (Hons), M.S., Ph.D., F.R.Hist.S.  
Professor W. D. Rubinstein, B.A., M.A., Ph.D., F.A.H.A., F.R.Hist.S. (Victorian Journal Editor)  
Isidor Solomon, A.A.S.A., A.C.I.S.  
David Sonenberg, LL.B.

**CANBERRA A.C.T. BRANCH**

**President**

Earle S. Hoffman, OAM, B.Agr.Sc., B.Com., M.S.

**Vice President**

Sylvia Deutsch, B.A. (Hons)

**Honorary Secretary**

Greg Marks, B.A., Dip.Ed.  
P.O. Box 3105, Manuka, A.C.T. 2603

**Honorary Treasurer**

Harold Pearlman, A.A.S.A.

**Committee**

Margaret Beadman  
Barbara Dickens  
Anne Hoffman

**FRONT COVER**

Front Row l. to r.: Abraham Wells,  
Dr. I. N. Steinberg

Back Row l. to r.: Meyer Lasse,  
Abram Stuchynski, David Wells.

Photo Donated by Harry Robertson

ISSN 0819-0615

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editor's Introduction .....	632
<i>Raymond Apple</i> The 1845 Report Re-Visited .....	633
<i>Alan Clark</i> Henry Moss: He Had A Vision For Nowra .....	643
<i>Morris S. Ocbert,</i> Bondi Jewry Between the Wars .....	649
<i>Harry Leslie,</i> War Experiences And Life As A Prisoner Of War .....	663
<i>David Mossenson</i> History of Jews in Western Australia - A Personal Insight.....	669
<i>Nate Zusman</i> Fifty Years of the Jewish Folk Centre in Sydney .....	675
<i>Suzanne D. Rutland</i> "I Am My Brother's Keeper" .....	687
Book Reviews.....	702
Correspondence.....	708
Addenda .....	709
President's Report (Sydney) .....	711
New Members .....	714
Genealogical Enquiries .....	715
Contributors .....	716

## EDITORIAL

This issue of the *Journal* has two main areas of focus: the convict origins of Australian Jewry; and the recording of the reminiscences of some members of our community documenting events in diverse periods and locations. Each of the latter group of articles will add, through this collection of personal stories, to our knowledge of Australian Jewish history and, indeed, to the general Jewish historical experience.

The two articles relating to early nineteenth century Australian Jewish history approach this period from different perspectives. Rabbi Raymond Apple's paper on the 1845 York Street Synagogue Report is an extremely valuable and thought provoking analysis of what may be seen as the major historical document of this period. Alan Clark, on the other hand, has taken a biographical approach, producing an excellent, carefully researched article on his subject — Henry Moss — a leading citizen of Nowra.

Moving into the twentieth century, Morris Ochert's article on 'Bondi Jewry' is the first in a series of personal histories. Mr Ochert's story is full of humour and pathos, highlighting both the strengths and the weaknesses of his family and the broader society, both Jewish and non-Jewish, in which he grew up. In a very amusing fashion, he has captured a period of Sydney Jewry, with its attitudes, its accents and its tensions. Through the use of humour, he manages to evoke the feelings of the times he describes while, at the same time, providing insights into that important transitional period of the community just before World War II.

Harry Leslie's account of life as a prisoner of war interned by the Japanese vividly portrays the hardships which many Allied soldiers experienced at the hands of the Japanese during World War II. At the time, Mr Leslie was serving in the British army — he settled in Australia in 1968 — but his experiences parallel those of the Australian prisoners of war who suffered at the hands of the Japanese.

Dr David Mossenson's account of his experiences writing his book, *Hebrew, Israelite, Jew: History of Jews in Western Australia*, deals with a different form of personal introspection. Here we see an historian deliberating on the problems of historical methodology and the availability and use of source material. Dr Mossenson's outline of the specific problems he encountered and the solutions he chose should provide useful guidance to future Australian Jewish historians.

Finally, Nate Zusman's article on the history of the Sydney Jewish Folk Centre is a mixture of personal experience and historical research. Mr Zusman was fortunate enough to meet Dr I. N. Steinberg in Perth in 1939. During the early years of the Folk Centre's evolution in Sydney he was living in Perth. After his move to Sydney in 1946 he gradually became involved in Folk Centre activities and, as the article makes clear, has been actively involved over the last few years, especially in the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the Folk Centre. The development of the Folk Centre was just one element in the transformation of Australian Jewry before and after World War II. This transformation was assisted by the financial support given to Australian Jewry by overseas Jewish organisations and, later, by the Claims

Conferences. I have discussed these developments in my article.

All of the articles published in this issue of the *Journal*, with the exception of Alan Clark's and Suzanne Rutland's, have been presented as papers to the AJHS in Sydney over the last few years. I feel that, where relevant, it is important to encourage presenters of papers in both Sydney and Melbourne to submit their presentations in written form suitable for consideration for the *Journal*. In this way, valuable papers can be accessed by a wider audience over a longer period of time. While seeking to encourage the publication of oral presentations in this *Journal*, this does not mean that other material will not be accepted. Any article of historical value may be published in the *Journal* and in this context it was particularly pleasing to receive Mr Alan Clark's most interesting paper.

The four books reviewed in this issue incorporate historical, literary and genealogical interests. Arnold Zable's *Jewels and Ashes*, a book of both literary and historical importance, has been reviewed by Yvonne Fein.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Gael Hammer for her willing assistance in copy editing, and Helen Bersten and Nate Zusman for their ready cooperation. I would also like to thank Professor Lionel Fredman and Dr John Stanhope for providing extra information in relation to their articles published previously. The manuscript was typed by Nancy Hickson of the Department of Semitic Studies, University of Sydney. I would like to thank Nancy for her reliability and efficiency without which the editing and production of this *Journal* would have been a much more difficult task.

Suzanne D. Rutland

## THE 1845 REPORT RE-VISITED

Presidential Address to the Australian Jewish Historical Society

by Rabbi Raymond Apple

6 December 1989

It is 145 years since the opening of the York Street Synagogue, Australia's first specifically-built edifice for Jewish worship. An impressive, well-proportioned building in the Egyptian style, it was designed by James Hume, who was associated with a number of Sydney's finest buildings. Though it was a time of economic difficulty, funds towards the building of the Synagogue were donated liberally by both Jews and Christians, but in the end there was a shortfall of 1000 pounds and the congregation were short of money for a minister's salary. These financial problems will loom large later in this paper, but for the moment let us leave them in the background as we echo the self-congratulations of the Synagogue committee, proud to have erected "a building which will reflect honor [sic] on its founders, and shew to posterity [perhaps by a printer's error the 1944 reprint of the 1845 report has the word "prosperity"] the great zeal evinced by a

handful of people, to do honor to the One all powerful Creator whom they worship”.

For a community of fewer than six hundred people (in New South Wales as a whole there were eight to nine hundred), the new Synagogue was a massive achievement. The intention had been to erect a building that was “elegant and stately”. Though the immediate environment, with its taverns, markets and police court, was unimpressive, the Synagogue was widely acclaimed as “a handsome building”, “chaste and classic”, and “beautiful”. It not only offered the Jewish community a worthy house of worship; it had a statement to make, a message to direct to the authorities and general public of New South Wales. It challenged gentile fellow-citizens to deny, if they dared, that the Jews were a decorous, respectable element of the body politic, conducting themselves as good citizens and entitled to the respect and privileges accorded to every recognised denomination.

In the first twelve months after the opening of the Synagogue, the congregational elders directed their attention to the publication of a report providing “a brief statement of the rise and progress of the Hebrew religion in this antipodean Colony”. The full text of the report was reprinted by the Australian Jewish Historical Society in 1944 to mark the centenary of the York Street Synagogue<sup>1</sup>, and there has been a further reprint in more recent years,<sup>2</sup> so that this important document - the very first attempt at Australian Jewish history writing - has been spared the fate of other early records. Incidentally, just before I went to London as a student, the then honorary secretary of this Society, the late Sydney B. Glass, told me that there had long been a belief that somewhere about the turn of the century the late Coleman P. Hyman, a former Sydney communal leader and amateur historian, had taken valuable Australian Jewish historical records with him to England, and asked me to see if I could trace any of this material. I did find that Hyman was associated with the Royal Empire Society and officials at their headquarters remembered that he had kept certain possessions on their premises, but there was no evidence that these included Australian Judaica and in any case the building and its contents suffered much damage by enemy bombing during the Second World War.

The 1845 report was gracefully written. Some of its phraseology has found its way into almost every subsequent work of Australian Jewish history. The language is likely to have been that of George Moss, whose elegant English style is seen not only in the letters he wrote as honorary secretary of the congregation but in his newspaper, the Sydney edition of the London *Voice of Jacob*, and in his contributions as Sydney correspondent of the London paper. But it is not just the language but the contents of the report that provided the foundation for Australian Jewish historiography. From 1845 until about 1959, well over a century, nobody seemed to question the facts as the 1845 report put them. Rabbi Falk is only one of a sheaf of writers to assert:

This report is a most important basic document for Australian Jewish history, summarising as it does the course of development of Australian Jewry from the beginning, from 1817, when there were only twenty-seven [in fact the report says twenty] Jews in the colony who formed themselves into a society, which probably would have been a Chevra Kadisha, as the first Jewish burial took place in that year.<sup>3</sup>

In a generation inspired by *Australian Genesis* by Bergman and Levi, edified by *The Forefathers* by Levi, and intrigued by the now easily available stories of Esther Abrahams and other colourful convict characters, it comes as a shock to be told that Australian Jewry began only about 1817. The report says:

It appears that in 1817 there were about 20 Hebrews in the Colony [the truth is that by then there were closer to two hundred], but little versed in the faith of their ancestors; however they formed themselves into a Society, and raised a subscription for the internment of their dead.<sup>4</sup>

Who were the twenty - never mind the other 180 or so - Jewish persons in the Colony in 1817? How did they get there? How long had Jews been in Australia? If the authors of the report knew, they were not telling. They disarmingly excused themselves by saying, "Your Committee in what may be termed the early age of the Hebrew religion in this Colony, have not found any very authentic records, but from enquiries they have made, it appears that ..." and there follows the statement about twenty Jews in 1817 and the Society they established. Who compiled the report? It was a sub-committee comprising Moses Joseph, the Synagogue president; Israel Solomon; Lewis Barnett; George Moss; and P.J. Cohen. Of the sub-committee, at least two - Joseph and Cohen - had been in the Colony since the late 1820s. Joseph had arrived as a convict in 1827 and Cohen as a free settler, bearing credentials from the Chief Rabbi of London, in 1828. Their own personal knowledge of events since their arrival would have been significant. Of the 111 seat-holders of the Synagogue, at least forty were former convicts, and many, like Moses Joseph himself, had not yet received an absolute pardon (for Joseph this came in 1848 after he had become a wealthy and influential commercial figure). None of the committee of the Synagogue had been in the Colony before 1820, but about seventeen seat-holders were. If, then, there was a lack of "very authentic records", there were enough people with personal and probably unpleasant memories of the early years to have been able to provide information. But one is reminded of the rabbinic comment on the first chapter of Exodus: "There arose a new king over Egypt who knew not Joseph", and the rabbis say, "It was not that he knew not Joseph but that he did not want to know Joseph". Bearing in mind the surname of the Synagogue president, perhaps it was not that Joseph did not know the true facts but that he did not want to know them.

That there was a conspiracy of silence is made even more obvious by the fact that as early as 1789 a list of First Fleet convicts, including some unmistakably Jewish names, was available in the appendix to James Shortland's *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*.<sup>6</sup> (Since modern research began on the Jewish convicts, a considerable body of information has come to light about the Jewish First Fleeters, and in one of his last letters to our Society our former Israel correspondent, the late Rabbi Shmuel Gorr, wrote that he believed he would soon be able to identify further Jews amongst the 1788 arrivals.) Moses Joseph could also have made enquiries, had he wished, about Jewish communal records in London relating to convicts sent to Australia. The minute-books of Solomon Hirschel's *Beth Din* record rabbinic anxiety that the wives of men transported to Australia might commit adultery in their husbands' absence. There are details of *gittin* (religious divorces) written, sometimes aboard ships in the Thames estuary, for convicts who

wished to free their wives. Solomon Hirschel tried, at least once, to appeal to the Duke of Sussex, who was well-disposed towards the Jews, to save a Jewish man from being transported.<sup>7</sup> In the congregational archives of the London Sephardi community there are also references to Jewish convicts.<sup>8</sup> I am not yet aware whether these begin as early as 1788, but some decades later there are records of the congregation providing financial assistance for the wives and children of men sent to Australia. This material suggests a whole range of research work that needs to be carried out in order to gain information on the type of people that the Jewish convicts were. We also need to see if we can discover any first-hand accounts of the experience of being a Jew and a convict. Readers of the *Bulletin* will have seen, during the bicentenary year, a letter from Esther Abrahams to her mother in England, but I suspect it was a clever piece of bicentennial ghost-writing. Authentic material of this kind may, however, exist, possibly in England, and it would greatly assist the historian.

The 1845 cover-up of the true origins of Australian Jewry is not difficult to explain. Men who had risen above their past to become respectable citizens did not, in the type of society that was forming in the flux of mid-nineteenth century Australia, want to advertise certain things. The obscuring of the convict period had a second, political motive, as we will soon see. Anti-Jewish prejudice was already difficult to contain and at various crucial points had stood in the way of gaining official approval and assistance for the emergent Jewish communities. It was essential to present a picture of the Jewish citizen as a cultured, respectable, responsible person, and if this meant deliberately creating and perpetuating a myth, it was a price that they considered well worth it.

In the drive for respectability, it was a great advantage for the fledgling Jewish congregation in Sydney to have J.B. Montefiore, a member of the famous Montefiore family and a founder of the Bank of Australasia, as its first president. When Montefiore arrived in Sydney in 1829 there were little more than a dozen free Jewish settlers apart from the convicts and emancipists. Abraham Polack had, the previous year, asked Governor Darling for the use of a house in Elizabeth Street "on behalf of himself and other members of the Jewish persuasion to celebrate Divine services".<sup>9</sup> Darling refused, with the remark that the Jews could have found a worthier person as their spokesman. That "worthier person" was found in Montefiore, who succeeded in officially establishing the congregation in 1832. But he was soon disappointed in his congregants. He urged them to work towards the erection of a proper house of worship but, as J. Maclehouse put it in 1837, he was defeated by "a cabal" and eventually withdrew from the congregation.<sup>10</sup>

Not all the convicts made good by any means but the congregation turned to those who had to become its leaders and representatives. Moses Joseph himself was president of the Synagogue from 1840 to 1848, and had extensive land holdings, especially in the New England area, owned whaling ships, and traded with Hobart Town, New Zealand and elsewhere. Abraham Elias, many times treasurer of the Synagogue, owned property and was a retired publican. Samuel Lyons was a highly successful auctioneer, financier and money-lender, was a philanthropist and was active in politics.

There is a received tradition that the convicts as a whole were the dregs of society. In a recent work, *Convict Workers: Re-Interpreting Australia's Past*, edited

by Stephen Nicholas, 1988, the argument is advanced that the convicts were basically decent working-class people, more sinned against than sinning.<sup>11</sup> How far this is true of the general body of convicts needs more research. We also need to know whether the Jewish convicts were more likely to have been decent or dregs. Levi points out that most of the Jews had been transported for larceny, the result of the desperate poverty of most of the influx of Ashkenazim who entered England in the latter part of the eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Does this mean that former Jewish convicts had special reason to be ashamed of what had happened to them and were anxious to consign their convict years to the limbo of convenient amnesia?

Whatever it is, the 1845 report, which makes not the slightest concession to the fact that there had been any Jewish convicts at all, was long accepted as reliable and subsequent writers quoted it uncritically. Not until the last thirty years or so was it found to be seriously flawed. But in the meantime, the reader need only examine the early volumes of the *Journal* of this Society to see how greatly the report influenced the first generation of our historians. In Volume 2 (1944), H.I. Wolff writes on "A Century of Hobart Jewry". He speaks of Jewish settlers, and only at the end of his paper does he give, without comment, a statistic that in 1837 there were 132 Jews ("124 free, 8 in bond").<sup>13</sup> D.J. Benjamin writes about Norfolk Island in Volume 3 (1953), "Unquestionably, there were Jews sent to Australia as convicts", but he cannot offer much evidence.<sup>14</sup> Rabbi L.M. Goldman, in Volume 4 (1958), says with a touch of amusement, "A small number of Jews had no option but to migrate to Australia".<sup>15</sup> At best then there is tentative acknowledgment that there was some sort of Jewish convict presence. Only in Volume 5 (December, 1959) does George Bergman stride bravely into the fray and write on Jews on the First Fleet.<sup>16</sup> Bergman, with Rabbi John Levi, must be counted amongst the pioneer historians who were able to get the Australian people to admit publicly that the convict period could be talked about. Bergman and Levi are acknowledged to have made a so far unrivalled contribution to the subject and their study of the convicts and settlers of a particular ethnic or religious group is said to be a trail-blazer.

The 1845 report prefers to see the beginnings of Australian Jewry in 1817. Here too there is a strange cover-up. Even if they could not admit that the earlier Jews were convicts, did they really have no information at all about earlier Jewish activity? Material is there in the records. The annual lists of convicts frequently mention the word Jew or a synonym of it. The newspapers were aware that certain people they wrote about, such as Joseph Samuel, "the man they couldn't hang", were Jewish, but more important, Samuel was reported to have been "prepared by a person of his own persuasion",<sup>17</sup> presumably Joseph Marcus, making this in 1803 the first public Jewish act of worship in the new Colony.

But this of course was long before 1845, and hardly within living memory, and the 1845 sub-committee might be pardoned for being unaware that it had happened. Personal testimony from the older members of the congregation would, however, have indicated that if there was as yet no organised community there was a sense of kinship amongst the early Jews. Coming mostly from London they would generally have known each other, used colloquial Jewish expressions when they met, and been aware of each other's nicknames such as Izzy the Hebrew Dreamer and Teddy the Jewboy. Jewish emancipists also tended to employ Jewish servants. But there was no *kehillah* as such, and if there was a level of Jewish consciousness

one wants to know why. The answers might include the following. The Jewish convicts, like most of their English contemporaries, would have had little if any Jewish religious education and, contrary to what some people imagine, came from a community where religious observance was not very strict. If a convict could say the *Shema* and recall a smattering of Hebrew prayers, that would already be an achievement. The Jews were few in numbers, geographically scattered, and aware that any approach to the authorities for permission to hold Jewish services would not have been likely to succeed. The Colony had no place for religious dissent until the growth of religious toleration in the 1820s and '30s. No matter how poorly served the Christians were in terms of religious leadership, the Jews were far worse off. Apart from that strange man Jacob Josephson, who arrived in 1818 calling himself a Hebrew teacher when in fact he was a teacher of Christianity to Hebrews, the only Jew with much religious knowledge was Joseph Marcus. In London Chief Rabbi Hirschel was aware that there were Jewish convicts in Australia but as far as we know there was not the slightest thought of sending anyone to enquire into their welfare or even of getting some prayer-books and religious appurtenances to them. The 1845 report is therefore not entirely wrong when it asserts that it was not until about three decades after the First Fleet that moves commenced to set up a Jewish community. But why speak in vague terms about a "Society" founded in about 1817 which dealt with the interment of the dead when, as we know now, it is possible to be specific and say that regular meetings for prayers were organised under the leadership of Joseph Marcus? Why totally ignore Marcus when enough people were still alive and active in 1845 to have testified to his religious activity?<sup>18</sup> And a second question - if people apparently did not remember Marcus, how did they remember the 1817 Society? After all, we have no other evidence that there ever was a *Chevrá Kadisha* during those years, though we do know that on occasions there was a Jewish funeral ... and Marcus is likely to have officiated.

After considerable thought I would like to put forward the proposal that the 1817 Society and Marcus' unofficial congregation, which lasted about three years from 1819 until he became too infirm to continue with it, were one and the same thing, and the Society was not merely a *Chevrá Kadisha* but a rudimentary congregation. I know that the report speaks of the Society meeting occasionally "to regulate their financial affairs" but I do not see that this precludes the possibility of it being identical with Marcus' group. This then gives the Society a credibility that is otherwise lacking since there is no independent evidence of its existence. But if I am right, why does the report studiously ignore Marcus and give him neither credit for his work nor even a grudging acknowledgment? It seems that he was not an uncontroversial character and not all his co-religionists regarded him with respect. He had been in Sydney since 1792 and by now was (in the words of the *Sydney Gazette*) a "palsied and infirm old man",<sup>19</sup> treated cruelly by his Christian wife whom of course he had married in church. He was debt-ridden and had been refused a grant of land due to his "not being of a good character". The source of our information about his religious activities is the Rev. William Cowper, who advises his superiors in London that Marcus, "Australia's only acknowledged Levite"<sup>20</sup> (whatever the phrase means it does not denote that he was a rabbi), was very interested in Christianity. We can only surmise that some of Marcus' Jewish contemporaries were suspicious because he was too friendly with Cowper and may

even have introduced into Jewish services he conducted an occasional Christian sentiment. He seems to have been sufficiently mentally confused for this to be possible, though in his favour it must be recorded that his tombstone, now relocated in the Pioneers' Memorial Section at Botany Cemetery, proudly bears in Hebrew lettering the last two lines of *Adon Olam*. In their search for respectability the men of 1845 might well have regarded Marcus as an embarrassment.

Instead of crediting him with some form of religious leadership, they preferred to suggest that the coming of free settlers, especially Phillip Joseph Cohen, gave the impetus to the creation of a *kehillah*. In their enthusiasm they referred to "an influx of respectable Jewish merchants". The number of free settlers by 1828 was still only 19, so that it was not much of an influx. But in this section of the report we find the only implication that there had ever been convicts; between the lines you read that the earlier Jews were other than "respectable Jewish merchants". But that is as far as they were prepared to go in acknowledging the fact of the convicts.

A further problem is caused by their singling out P.J. Cohen as the founder of the congregation. But seeing that Cohen was himself a member of the editorial sub-committee and by 1845 had been through a number of ups and downs, he was clearly concerned to establish himself in history as the leading light.

After Cohen's death his family published a Memorial which called him the person who "by drawing together the Jewish residents for Holy Worship ... founded the nucleus of the first Hebrew congregation in the Antipodes".<sup>21</sup> This claim was based on a statement in the 1845 report that it was he who, by offering his home as a venue, took the initiative in establishing regular services, though the report adds that "from some difference of opinion then existing amongst the members of the faith, Divine Service was also occasionally performed in a room hired by Messrs. A. Elias and James Simmons".<sup>22</sup> We should not minimise the work that Cohen did but it seems clear that even before his arrival in Sydney in May, 1828, services had been held in private homes by the well-established emancipists. We know that Walter Jacob Levi, one of the free settlers who died after less than a year in Australia, had urged his co-religionists to unite to establish a Synagogue,<sup>23</sup> and that Abraham Polack, an emancipist who at that stage was a tavern-keeper, petitioned Governor Darling in August, 1828, for a Synagogue but was refused permission in rather insulting terms.<sup>24</sup> Although Polack later became president of the Synagogue, his initiative, which clearly arose out of feelings that had manifested themselves amongst the small group of Jews before Cohen's arrival, is ignored by the 1845 report, though he is listed as a member of the congregation. The latter-day reader of the report may be forgiven for imagining that when some of the seat-holders read the account of events compiled by the sub-committee, they would not have been too pleased.

The reference to "some difference of opinion" is explained by Bergman as concerning religious issues less than personality clashes between the old emancipists and the group who supported P.J. Cohen.<sup>25</sup> I believe, however, that religious issues did play a part. Cohen, though not a rabbi, was more learned than most or all of the Jews he found in Sydney, and was stricter in his approach to Judaism than many of them were. He was not impressed to discover that one after another of the leading Jews of the Colony had married out of the faith. In the birth register he compiled for the Bridge Street Synagogue he omitted the children of

James Simmons, whose wife was a Christian - though Simmons himself specified in his will that his children were to be disinherited if they married out. Years later, at the time of the Macquarie Street secession, Cohen was one of those who left York Street Synagogue in protest at the refusal of the then minister to say the customary prayers at the circumcision of the son of a woman whose Jewish status may have been in doubt, but the secession may have involved personal tensions between groups in the community and Cohen's involvement does not necessarily imply that his religious views had weakened.<sup>26</sup>

The differences in the community in the late 1820s certainly expressed themselves in rival services being held but the report is in error when it speaks of Abraham Elias and James Simmons in the one breath. Elias, who had arrived as a convict in 1817, was by now a merchant in Windsor and only moved back to Sydney in 1831, subsequently becoming the first treasurer of the Synagogue. But we do know from the newspapers that in 1830 several householders arranged *Sedarim* for family and friends on Pesach. The *Gazette* said that "all the Jews in Sydney, and many from the country" would attend P.J. Cohen's Passover services.<sup>27</sup> A person signing himself "A Hebrew" wrote to the *Monitor* that other prayer assemblies took place at James Simmons' house and at that of Vaiben and Emanuel Solomon<sup>28</sup> (these were brothers who both arrived in 1818 and later founded the family that long dominated South Australian Jewry).

The nucleus of the community was always conscious of the need for respectability in the eyes of the general public. The report has a nice turn of phrase when it speaks about the coming of free settlers "coupled with other circumstances [which] had raised the Hebrews in the estimation of their fellow colonists". By 1829 the *Sydney Gazette* could earnestly assert that "the respectable Jews of the colony are anxious to form a congregation that they may observe the solemnities of their own Sabbath, but many difficulties are in the way".<sup>29</sup> The "many difficulties" included the negative attitude of Governor Darling which was common knowledge in the Colony. Positive attitudes towards Jews were far from assured. Myths and stereotypes about Jews abounded. Bergman and Levi give a range of illustrations in *Australian Genesis* and show that the authorities, the newspapers and the public often made gratuitous and generally uncomplimentary references to a person's Jewishness. Hence the importance that was attached by Jew and non-Jew alike, but for somewhat different reasons, to epithets such as "honest Jew" applied to James Larra, and "honest Israelite" used of Joseph Aarons. The Goulburn Jewish community became famous because of the byword, "as solid as a Goulburn Jew" (another version is "as honest as a Goulburn Jew"). Such expressions of "grudging respect" as Bergman and Levi call them enhanced the standing of the community,<sup>30</sup> and care was taken in the 1845 report to avoid mentioning persons who in truth had well served the community but whose reputations were possibly a little clouded. This may be why Abraham Polack is not given credit for his endeavours; before long he was to become insolvent. We presume that the report was not circulated only to members of the Hebrew congregation but was published more widely, and like any public relations document it was designed to impress and create a climate of favourable opinion.

But what particular advantage did this campaign have in mind in 1845? The answer is made clear by juxtaposing two passages towards the end of the report.

One urges the congregation to recognise the need for facilities for Jewish education for the purpose of “imparting to youth the knowledge of their Creator, their religion, their duty to mankind, and giving them that instruction which will enable them to become good citizens”. In addition to whatever financial support the congregation itself would give the project, the committee recommended “if necessary to apply to the Government for aid, which your Committee have every reason to believe would be granted”.<sup>31</sup>

The second passage reads as follows:

Your committee in now retiring from office and resigning the trust you have reposed in them, hope you will exercise discrimination in the appointment of their successors, and elect such persons who will carry out the objects pointed at in this Report, and not allow party feeling or petty jealousies to influence your minds in the selection of persons to fill so important an office as Committee man; as a crisis has now arrived, which will if properly followed up lead to important results to the Jewish community, which in after ages will be viewed with gratitude and affection, to those spirited individuals who have exerted themselves in the noblest cause that human beings can accomplish, the good and welfare of their fellow creatures.<sup>32</sup>

It is noble prose, and one cannot fail to be impressed. If, as seems likely, the style is that of George Moss, the congregation was fortunate to have him. Incidentally, Moss' father, Mordecai Moses, the congregation's Shammass and collector, had a fine style in Hebrew, and examples abound of his beautiful Hebrew calligraphy. George Moss had come as a free settler in about 1831; Mordecai arrived as a convict five years later, being referred to in the ship's indent as a “Scripture reader and dealer”, aged 58.

To understand the tenor of the paragraphs I have quoted from the report it must be explained that the years 1844 and 1845 saw high drama over the question of education in the Colony. Hitherto the Jewish congregation had not sought state aid in spite of the urging of George Moss. In 1844, however, public debate erupted over proposals for state-supported non-denominational but nonetheless Christian education. The Jewish community favoured general rather than denominational education, though George Moss was more inclined towards a denominational system. A well-attended meeting of the Jews of Sydney was held on 17 October, 1844, and resolved to submit a petition protesting that the Jews should not be excluded from state aid no matter which system of education was adopted. Some of the newspapers were sympathetic. The *Examiner* was optimistic about the Jewish community's chances of success: “We know”, it wrote, “that if the Hebrew religionists will ask for the boon it will be cordially conceded”. W.C. Wentworth represented the Jewish cause in the Legislative Council and the vote of the majority was in favour, though of course there were fierce voices that objected to “unchristianising” the government of the Colony by officially subsidising Jews as well as Christians. The progress of the campaign for state aid has been charted by Israel Getzler, in his *Neither Toleration nor Favour*, and others, and does not need to concern us here.<sup>33</sup> But it now becomes clear that the 1845 committee believed its

efforts in this direction would succeed, but only if the congregation realised that “as a crisis has now arrived”, they had to be careful to choose the most suitable leaders to articulate their case. The obvious message was that respectable and respected persons were needed in this role, and the cause could be completely jeopardised by the choice of people based on “party feeling or petty jealousies”.

Other, minor aspects of the 1845 report also warrant examination. The statistical section listing births, marriages and deaths from 1830 to 1845 could prove a fruitful subject of study and amongst the questions that would have to be asked would be why there is said to have been no marriage in 1831 when we know that P.J. Cohen conducted or at least witnessed the religious marriage ceremony of John and Rebecca Moses née Mary Connolly, whose *ketubah* we possess. The list of members, donors and donations could also repay study and analysis.

Looked at as a whole, the report is a most skilfully constructed weapon in a fight for recognition, status and equality of treatment. It is part of the struggle for Jewish emancipation in Australia, mild and limited though that struggle was in comparison with other communities in other countries. It is therefore an important part of the maturing of Australian Jewry from a tiny group of outcasts of society, too frail in their situation and too weak in their Jewish identity to establish a community, to an articulate, determined, organised congregation prepared to take a stand on a matter of principle and to enter the fray of public debate as a segment of society with pride in itself and its historic tradition.<sup>34</sup>

The pity is that after the dust of that battle had receded, the report came to be relied upon merely for its historical information. For so many decades, no-one realised that that information had been tailored to suit a certain purpose, and myths inevitably grew and Australian Jewry was denied the real, colourful and even inspiring story of its foundation and beginnings. Now that re-assessment of the document is possible, we can recognise its strengths and weaknesses. Indeed, the weaknesses even become strengths, for they enable us to understand better the pressures and priorities of a significant generation and to add to our own capacity for communal self-awareness.

## NOTES

- 1 Report of the Committee of the York Street (Sydney) Synagogue, 1845 — 5605', Reprinted for the *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal*, 1944 (Hereinafter, Report).
- 2 *Idem*, Reprint Approx. 1986.
- 3 L.A. Falk, *AJHS Journal*, Vol. 3, Part 3, 1950, p.134.
- 4 *Report*, p.7.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 James Shortland, *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay, 1789*.
- 7 Personal communication from M.A. Simons, author of *Forty Years a Chief Rabbi: The Life and Times of Solomon Hirschel*, 1980, which makes occasional references to Australia. Re Hirschel's Beth Din: H.J. Zimmels, 'Some Decisions and Responsa culled from the Minute-Book of Chief Rabbi Solomon Hirschel's Beth Din', in H.J. Zimmels, J. Rabinowitz and I. Finestein, eds, *Essays Presented to Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* (Hebrew Vol)), 1967 e.g. pp.223, 232.
- 8 Occasionally reprinted in *Congregational Bulletin of Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation, London*, in the 1980s.
- 9 J.S. Levi and G.F.J. Bergman, *Australian Genesis: Jewish Convicts and Settlers, 1788-1850*, 1974, p.220.
- 10 Cited in Levi and Bergman, *op. cit.*, p.227
- 11 Stephen Nicholas, ed., *Convict Workers: Re-interpreting Australia's Past*, 1988.
- 12 Introduction in J.S. Levi, *The Forefathers: A Dictionary of Biography of the Jews of Australia, 1788-1830*, 1976.
- 13 H.I. Wolff, *AJHS Journal*, Vol 2, Part 1, 1944, p.16.
- 14 D.J. Benjamin, *AJHS Journal*, Vol 3, Part 8, 1953, p.362.
- 15 L.M. Goldman, *AJHS Journal*, Vol 4, Part 7, 1958, p.336.

- 16 G.F.J. Bergman, *AJHS Journal*, Vol 5, Part 2, 1959, p.50.
- 17 Levi and Bergman, *op. cit.*, p.57.
- 18 J.S. Levi, 'The Tale of Australia's First 'Rabbi' — Joseph Marcus, 1767-1828', *AJHS Journal*, Vol 8, Part 2, 1975, pp.29-36. The list of members of the York Street Synagogue, 1845, may usefully be checked against J.S. Levi, *The Forefathers*, for the pre-1830 dates of arrival of some seatholders.
- 19 J.S. Levi, *The Forefathers*, *op. cit.*, s.v. 'Marcus'.
- 20 J.S. Levi, 'Australia's First "Rabbi"', *op. cit.*, p.30.
- 21 Copy in Rabbi L.A. Falk Memorial Library, The Great Synagogue, Sydney.
- 22 Report, p.7.
- 23 Levi and Bergman, *op. cit.*, p.220.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 G.F.J. Bergman, 'Phillip Joseph Cohen', *AJHS Journal*, Vol 8, Part 2, 1975, pp.48-81.
- 26 *Ibid.*, CF. Contemporary Letters on the Subject in the AJHS Archives.
- 27 Cited by Levi and Bergman, *op. cit.*, pp.221-2.
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 *Ibid.*
- 30 Levi and Bergman, *op. cit.*, p.247.
- 31 Report, p.9.
- 32 *Ibid.*
- 33 I. Getzler, *Neither Toleration nor Favour: The Australian Chapter of Jewish Emancipation*, 1970 (based on his MA Thesis, Melbourne University, 1960).
- 34 This conclusion is reinforced by the 1847 Report of the Synagogue ( Reprinted in the *AJHS Journal*, Vol 5, Part 2, 1959, pp.72-82), though the convict origins of the community are still ignored. Apparently a Report was also prepared in 1846 (See York Street Synagogue minutes for 23 August 1846) but no copy is extant.

## HENRY MOSS : HE HAD A VISION FOR NOWRA

*by Alan Clark*

Nowra scarcely existed when he arrived in 1851, but Henry Moss had a vision that it would be the major town in what is now the Shoalhaven City Council area. He gave 36 years of his life to the district, and became involved in many of the organisations functioning at that time. A powerful, influential personality who had a hand in most of the important decisions of his era, Moss was known to the townsfolk as "The General".

He was born Henry Moses on 1 June, 1831 in Sydney, the second of four children from the first marriage of John Moses. Henry's father was one of three brothers transported to Australia from London as juvenile delinquents. First to come was 18-year-old Moses Moses who was convicted at the Old Bailey in 1813 and transported for life; John was sent to Van Dieman's Land for seven years after his conviction in 1820; and Isaac, who was convicted in 1822, received 14 years. A fourth brother, Abraham, migrated as a free settler in 1833. All were later successful businessmen.

John Moses married the Irish-born Mary Connolly at Hobart Town in 1826. She assumed the name "Rebecca" when she became the first gentile woman to be converted to Judaism in Australia. The couple then went through a "proper" Jewish marriage on 4 August, 1831, the first to be performed in Australia.

The early life of young Henry can be traced through the movements of his father. After his emancipation, John owned a store in Hobart, but then moved to Sydney where he was in business as a pastry cook when Henry was born. He was unsettled for some years, taking a trip home to England. He returned in 1832 to open a restaurant and confectionery shop in Sydney, and then went back to Tasma-

*Mrs H. Moss**Henry Moss*

nia. After a time as a publican in Hobart, he returned to the mainland by 1844 and went to Yass where his brothers Moses and Isaac were already living.

In November 1844 tragedy struck the family of John Moses at Goulburn when two daughters, Sarah and Hannah (or Anna) were drowned in a vehicle at a flooded river crossing. Three months later, John's wife Rebecca died at the age of 46. In 1848 there was trouble of a different kind. Following a fire which burned the stables of their inn at Bowning, John Moses and son Henry (then aged 17) were, on 11 October, sentenced to five years' hard labour for perjury after they tried to influence the evidence given by a witness at the hearing. His prison record states that Henry was five feet four-and-a-half inches tall, with brown hair, blue eyes and a fresh complexion.

On his release, Henry came to the Shoalhaven, and about that time appears to have dropped the "e" from his name and changed it to Moss. Perhaps it was because there were many cousins of the same name in the district, but I believe it more likely that he was looking to turn over a new leaf. Terrara was the main business centre when the 20-year-old Henry Moss arrived, but he saw the raw potential for the area known as Nowra.

He is said to have had a "liberal education in his youth", and with a love of classical history and music, continued to study in his mature years. Moss was there when the first allotments were sold at Nowra on 26 August 1856, paying £4 each for lots 18 and 19. These lots are opposite the School of Arts, today occupied by Dunlop and the Nowra Technical College. Some years later successive floods caused Terrara to lose its popularity to the benefit of Nowra.

Sport also attracted his attention, notably horse racing and cricket. In November 1854 he helped mark out the local race course, and was secretary when the Shoalhaven Jockey Club was formalised in 1858. Some 20 years later when the club had become defunct, it was Moss who called a meeting to revive it. His advertisement stated that he was "endeavouring to make the sport as flourishing, attractive and honourable as it was carried out many years ago when we had our own club firmly

established". He was also a member of the Shoalhaven cricket team which played a match against Ulladulla on Mr McGuire's meadow at Greenhills in October 1860.

25 December 1862 saw the marriage of Henry Moss to Sarah Zorilda Hyam, the daughter of his friend Michael Hyam who had married Henry's elder sister Deborah in 1853. Although born at Jamberoo, Sarah and other members of the family had come to the Shoalhaven district in 1847. Henry was listed on his marriage certificate as a storekeeper. He was then 31 years of age, while his bride had just turned 22.

With Michael Hyam, Moss was involved in the first attempts at local government in the area, collecting signatures on a number of petitions. The first suggestion was to take in Nowra, Nowra Hill and Greenhills, with boundaries basically those of the police district, from Nowra Creek along the Braidwood road to a little beyond the Yerriyong turnoff with the Shoalhaven River as the northern boundary.

The Shoalhaven Municipal Area was formed in 1859, but it functioned for only about four years, the last with Moss as Mayor. This council was vigorously opposed by pioneer settler Alexander Berry, and after a drawn-out and sometimes bitter legal battle, it was declared illegal by the Privy Council, with the local aldermen having costs of £160 awarded against them.

In giving evidence to the Select Committee on the Shoalhaven Municipality Petition in 1860, Nowra farmer John Smith claimed that Moss was "not a very proper character". He alleged that prior to the previous election, Moss had been throwing his money about, attempting to influence electors.

Henry G. Morton stated that Moss had adopted the boundaries, and was the main advocate for the municipality. He had acted on the advice of a friend, Dr John Dunmore Lang, whom Berry described as his "bitterest enemy". Lang was the author of the famous "Shoalhaven Incubus" letter which was printed in two South Coast newspapers, and produced several libel actions.

The Privy Council decision was to be criticised in later years, for when local government was legally constituted in the late 1860s and early 1870s, Shoalhaven found itself with several small councils instead of the one, as was originally mooted.

The career of Henry Moss had some parallels with his uncle, Moses Moses, who conducted a hotel at Yass and was a member of the first council in that town. Henry conducted the Shoalhaven Central Hotel at Greenhills, strategically placed between Terrara and Nowra on the western side of Fery Lane, at its intersection with Moss Street and Terrara Road. It was first licensed in 1868, and he presumably inherited business from Michael Hyam's "Sir Walter Scott Inn" which operated on the opposite corner between 1847 and 1867.

Before building his hotel, Moss checked the levels of the 1860 flood and had the floor constructed 2ft. 2in. above that level. The structure withstood most floods, but in April 1870 he is reported to have had 14 inches of water in the lower rooms. He had a licence for bagatelle, a type of billiards, and there were cattle saleyards on the property. Whether he made a lot from the hotel is doubtful, for according to the 1878 will of Michael Hyam there was a £1,025 mortgage on it.

He closed the hotel on his own Sabbath as well as the Christians' Sunday. This gave him time for his many and varied interests. He spent a lot of time exploring the Shoalhaven district and knew it so well that he was able to advise government authorities on routes for roads. In 1859 he informed Government Surveyor Isaiah Rowland that he had discovered a route from Goulburn to Jervis Bay. Then, in

1861, the Secretary for Lands was asked to have a road surveyed from Yellow Waterhole to Ulladulla Road, "as marked out by Aldermen Moss and Maguire".

While on his expeditions he made a survey of the geology of the area and this was acclaimed by the geological authority of the day, Rev. William Branwhite Clarke, who became a close friend. Moss took a party 45 miles to Tim's Gully where they discovered copper, and he was involved in the Pinnacle Gold Mining Co. at Yalwal. He had his own boring equipment, was able to provide information for the Department of Mines, and advised prospectors on the value of quartz reef discoveries.

Not deterred by the setback in the establishment of a municipality, Moss devoted his energies to the formation of a public township on the heights flanked on one side by the Shoalhaven River, and on the west by the placid waters of Nowra Creek. "This was another great and continued battle", he later said of the struggle to transform the area described as "a waste of gum trees and the domain of the wallaby and the dingo".

Moss had support from a group of residents, and Nowra started to go ahead: it was the venue for the Court of Petty Sessions, the Police Station, the Crown Lands Office and other Government business. The flood of 1870 saw the mood change, as residents started to favour Nowra and its higher terrain, in preference to the low-lying Terrara.

Still in his twenties when he had his first tangle with local government, Moss would probably have been classified as a "young radical". However, he benefited from his experience, and when the Nowra Municipal Council was formed in 1872 he was among the original aldermen with Bernard Brown, Jeremiah Green, David Hyam, John Macarthur and James Maguire.

Elected as the first Mayor of Nowra, Moss was a member of council for the rest of his life, and earned a reputation as a tireless worker dedicated to the betterment of the town. In all, he served seven years as Mayor, being elected again in 1874, 1875, 1876, 1883, 1885 and 1886. A particular interest was the establishment of recreation grounds and parks, and aldermen of later eras praised his foresight in this regard.

Never missing an opportunity to advertise the district, Moss even went to the extent of exhibiting overseas. He received a silver medal from the 1862 International Exhibition of London for an entry of timbers, minerals and arrowroot flour made from burrawang nuts. He was also awarded bronze medals at the 1867 Paris Exhibition, and the 1879 International Exhibition held at the Garden Palace in Sydney. Visitors to the Nowra Museum today can see a Highly Commended certificate awarded to Moss at the 1879 exhibition for his "arrowroot from burrawang". His efforts in advertising Australia were recognised when he received a silver medal with a letter of thanks from authorities in Sydney.

Both Moss and his wife had an affection for the local aboriginals and assisted them in many ways. He took steps to see they had ample warm clothing and, after he made representations to the Colonial Secretary, the President of the Marine Board was instructed to provide a suitable fishing boat with necessary gear for the use of aboriginals at Shoalhaven.

For the 1879 International Exhibition, Henry made up the exhibition of aboriginal implements, plants and geological specimens: the aboriginal exhibit included

two canoes, 14 and 16ft., each made from one sheet of bark; boomerangs; nulla-nullas; jerks for throwing spears; fishing lines made of currajong and wattle fibres; and stone tomahawks of various weights.

Although he did not aspire to be a politician, Henry Moss was skilled at making representations to officials in high places. Following the disastrous floods, he sought assistance from Mr (later Sir John) Robertson who had been the Member for Shoalhaven from 1862 to 1864. As Premier in 1870, Robertson provided grain for the farmers to re-sow their fields. Moss had earlier actively supported the Robertson Land Act of 1861 which broke down the monopoly in Crown Lands purchase, and proved to be a boon to local residents seeking property.

During the late 1870s there was rivalry between Terrara and Nowra as both townships sought new post and telegraph offices. Moss was well to the fore, and he was chairman at several meetings which pressed Nowra's case. He offered to donate a block of land to clinch the deal, and although the offer was not accepted, the Government set aside £800 in 1879 and Nowra eventually got its new post office in 1883.

A founding member and secretary of Abercorn Masonic Lodge in 1878, Moss hosted meetings at his hotel, and he played his part in the rapid progress of this lodge. He loved to write, making contributions to the coast and city press, while some of his verse also attracted attention. As well, he was the initial Jewish trustee for the Nowra Cemetery and a member of the Public School Board for the Nowra sub-district.

At a time when many people were not adept at writing letters, Moss was on hand to help out. He was able to handle correspondence to authorities and get results, be it to the Office of the Surveyor General, urging the sale of town lots in Nowra; to the Department of Education, asking on behalf of Cambewarra residents for a school to be opened; or to the Railways Commissioners, requesting that fires be provided in the waiting room at Moss Vale railway station for the comfort of those waiting for trains.

After being bedridden for some months, Henry Moss died on 18 September, 1887, at the age of 57 years. He left his widow Sarah and eight children: Charlotte Rebecca (born 1864), Hyam Asa (1865), Israel Isaac (1867), Miriam Deborah (1869), Cyrus Saul (1872), Esther Janetta (1876), Mona Zarilla (1879), and Garnet Edna (1881). He had long suffered from asthma, but his death certificate stated that the cause of death was dropsy. Sarah was to survive her husband by 41 years. Of their children, Hyam became a Sydney solicitor, Israel became Chief Clerk of the Prisons Department, and Cy followed in his father's footsteps by becoming a Nowra alderman.

The high regard in which Moses was held was illustrated when a memorial was erected over his grave in Nowra Cemetery. It was constructed at a cost of £42/5/- subscribed by members of the public. The obelisk is 15 feet high and has four shield-shaped marble tablets with these inscriptions:

*North side:*

Inserted by the Municipal Council of Nowra to the memory of

HENRY MOSS

for long and distinguished services.

E. Secombe, Mayor.

*South side:*

I.T.N.O.T.G.A.O.T.U. ,

Abercorn Lodge,

No. 7 N.S.W.

BRO. H. MOSS

One of the Founders

and Secretary.

Inserted by the Members.

K. Howie, W.M.

*East side:*

Sacred to the Memory of

HENRY MOSS

Born 1st June 1831, Died

18th Sept. 1887.

A dear husband

and kind father.

Inserted by his widow.

*West side:*

Erected to the memory of

HENRY MOSS

by the people of Shoalhaven to

commemorate

his many disinterested

labors of life in

promoting the welfare of

his fellows.



The wording, "his many disinterested labors" on the tablet erected by the people is a little intriguing. Stonemason Jonathon Dudgeon may have spelt "disinterested" instead of "distinguished", but it is more likely that the meaning is that his labours were without self-interest.

Described in the *Shoalhaven Telegraph* as a "very handsome and substantial memorial", it was unveiled by Mayor Edwin Seccombe at 3 p.m. on Saturday, 7 April, 1888. The newspaper reported that his speech included this tribute:

When they looked 15 continuous years of labour, care and anxiety squarely in the face, and remembered the weakened constitution, they must, one and all be struck with the tenacity and impelling spirit it contained, while ever labouring for the advancement of his fellows.

The innumerable advancements procured for them by Mr Moss's individual labours were too numerous for him to recount, but in the form of recreation grounds alone, they

possessed lasting benefits of which they could be neither too proud nor too thankful.

Members of the Abercorn and Broughton Masonic Lodges were present in full regalia, with W.M. Kenneth Howie of Lodge Abercorn being among the speakers. Zaccheus Bice had been in the district when Moss arrived, and was able to relate some of his outstanding work at Nowra. "It was owing to his exertions that the Nowra township was laid out, and he afterwards set out to induce the Government to open the roads. There was no council to press the Government, and it was left to Henry who was successful in having roads opened to Ulladulla, Greenwell Point and Yalwal", he said. Francis McMahon Snr. of Milton stated that Moss was the "general head of everything" - he took the initiative and wrote letters when they needed to be written, and Nowra should thank him for many privileges.

A century after his death, many Nowra people have not heard of Henry Moss, but there are a few reminders: his memorial stands above other graves at the cemetery; while at the end of the street that bears his name there is an old home on the site where he once conducted his hotel.

#### Sources of Information

Death certificate of John Moses; marriage certificate of Henry Moses and Sarah Zorilda Hyam; death certificate of Henry Moses; *Sydney Morning Herald*. 12/10/1848; Report from the Select Committee on the Shoalhaven Municipality Petition (1860); various issues of *The Shoalhaven Telegraph*, particularly obituary (21/9/1887) and report on unveiling of memorial (11/4/1888); *The Hawkesbury and Shoalhaven Calendar* (1905); *Back to Shoalhaven Week Book* (1926); *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journals*, Vol.VIII Part 4 (1977), Vol. X Part 1 (1986); *A Dictionary of Biography of the Jews of Australia 1788-1830* (John Simon Levi).

The author, who is secretary of Shoalhaven Historical Society and Shoalhaven Genealogical Society, has been researching the life of Henry Moss for the past six years.

## BONDI JEWRY BETWEEN THE WARS

by Morris S. Ochert,

My topic is "Bondi Jewry Between the Wars". Not everything will be in perfect chronological order. Who cares? A little disorder is in order in this topic. Some episodes are not strictly confined to Bondi, but I have included them to present a more complete picture. Some stories are not entirely "genteel" - but what is important is that they are all true! I will simulate the dialect of the folk in my story - not, heaven forbid, to lampoon or to ridicule them, but in order the more accurately to capture the nature and style of these lovable, colourful characters! I commence with the story of my late father, Samuel Ochert.

### My Father

Lipovets, near Kiev, appears only on very detailed maps of the Ukraine. It is not far from Chernobyl. It was a hive of Jewish life. My father, Samuel, was born there

in 1883 in a large orthodox family named Ocheretyansky. He became a learned Talmudist and Hebraist and was on his way to attaining *Semichas Rabbonas* when the Czarist police stepped in. Samuel was political secretary to Chaim Nachman Bialik when they raided a meeting of his group. Bialik was freed as the police said, "This crazy Yiddish poet is harmless!" If they had only known of his powers ...! Samuel was sent to Siberia, but escaped and fled eastwards. In Japan he took a job as a waiter, till he tripped with a soup tureen. The lady who collected the contents demanded his resignation. He resigned! He stowed away on a ship - destination unknown. When found, he was put to work shovelling coal into the boilers.

How did this impractical, untrained young man ever make his mark in this competitive, technological world? He arrived in Sydney in 1908. On the wharf was a table, and on a box sat a grimy, illiterate migration officer with some forms. Sam illegally joined the queue, while this official bit away some wood to expose the lead in his pencil.

"Wot's yer name?", he barked. (Another passenger translated into Yiddish.)

"Ochertyansky."

"Yair?" he shouted truculently. "We'll call ya 'Orchard'." Whereupon he laboriously pencilled his own version of that word - and to this day the entire dynasty carries the surname "Ochert" - at least that's our story!

Sam had no trade, no English language and no money, but he had a capacity for hard work and turned to an arduous trade which was then in its infancy - the retreading of tyres. He went to Akron, U.S.A., and intensively studied rubber chemistry and the associated engineering processes. On his return to Sydney he founded the General Rubber Co., which grew to be one of Australia's largest tyre retreading houses.

In Australia he met Rachel Chayes, whose family had come from Harbin, China, though she was born in Odessa in 1892. They were both active in the Yiddish amateur musical and dramatic theatre which flourished in the largely East European Jewish community of Sydney. They married in 1913 and had three sons and a daughter, but Rachel and her daughter both died in the world-wide post-war Spanish influenza epidemic in the early 1920s. Subsequently Samuel remarried and two daughters and a son were born of this marriage.

Dad was a hard-hitting, tough man who spoke his mind on all subjects and who could be heard in the next street. About 1930, some overseas "expert" (let's call him Brodsky) was presenting his gloomy, pessimistic prognosis on the Zionist cause. Finally, my dad interjected - "Brodsky - You are an idiot!" Whereupon Dad took over the lectern and gave his own lecture.

In 1929, my brother Dave was performing his *Bar Mitzvah* reading in the old Central Synagogue. He had no voice, little skill and even less motivation, and was being even more put-off by a senior congregant (we'll call him Mr Ellis) who persisted in that annoying habit of chanting aloud, just a few words ahead. Dave became confused. Then Dad stood up in the crowded *shule* and shouted "Ellis - shut up!" Ellis went silent. Dave completed his passage and duly was declared a *Bar Mitzvah*.

We always had a housemaid in our Bondi house. They lasted from a day (or less) to a year (rarely). One was a pallid little Irish girl, freckles, scrawny, nervous. Dad was delivering one of his perennial homilies on people who started with

nothing but, by hard work, had succeeded. He always finished with "... and today, dat man makes ten pounds a bladdy veek!" This figure was always emphasised by him rising to his feet and crashing his fist down on the table. Dad had almost reached that point when Little Irish crept in and sought to put a glass dessert bowl of stewed prunes in front of him. She was really scared. Dad's voice was reaching a crescendo. In she darted and tried to dart back. Too late! Dad was already on his feet and his arm was raised. Down came his fist, fair onto the dessert. The glass splintered and Dad's hand needed several stitches. Brother Dave received a cut chin from flying glass. The girl's pallor was splotched with mashed prunes. She yelled, ran and packed up and left us forever! A quantity of prune juice squirted up through Dad's partly closed fist and hit the ceiling. For years afterwards we called the stain "Dad's map of Palestine" - it was just the right shape!

One public holiday, Dad and I went to fit a tyre for a man who was stranded by a blowout. Before starting, Dad explained that advance payment was needed for roadside service. The guy turned nasty. "Why do you Eastern Jews, with your foreign accents, see fit to work on a public holiday?" He's still waiting for his tyre to be fitted, and that's 60 years ago!

Dad was a workaholic and the enemy of negative thinking. Sundays and holidays were his opportunity to do business while the "lazy *Mamzerim* are idle". During the Depression he was driving to Penrith to deliver and fit some truck tyres on a public holiday. I went along to help. The highway was blocked by a group of unemployed young men and women who were dancing in relays, from Penrith to Sydney, while soliciting funds from motorists. My dad shouted at them. "I vil give you notting for dancing - sveep de bladdy streets and I vill give you money". His injunction was printed in the press next day, with a favourable editorial.

In the 1930s the *Hebrew Standard's* editor, Alfred Harris, maintained an adverse attitude to Zionism. In 1935 my dad and colleagues in Sydney and Melbourne helped to launch the *Australian Jewish Herald*, which had a pro-Zionist stance.

In our large house many functions were held. At one, the National Council of Jewish Women's catering lady, Mrs Nettheim, told me to count the people who wanted black coffee and those who preferred white. I came back and reported (let us say) "42 white, 51 black and one tea". "Who vants tea?" she yelled. I showed her the tiny little old lady who wanted tea. She said loudly, "Vot coffee you vont - *schwartz oder veiss?*" "Tea" was the reply. "*In mitten der innen!*" (in the middle of everything) yelled Mrs Nettheim. Well - that's when I learned how to employ that most useful of Yiddish exclamations.

In our home at a function on another occasion, a woman was describing what she saw in the Holy Land and she mentioned Lake Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee. A rabbinical gentleman interrupted - "But Mrs \_\_\_\_\_, Lake Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee are synonymous." "Yes," she gushed, "but I think the Sea of Galilee is the more synonymous of the two."

At another gathering we were addressed by an American lady of impressive presence - a leading activist in the Zionist movement and in the ultra-reform movement where she was a lay preacher. "We must enrich our divine services with inspirational messages. We must emulate our brethren of the Christian clergy. Take the 23rd Psalm ..... Why don't we have magnificent declarations like the 23rd Psalm?" she demanded to know. My father was deeply saddened that she knew not that

Judaism gave all the Psalms to the world. He said, "*Boros, boros nishbarim* - my people have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewn themselves pots, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer XI, 11).

About 1929 he received a cable that a vessel full of "materials", needed for the *Yishuv's* self-defence, was on offer. The money was just not available. Communities world-wide were asked to dig deep and urgently. Dad rang round, allocating areas for canvassing by all available supporters. Then we went out canvassing and did well till we came to a wealthy non-contributor. Dad said, "Don't do dis for yourself. Do it for your grandson here." The man replied, "I'm glad you mentioned him. It is true I was born into your faith, but I married a lady of denomination 'A'. Our son married into denomination 'B'. My grandson here attends a college run by denomination 'C'. Now what does that make him?" My dad's reply was, "A *Mamzer!*" No, he didn't contribute, but Sydney's total was very high. Apparently that was the general result, for the "materials" were unloaded on a remote Palestine beach and disappeared inland. My dad quoted Herzl: "If you will it, it is no dream." "I will yet see the blue star flag on the ramparts of Jerusalem." And he did!

Dad's conversation was full of *Ben Sira, Targum, Talmud, Yeshayahu, Yebeskiel, Torah, Onkelos, Rashi, Moishe Rabainu, Rambam, Sukenik*. He would say, "I eat dust at their feet."

In the years up to his departure from Australia in 1938, my father was active in many fields of Jewish endeavour: religious, educational, philanthropic, social and Zionist. He was a foundation officer of the Union of Sydney Zionists; a foundation committee man of the former Central Synagogue at Bondi Junction; a



*Samuel Ocbert in Jerusalem, 1942*

foundation member of the Maccabean Institute; a founder of a Talmudic study group. His Talmudic library was unique for the rarity of many of the volumes. He was Honorary Inspector of Hebrew Schools under the N.S.W. Jewish Board of Education. He worked to settle immigrants from Russia, Poland and Nazi Germany. On his Zionist work I recall him saying, "My greatest failure was with the old fool" (Sir Isaac Isaacs, the Jewish Governor-General who opposed the Zionist platform). "I had mixed results with the *Rabbonim*, some of whom were with us and some against us. With most of the *Ba'al Ha'Baitim* I had great success and many later became leaders of the movement locally."

In 1938, responding to the inspiration gained from his years with Bialik, he went to live in Palestine. He donated his company's premises in Sydney to the J.N.F. In the *Yishuv* he was to realise his

lifelong ambitions: to aid the upbuilding of Zion as the homeland of the Jewish people; to participate in the revival of Hebrew as their spoken tongue; to continue his Talmudic studies; and to be reunited with many of his former Zionist colleagues from Russia, for example, Ussishkin. He associated himself with *Ha-K'lallim* - The General Zionist Party. This was a period of Arab disturbances, and he became a supply and maintenance officer in the Jewish Self-Defence Organisation. His house became a casualty station for the wounded.

The Second World War saw a postponement of Arab attacks and Dad volunteered to serve the British Eighth Army in the capacity which he knew best. This was an army mounted on pneumatic tyres, but with no tyre maintenance facilities. Damaged or worn tyres had to be replaced by new ones, and ships bringing replacements were being sunk at an alarming rate. He was given officer's rank and founded the 1st Tyre Maintenance Unit, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, Middle East Forces. He procured machinery, and whatever was not readily available he designed and built. At the peak of activity, 8,000 men worked in his unit, all either trained by him or by officers whom he had instructed.

Throughout the Middle East theatre he set up base workshops in support of the smaller mobile workshops which he provided to follow the movement of the army.

Many were the problems in rubber engineering which were brought to him, far outside the field of tyre maintenance. They called for great ingenuity and inventiveness. Items of surgical, aeronautical, automotive and military equipment were produced or repaired. Doctors, conducting operations, sometimes needed temporary prosthetic fittings to be manufactured. Recalling the baking of *matzot* in the desert sun during the Exodus, he utilised solar heat for the restoration of inflatable dinghies, used for the escape of crews from planes which had crashed into the sea, and the big "water bladders" which were dropped to supply the troops in the desert. In both cases, they would burst when dropped or they had porous or soft areas. He developed a vulcanising fluid which was poured into them. Teams of Beduin were set to rolling them over and over on the burning sand in the hot sun. Soon the entire internal surface was coated with a strong lining of perfectly vulcanised rubber. He developed a vulcanising fluid which quickly cured on contact with air. This was poured into the tubes of tyres so that, even when ripped by gunfire, they would deflate so slowly that the tyre would not burst and overturn the vehicle. Ever bigger moulds had to be built to accommodate aircraft tyres of huge sizes, as bigger bombers were put into service.

Pneumatic-tyred desert tanks posed new problems. Processes had to be developed to repair tyres of vehicles, tanks, artillery and "ducks" which were ripped by barbed wire, shell-fire and the jagged stones of the desert. The range of the tyre moulds had to be doubled when captured Italian and German vehicles and mobile equipment, fitted with metric sized tyres, were pressed into service.

Apart from the fact that he was one of the older men to serve in the Eighth Army, he was widely respected for his personal characteristics by men of all creeds and ranks. His learning and willingness to teach, his affinity for hard work and his outspoken Jewishness won him the admiration of all with whom he came in contact. He went to great lengths to arrange for religious facilities for Jewish personnel. After the war he received high commendations for his splendid contribution to the war effort in the Middle East.

On retiring from the army he purchased two vessels which, based in Haifa, traded from Greece to the Persian Gulf. These were sunk while on Hagannah service during the Israel War of Independence. Then he occupied himself with studies in Jerusalem, until his death in 1962.

*My Father-in-Law*

Norman Ravidell, my late father-in-law, was born in Yekaterinoslav, formerly Pavelgrad, now Drepropetrovk. He came from a typically large Jewish family and has told me of the hardships of living in the Jewish Quarter where, during the pogroms, blood actually flowed in the street. As a teenager he was a large youth and would stand at the gate of his parents' home while the rioters swept past. They must have thought he was an official guard as they did not raid that house.

He told of the Russian Army's conscription of Jewish men and boys in towns and villages: how they seized every male, even as young as nine. Many Jewish lads disappeared, forever, into that vile army. Every effort was made to blot out their Jewish origins, and forced conversions and compulsory religious instruction were carried out by the "Mother Church", the Russian Orthodox creed. While the officers lived in luxury, the men lived on the ice and snow. They were frequently cold, wet, hungry and demoralised, and illness was rife. There was no medical attention for them - only a monthly sick parade before horse doctors. Norman told me that a common ailment was haemorrhoids and it was treated with a hot soldering iron. I exclaimed, "It must have hurt!" He replied - "Why? Dey held it by de handle and anyway it must have been effective, because no man ever came back for a second treatment."

Norman and my father met in Siberia. Norman reached Sydney after my dad, and later joined the General Rubber Company. He opened the Brisbane branch and headed it until his death in 1953. I married his daughter, Miriam, in 1946. We are



*Norman Ravidell about 1950*



*Miriam and Morris Ocbert - 1946.*

still married.

Norman was a giant in Brisbane Jewry, as Congregation President, as a communal and Zionist leader, philanthropist and representative to the outside community, where he was held in great respect. He did vital work in settling new arrivals during and after World War II.

He was a colourful personality and whimsical, always saying what was on his mind. Once I accompanied him, with a dealer, Schwartz, to the home of a little English widow whose piano he hoped to buy for my wife (we still have it). Both men spoke with strong Russian accents and Norman had a hearing defect which he used to good effect. Schwartz said, "Ravdell, I vant you should meet Mrs Drake". Norman looked worried and asked her, "Missus - please - vot's your name?" "Mai name is Mrs Drake", she replied in a stiffly English dialect. He turns to me: "He says it - she says it - still sounds like Drek to me!"

At Auchenflower Bowling Club a man applied for his membership to be transferred from the Booroodabin Club. "Too many Jews there", he confided. "You von't like it here too" replied Norman. "I'm a Jew and de President." The application lapsed.

About 1920, a stranger entered the Synagogue and sat near the door. The Shammas reported to Mr Ravdell, "We got a *mesbugger* here - he says he's de Governor of Queensland." And he was the Governor, Sir Matthew Nathan, who became an active congregant.

Many Jewish doctors came from Europe immediately after the Second World War and were shocked to find that the authorities required them to re-do the entire medical course of studies. Norman arranged with Dr (now Sir) Abram Fryberg, then Director General of Health and Dean of the Faculty, to reduce that severe requirement in Queensland and they were instead set examinations. As a result,

many refugee doctors were able to return to practice soon after arrival.

Though he passed away in 1953 he is still spoken of with respect in the Brisbane Jewish and general communities.

#### My Brothers

My eldest brother, Nathan Ochert, was born in Sydney in 1914. He distinguished himself early in life in chemistry, physics, mathematics and languages. His high school teacher paid him to help to mark university mathematics exam papers. As a teenager in the Australian Militia he became deeply absorbed in the complex mathematics and physics involved in artillery range-finding and trajectory prediction in the pre-computer days. He developed a far speedier procedure, utilising sliding, 3-dimensional scales,



(Left to right) Nathan, Morris and David Ochert about 1922

which was widely adopted. He graduated from Sydney University.

He migrated to Palestine with our father in 1938. Both were soon involved in the defence of the Yishuv. Nathan was an officer of the Frontier Police. On the defence line known as "Taegart's Wall" he was seriously wounded. On the outbreak of the Second World War he joined the British forces and served as an artillery officer and instructor in the Middle East. Later, in East Africa, he contracted a severe tropical illness. During his long convalescence in England he took degrees in electrical engineering and science at the University of London, did post-graduate studies at London and Oxford and worked towards a Ph.D. in applied sciences.

He engaged in research in cryogenics (high vacuum-low temperature) and pioneered a method of achieving an unprecedented high vacuum. The main purpose of this was to enable the long-term storage of vast quantities of blood, which the authorities proposed to utilise in the event of some future nuclear attack.

After a number of visits to Israel he migrated there at the invitation of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, to set up the Department of Vacuum for Israel's first atomic research reactor. He was, for many years, the head of the Vacuum Department of the Defence Ministry. He was involved in the successful cryogenic storage of polio vaccine and of animal semen for artificial insemination, was a consultant to the army, air force, Hebrew University, Technion, Bar Ilan University, Hadassa Hospital and private industry. He set up an ultra-low-temperature laboratory at the Hebrew University and was a departmental head at the Weizmann Institute. In assessing the qualifications of overseas applicants for senior scientific appointments in Israel, his linguistic ability was of great value.

In 1961 he married a colleague at the Weizmann Institute of Science, D'Vorah Strauss, who was later secretary to Abba Eban when he was President of the Institute. They married at the Institute and their home was on the border of the Institute opposite that built for Dr Chaim Weizmann and his wife, Vera. Nathan died in 1976, leaving his widow, a daughter and a son.

My brother Dave was born two years after Nathan and two years before me. He was a red-head with a fiery temper; a leading track and field athlete and footballer. As a boy, youth and man, he was never a person to trifle with. At Bondi Public School we arrived early one morning in 1931 to find that a racist cartoon was being drawn of Dave and me with an offensive caption. Dave went into action and the cartoonist ran home spitting teeth and blood. The entire school knew about it, but to this day we have heard no word about it - not from parents, teachers or police.

David was a leading Maccabean gymnast, a university footballer and was on the reserve of the Empire Games in 1938. He represented New South Wales in chess, studied engineering at the University of Sydney and was adjutant of the University Regiment. To get away from a wartime desk job in that regiment, he joined the vessel *Queen Elizabeth* as an engineer officer and was at sea until well after the war. Since then he practised as an engineer.

#### Jewish Immigrants' Life in Sydney

In the 1920s and 1930s many migrants arrived in Sydney, from Russia mainly, many settling in the Eastern Suburbs. My father, after years of frustrations, was able to bring out his aged father, his youngest sister, Dora and her family, but he had to pay an enormous price to get permits for them.

Though Yiddish was spoken by most Jewish immigrants, it was rare for parents to teach it to their children, partly because it was regarded as a trapping of that old, cruel world they had left behind; partly because they wanted to become fluent in English as quickly as possible; and also because it was useful for adults to communicate privately in the presence of their kids. The remark '*rad Yiddish*' (speak Yiddish) always meant that some choice bit of information was about to be imparted. What was not realised was that kids picked up a great amount of Yiddish anyway! However, had it been actually taught, it would not be the dying tongue it is today in Australian Jewry.

Many Russian Jewish immigrant children were enrolled at Bondi Superior Public School in Wellington Street. They were so obvious and discernible - pallid, confused, frightened, with high button-up boots and knickerbockers tucked into long socks, peaked caps, long coats buttoned down the side or in sailor suits. A large denominational boys' school stood where Wellington Street met Bondi Road, and its pupils were given hell-fire sermons on Sundays. So on Monday afternoon, the newcomer children were picked on. But one particular Monday there was an organised attack, for many of their mothers were there in advance, and the teachers marched their boys out early. They were formed up solidly across the street. The teachers and mothers were on the footpath. As the population of our public school swarmed down the street, the Russian children were pulled out and beaten up. The attackers' mothers screamed encouragement in a wild display of hatred. The police were absent. From that day, a number of Jewish parents were in attendance each Monday, and anyway the Jewish children detoured from that intersection thereafter.

On Saturday afternoons the big footy games were played at the Cricket Ground near Victoria Barracks. How could "the Jewish mob" attend? Simple! We'd buy our sixpenny tickets at the newsagents on the Friday, push a bootlace through a hole near one corner and wear it as a necklet under our shirt. Immediately after *shul* - never mind lunch - we'd hurry, as many as 25 of us, up Oxford Street to the ground and onto the queue. As we reached the turnstile, we'd pull out the ticket from between our shirt buttons and show it to the collector. He roughly ripped each ticket off its bootlace, with the remark addressed to the world - "Stupid Jew *mamzerim!*" (Only he didn't speak Yiddish.) It was half the fun of the footy game.

#### Schools, Shuls and Jewish Youth

In about 1923 I was in the infants' class at Bondi Public School. We were drawing on brown paper one day and for convenience I put some crayons in my shirt pocket. An ugly middle-aged Pommy teacher swooped on me and dragged me to the Headmistress. "I want you to punish this thieving little Jew", she screeched. "He's been stealing crayons." The Headmistress closed the door, took me on her knee, wiped my tears, put some Minties into my offending shirt pocket and kissed me. She said, "I'm Miss Brodie and I'm Jewish too! Don't take any notice of these bad people. If ever you have any trouble, run to me." And that was my first encounter with rampant anti-Semitism.

H.I. Woolfe, a teacher of the Great Synagogue staff, gave religious classes at that school. He was to be paid three pence by each of us "or whatever you can afford". I hope he didn't have to live on that donation.

During the Great Depression we were pupils at North Bondi Public School when a non-Jewish child collapsed from hunger. He hadn't eaten that day! It soon was

ascertained that there were many others in the same plight. All children whose parents could do so were told to bring extra food which would be shared between those who had none. Jewish people of Bondi responded generously. Several years ago, B'nai B'rith women were performing the identical *Mitzvah* at the same school.

In 1929 there was a teacher at the Bondi Synagogue *Talmud Torah*, highly educated, about 60 years old, tall, swarthy, a big angry nose, burning eyes, enormous black eyebrows, a huge voice, masses of white hair. Everyone knew him as "The *Mesbuga*" (The Madman). One Tuesday afternoon he taught us "*Ivri Ani Yisroel Ami ...*" - "I am an Hebrew, Israel is my people." It had a poor tune and was certainly not a march. But he decided we were to march up to Bondi Junction and along Oxford Street and back - about 150 of us - singing it and clapping in time. "Ve vill show d' vorld!" he exulted. He put tiny Alfi Napolski in front carrying a *Magen David* (Shield of David) flag. Then came "The *Mesbuga*" and the rest of us were to follow. Once round inside the *shul* went we, singing. Then he and Napolski took a right wheel out into Grosvenor Street. But we didn't! We continued round the *shul*. Now my dad was Inspector of Hebrew Schools and was driving home and decided to look in on the classes. Suddenly he sees the flag and little Napolski, followed by "The *Mesbuga*" singing at the top of his voice and clapping and marching right up the centre of Grosvenor Street, into the peak-hour Junction traffic of trams, buses, cars and people. Dad hopped out of his car and reversed the little parade back to the *shul*, where an enormous argument ensued. The *Mesbuga* was adamant - "Ve vill show d' vorld" - all this debate going on at a deafening pitch. My dad's equally fortissimo response was: "You are a bladdy idiot. If you want to start a pogrom, go ahead but don't *schlepp* d' children." Finally, the kids having mostly left, there was a moment of silence and little Napolski hopefully held up his flag and piped up, "Ven vill ve march ...?"

About 1928, Mr Wilberforce, a music inspector, visited North Bondi Primary School. He was disappointed at the singing. "Give me all your Jewish boys and I'll show you how to teach music", he said. In an hour we were ready to give a concert to the whole school. (I recall a dainty pastoral he taught us, in three parts - "Rise, Rise Thou Merry Lark ...") He said - "If you want to make music, go to the people to whom the Almighty first gave it ..."

Joe Joseph, a Londoner, was brilliantly trained in Jewish liturgical music and in light opera productions. He formed the Sydney Musical Society of almost all Jewish singers and they performed at the Conservatorium. Under his baton, the Bondi Synagogue Boys' Choir even sang on Radio 2BL and cut some records. Of course "The Jewish Mob" was well represented in that choir, as well as in the Judean Scouts. I recall a mini-jamboree of the Eastern Suburbs District Scout Groups about 1931. About 400 were gathered around the big camp-fire circle that night. We Jewish scouts numbered about 40 - every one a trained singer. Each troop was to provide a competitive item. Well, there was the usual inane stuff - silly songs, sung out of tune, out of time, uncondacted, by flat and untrained voices. Then came our turn. Twenty golden-voiced sopranos commenced. In came the altos with the tenors close behind. Then a brace of young baritones. Even if I say so myself, the magnificent harmony exploded into the night air with stunning effect. Then followed some pretty little psalms and then a powerful full-throated offering that left us all exhausted and exhilarated. For that performance we won the Bourke's

Banner and I recall carrying it at the Bradfield Jamboree in January 1939. The war started that year and Joe Joseph joined the Air Force and I haven't heard of him since.

In the 20s and 30s various Jewish youth groups formed, loosely constituted, and largely for social purposes. A major feature was their Sunday gatherings at the steps of the Bondi Beach promenade, in front of the Esplanade building. Many friendships were cemented there and some marriages resulted.

I recall the induction of Rabbi Kirsner at the Bondi Synagogue about 1928. A procession of *Sifrie Torah*, carried by *Rabbonim* and *Baal ha-Buyitim* of the Great and other synagogues, came down the street, led by Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen, a man of impressive appearance and magnificent voice. Unfortunately, Rabbi Kirsner, though young, was frail and unwell, and this restricted the effectiveness of his ministry. His plaintive response to most problems was "*Vos kann ich ton?*" - "What can I do?"

From 1929 to 1933 there was a *chazan* at the Eastern Suburbs Central Synagogue who was appropriately called Cantor Kantor, a brother of Mr Kantor the bookseller in St Kilda. He was also a teacher, *Baal T'Kiab*, *Baal K'riah*, *Shammas*, *Mobel* and *shochbet*. He taught me my *Bar Mitzvah* so well I still, to this day, teach *Bar Mitzvah* candidates. Aged over 90, he lives at Ramat Gan in Israel.

Another colourful personality was Aaron Blashki, of blessed memory. In collaboration with Lou Joseph, a teacher at Bondi Talmud Torah and two German scholars, an English translation was produced of the Pentateuch with *Onkelos*, *Haphoroth* and Rashi's Commentary, in five volumes. I understand that the publication was paid for by Aaron himself. My father bequeathed me his set. Aaron was a leading philanthropist, who provided employment to many newcomers, including my father-in-law. Aaron distributed, from a large Minty tin, a handful of sweets to each child as they left the Synagogue on *Shabbat*, and each received from him a shiny new florin as *Chanukah Gelt*.

There was a tall, thin, but powerful hoy from Russia, who was retarded. Some *Goyish* lads harassed him and he struck one, who died of head injuries. I recall our menfolk arguing, as always very loudly, and waving their hands. "D' boy is dangerous. He must be locked away ..." etc., and their opponents responding, "D' *sbeiguts* got vot he deserved! Leave d' boy alone!"

In 1932 Cantor Rakman formed the tiny *Machsikei Hadass* ("Those who grasp the myrtle", an ancient term for Zion) congregation near Hall Street, graced by a magnificent male choir. I was the youngest baritone. The Cantor's beautiful little son was the soprano, and when he sang the angels listened. He had been blinded when a stone struck his head. Of course no one saw who threw it, but it was, without doubt, an anti-Semitic attack. No one was punished. The little fellow adapted well, and his beautiful voice may have given him some joy despite his tragic disability. I think the depletion of this congregation due to the Second World War caused this little *shul* to close.

In the 1920s there was a caretaker-cleaner at Central *Shul*. He was five foot high and three foot in diameter. We gave him a bad time and he responded in kind. He wore leather braces to support his dignity when he would whip off his huge leather belt and chase us boys. He was powerfully built, with a voice to suit and an enormous mouth. And a temper! One day during *Shabbat* service, some lads

locked all the cubicles in the men's toilet and then slid out under the doors, which had about 8" clearance from the floor. Soon, some *Mispallalim* (worshippers) were shouting at his door (everything was done at full voice in those days). "Vot's d' matter - de doors von't open." Their need was obviously urgent. The caretaker called back "Foist, I gotta get me a hard b'rendi (brandy)". He stuck his head and shoulders under one door and proceeded to unlock it with a stick which he kept for those crises. Having done so, he saw a bunch of boys laughing. Off came the belt, up he sprang with a roar, only to land on his ample stomach - they had tied the laces of his huge boots together. He kicked off his boots and, barefooted, belting the kids and shouting, he chased them into the Synagogue and the service stopped. You can imagine the furore that erupted. As soon as any opinion would be expressed, a polarisation would naturally ensue. Some *Mispallalim* shouted: "D' parents gotta teach d' boys manners!" But the experts on the other side of the spectrum replied: "*Sie Halfen azoi vi a toiten benkes!* Is gonna halp like a poultice on a daid corpse." One wise old chap philosophised, "... and who-oo-oo is gunna teach d' parents?" And one heavyweight pontificated, "*Sbi ne'ema* - you gotta bring up d' child in d' vay he should go." A meek little chap asked "Who say'd dat?" And the reply was "Me poisonally - I say'd it." But his glory was short-lived, for an old guy who had been around a bit said, "*A Meshuga - Ebr zagt 'Sh-ne'ema'. Ober ebr vaist nicht es is fun der brit hadash*" - "Der fool tink he's qvoting fun der *Tenach*, but he don't know it's fun der new *Goyishe* Testament!"

A doorman was employed to keep order in the foyer of the Great Synagogue. He was a short, cockney, ex-boxer in a chauffeur's uniform. A visitor entered and the doorman offered him a *tallis* (a man's prayer shawl). The man waved it away - "I'm not staying long." The doorman insisted - "Mister - in this *shul* you wear a *tallis*. Put it on, or I'll tie it round your bleedin' neck!"

#### Scouting

The Second Bondi (Judean) Scout Troop was formed by Edgar Kelson, who had arrived from Germany about 1925. He was so dedicated to the troop, and we to him, that we have held three reunions in the post-war years, the latest in 1987, when we also celebrated his 80th birthday. Few scoutmasters are still hailed and respected by their scouts after 50 or 60 years. I was invested in 1930 yet I still correspond with Edgar. In World War II Edgar was in an AIF Intelligence Unit. He was fluent in German and was decorated for interpreting the esoteric wording of a radio message which gave warning of the imminent German invasion of Crete.

We called ourselves "The Jewish Mob" - about two dozen teen-aged boys who ran together - at the Bondi Synagogue and its *Talmud Torah*, in the Second Bondi Judean Scouts, at public school and high school, at the beach and around the community. We were survivors! One-upmanship was our creed.

In scouting, a "Scouts' Own" is an inter-denominational service to which each religion contributes. The "Scouts' Prayer" is acceptable to all, ending "... Oh Lord Our G'd, accept this prayer, amen." First the Catholics added before "Amen" a Latin sentence which sounded like "Benedictus, Benedyktus, a petition up the nostrils, Amen". The Protestants inserted "... for the sake of Jesus Christ, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, as it was in the beginning so will it be in the time to come, world without end ... Amen." The Anglicans added some other ending. Now, one-upmanship was our speciality, so we inserted, "... For the sake of our Fathers

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; our Kings Saul, David and Solomon; our Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel; *Yiskadal ve-Yiskadash: Ve' Nomar Omeyn*". Then an edict arrived from H.Q. - "No more ascriptions or doxologies."

The Judean scouts used the attic above the Bondi *Talmud Torah* to store equipment. One heavy lad stepped off the joists on to the fibro ceiling and brought it down on a Board of Management meeting in the classroom below. The excitement loosened his bladder. This didn't endear him to the Board. No more storage in the attic!

In one of those classrooms, a patrol leaders' meeting was in progress. In the next room the Bondi Jewish Social Club (BEJASC) was celebrating something. One lad went in and said, "Can you make less noise - we are trying to pass a motion!"

The Bondi Judean Scouts attended a district camp during *Chol ha-Moed Pesach*. How? We took a crate of *matzo*, bottles of *gefилte* fish, wine and *chraime*. We fried *matzo* in huge quantities and everyone in camp sampled it. We staged a demonstration *Seder*, with choral accompaniment and full explanations and, of course, paschal food. We lads were very proud to be Jewish!

Sammy Green, a scout of our troop, fought off an Alsatian dog which was savaging a woman, while several men stood by. He received an award, at a big scout parade, from the State Chief Scout, Sir Phillip Game, who made very special mention of the Jewish people.

#### Maccabean Hall

There was great excitement at the opening of the Maccabean Hall in Darlinghurst in November 1923. Its prime purpose was to cater to the needs of Sydney's many Jewish ex-servicepersons. The so-called Great War was not long over and there was still much enthusiasm for "King and Country", "the Colours", the "British Empire" and "Old England", and this was evident in the Sunday evening concerts at "The Mac". It seemed mandatory that at each concert there would be a segment of "Jingoism", national chauvinism, references to "our brave boys", and "stiff-upper-lipmanship" over our terrible losses. To ensure that, there was no shortage of broken-down Diggers in their pathetic worn-out uniforms and their faded war ribbons who hired themselves out to any function for a meagre "ten shillings plus tramfare for the night". There were also some ex-officers in smarter uniforms and dashing moustaches who had once been debonair playboys but now were reduced to competing with the old Digger "entertainers". These sad men of both categories had one thing in common - they were burnt out by their war service, and by alcohol, the universal panacea for that condition. They would either recite prose or poems (Kipling was, of course, popular) or wartime episodes, or sing appropriate songs, stirring, sad or happy.

Striking his leather-bound swagger stick against his long shiny leather leggings to good effect, an immaculate officer recited a striking piece of prose - "But the Guns Got Through". It concerned a huge artillery column which finally reached the front at a terrible cost of men, horses and guns, but they never fired a shot - they had been routed to the wrong area! Another officer performed the chilling poem "The Green Eye of the Little Yellow God". Though he was too intoxicated to come on to the stage unassisted, he propped himself against a chair and his audience froze at his powerful rendition. Just as Mad Carew gave the stolen green eye (an enormous emerald) to the Colonel's daughter, the performer slowly slid down and

collapsed on the floor. Panic! The committee rushed on to the stage. "Is dere a doctor in d' house?" "Yes - here's Dr Mendelsohn!" "But", screamed the good doctor, "I'm a dentist - you vant I should pull out his teeth?" The corpse stirred and, proud and unassisted, phoenix-like he hauled himself to his feet and continued his scary saga from exactly where he had gone into his alcoholic fade-out! He reached the blood-curdling finale, clicked his spurred heels and threw a sharp salute. The audience was on its feet and gave him a tremendous ovation - many thought his collapse was part of the dramatisation! Once off the stage he asked, in cultured tones, for "a stiff drink and can someone drive me to my diggings", and someone asked him, "Wotcha mean your diggings - you t'ink yet, you still in d' trenches, dochten (there)?"

#### Unrest during the Great Depression

During the Depression years, 1929-1932, the Communists used to conduct a rally on Friday evenings outside the post office in Hall Street, Bondi Beach. The New Guard, which we vaguely understood to be "right wing" and was affiliated to Sir Oswald Mosley's "British Legion of Fascists", would turn out in force to oppose them. We Jewish lads only knew that neither group was "*Gut fur der Yidden*" (good for Jews) and as soon as *Bensching* (Grace after meals) was over, we'd race to "Red Square" to witness the inevitable brawl. I'll describe the biggest battle. The Comms assembled well up Hall Street, near the junction with Glenayr Avenue. They had a big red flag, drums, a trumpet and about 40 men, women and children. By the post office the New Guard, say 60 of them, formed up. Between were about 20 police. Down the hill marched the Commos - with voices raised in "The Red Flag" accompanied by drums and trumpet. The New Guard formed a solid line across the street and Eric Campbell, their leader, turned to us and said quietly, "You Jew kids, keep back - you'll have your turn later." We didn't know what he referred to - we were to find out only when Hitler took over! Suddenly, a light went on in a balcony over a shop, where there was a big sign, "Office of Abe Landa - The Man for Bondi. Lang is Right". (Landa was a Jewish M.L.A.) The noise stopped for a moment and Abe shouted: "Stop! This is not the way ..." No more could be heard - the New Guard resumed its cry, "Go back to Russia!" The drums and trumpet and "The Red Flag" resumed and in a moment fists, coshes, knuckle-dusters, bottles and truncheons were in action. Women screamed, children scattered, blood flowed in the street. And that was the first time we had a taste of war. Within a decade we had all the war we wanted and some paid the supreme sacrifice.

#### Sir Isaac Isaacs and Anti-semitism

When Sir Isaac Isaacs was nominated as Governor General, King George V had reservations: "Who is this man?" But he was well aware of Sir Isaac's background. Apart from his non-Zionist attitude he was a successful Governor General. Soon after his appointment he was offered the patroncy of the Royal Sydney Golf Club at Rose Bay, as was the custom. Sir Isaac Isaacs declined as he would have been the first Jewish member. The same thing had happened in 1920, when Queensland Governor, Sir Matthew Nathan, was offered the patronage of the exclusive Queensland Club. They have never yet admitted a Jewish member and it is believed that none has applied, anyway.

#### The Second World War

Just before the Second World War, a Maccabi-Hakoah soccer team arrived and

played a series of games. Their footwork was so good a sports writer's headline read, "Jewish Terpsichorean, Tantalising, Toeball Thrills the Fans". It was an euphoric time for us, and the Sydney community turned on great hospitality. On their return journey, the war commenced and their ship was delayed for some weeks in Colombo.

The Second World War had not long started when a vessel arrived, with hundreds of Germans who were being moved from a Christian religious order's settlement, the Templars, at Sarona near Tel Aviv, and resettled near Sydney. Being civilians they were under a superintendent of the British Palestine Police and all the guards were *Ghaffirim* in *kepis*. They were Jewish settlement police and railway police. Sydney Jewry went mad with the excitement of welcoming real living *Chalutzim* in uniform and with the thrill that "the tables are turned! Here are Jewish police guarding German prisoners!" At the Maccabean Hall a capacity gathering saw them dance *horas* and sing their rousing *Ivrit* songs. Such noise! Such exuberance! Jews and non-Jews invited them everywhere. They marched past the Cenotaph - how proud we all were! They told us that the greatest anti-Semites on their ship were not the Germans - they were the British Police Superintendent and his 6-foot daughter!

And that was Bondi Jewry as I recall it - frequently very funny, sometimes very sad. A typical *shtetel*, yet with its own individuality. Those times are gone forever, taking many colourful people with them. But they all left their mark ... *Zichronut Livrachba* - May their memory be a blessing.

## WAR EXPERIENCES AND LIFE AS A PRISONER OF WAR

Harry Leslie

When asked to give this talk I searched the memories of my life. There has been a great amount stored away. Some bad, some good. Even as a prisoner of war. However, the main theme of this talk will relate to my survival from the horrors experienced as a prisoner of war under the Japanese. Was this survival due to destiny, faith, hope, luck? Maybe a combination. God only knows!

We, as Jews, suffered the Nazi persecution in Europe that led to the Holocaust, where 6,000,000 Jews were exterminated - amongst them my relatives in Poland and Russia. Unlike the Nazis, the Japanese used a different, sadistic way of committing horrific atrocities against all the countries that they conquered, including prisoners of war, regardless of race or religion, owing to their militaristic culture; their codes of honour did not recognize the Geneva Convention in matters of war between nations. The purpose of this talk is to show this generation the horrors of war and to remember what happened to us during 1939-1946, with the hope that a better understanding will develop between nations in the future.

### The Twist of Fate

The persecution of the Jews in Poland and Russia resulted in many Jews fleeing to different parts of the world. My mother and father were born in Russia. They fled Russia at the turn of the century and settled in London. Some of their families

went to America; others remained behind in Poland and Russia, never to survive. Here is the first instance of fate playing her hand, leading my parents and therefore myself away from the scene of the Holocaust.

My father was a bandsman in the Russian army and the story that I was told was that while on reserve he went AWOL (absent without leave) and fled to London. My mother followed on a cattle boat some time later with my two eldest brothers, aged five and three, accompanied by a *landsman* (friend). My father became a master cabinet maker. They worked hard and the family increased until I came on to the scene in November 1919 - the last of a family of nine, with six brothers and two sisters. Large families were the norm in those days. It may be that this was traditional, with my father coming from a rabbinical background. His father was a rabbi and one of my grandfathers was a Dayan, I was told.

During my schooling I went to *cheder* and accompanied my father to *shule* services. (I was also a choir boy.) He played the tuba in the army. It was usual for him to blow the *Sbofar* on *Yom Tovim*. Unfortunately he died soon after my barmitzvah.

I was taught the scriptures and stories of the history of the Jews throughout the ages. On *seder* nights I used to read the story of the Jews being slaves under Pharaoh in Egypt and how they suffered with torture and hard labour.

In my youth in London's East End in the 1930s, the British Fascist Party led by Sir Oswald Mosley carried out anti-Jewish acts of terrorism in our streets. We formed groups to defend our families which often resulted in hand to hand fighting. This was my first introduction to brutality.

The greatest confrontation took place in Aldgate when Mosley's gang of Blackshirts attempted to march through the East End of London. We barricaded the streets in such large numbers that we stopped them, chanting "They shall not pass". This event still lives in my memory. Hitler and Mussolini used Franco's Spanish Civil War as the stepping stone to World War II which broke out on 3 September 1939.

I was called up for army service on 18 January 1940 at the age of 20, and joined the 5th Battalion, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment stationed in Cambridge. Our training during the next six months was mainly in the Cambridgeshire area. During this time I used to do alterations for some of the soldiers' uniforms in our unit. I was asked to set up supplies and equipment for the tailoring needs for the battalion. On my first leave I obtained fabric and sewing supplies and was allowed time to do alterations between my normal duties. This was the time of preparations for possible invasion. To strengthen our defences we moved to Mildenhall Aerodrome, Suffolk, one of the main centres from where the Air Force was preparing to take part in the Battle of Britain.

On my next leave home to London the bombing raids had started and we were all in the front line. Devastation was everywhere. My family were evacuated to country areas, due to the bombing of their home. Civilians were suffering hardships. Many slept in air raid shelters and Underground stations.

On returning to my unit I was established as the Battalion's tailor. My days were mainly spent tailoring, due to the further intake of men to make up a complete battalion. Joining us were some troops that returned from the Battle of Dunkirk in France. Final arrangements were made for all stores and equipment being crated ready for shipment. At this period the Germans were sending Jews in occupied territories to concentration camps and the British Intelligence were concerned at the

possible disadvantage to relatives in the British Forces if they were to be taken prisoners. I had aunts, cousins and relatives in Poland and Russia. I had the option of either changing my name, which was Zilesnick, or being transferred to another unit. I decided to change my name to Leslie. All documentation name tags AB-64 were changed.

We were part of the 18th Division that set sail on 29 October 1941 from Liverpool on the troopship *Sol del Raina* in convoy on our way to the Middle East. We arrived in Halifax, Canada, and transferred on to an American ship, *USS America*.(West Point) While we were on the high seas we heard that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941. This brought a complete change in the British and American strategy resulting in our Division being diverted, with a brief stop in Cape Town. All Jewish Soldiers went to the *shule* hall where the chaplain, Rev. Kassel, arranged for the local families to look after us while we were there.

We then proceeded to Bombay. Our Battalion went to Ahmadnaga British Training Station for one month's training in tropical warfare. Returning to Bombay and rejoining our troopship *USS America* we then made the journey to Singapore. We arrived in Singapore on 29 January 1942 and as we disembarked we saw there were civilians and naval personnel being evacuated out of Singapore. On arrival at our barracks the stores were unloaded. My sewing machine was used for repairs that were required before the troops went into action on 8 February 1942.

We went into battle at Bukit Timah and Thompson Reservoir. We were forced to retreat and the next day, 14 February, I joined my group to bring back supplies from the stores, which were between us and the Japanese lines. While loading the trucks we were shelled with mortar bombs. A direct hit on the store killed and wounded some of us. A shrapnel wound in my thigh meant I had to go into hospital in Singapore; the next day - Capitulation - 15 February 1942 - to become a prisoner of the Imperial Japanese Army for three and a half years.<sup>1</sup>

One week later I was moved from hospital to my unit in Changi where I had my first real experience of what was in store. Rations of limed rice, not fit for human consumption, were given to us, which turned my stomach. Every day brought hardship and the feeling of uncertainty of what would become of us. The Japanese cruelty began to show with their complete disregard of normal treatment of prisoners of war according to the Geneva Convention. There were even atrocities against the staff and inmates of the hospital.

For the next three months in Changi we were confined to camp and at this time I was able to get puttees and I started to make forage caps by hand. During this time we suffered dengue fever, stomach ailments and tropical ulcers, among other illnesses. One day I heard a voice call out "Harry". Turning round, there was my brother-in-law, Sam Nemko. He had heard my battalion was in Singapore. We were both overcome as we embraced each other. He was in the British Signal Corps, having been in action from the start of hostilities in Malaya. We were able to visit each other at various times, even going to a Jewish service, and then all groups were taken for different working parties. My brother-in-law went on the Burma Railway. I went to camps in Singapore.

Some of my mates at this period pointed out one of the guards in charge of our working party. They nicknamed him "The Yid" because he had a different look from the others. I was asked to find out if maybe he was a Jew. In passing him I

said "*Sholom Alecheim bist deir a Yid*". There was a blank expression and I then told my mates he wasn't a Jew!

We transported timber from Kota Tinggi, Malaya, back to Singapore, going through villages where the Japanese beheaded Chinese and Malaysians. Their heads were displayed in the village squares for all to see. In August 1942 I was in a group sent to Formosa (later known as Taiwan) on a cargo ship, *Dai-Nichi-Maru*. We were battened down in the hold like cattle and some of us died and were buried at sea. The remainder arrived in Haito Camp, Formosa. This camp was where General Percival and all high ranking officers from Singapore were sent prior to our arrival. General Percival was forced to sign a declaration that prisoners would not attempt to escape. They then went to Japan. There were about 500 POWs in this camp, made up of British, Australian, Dutch, American, Chinese; always some coming and going. The main work was loading stones, which were transported for ballast, from the riverbeds nearby on to trains - a hard labour job.

After a short time I became the tailor for the camp doing work for the Japanese and clothing repairs for our POWs. This was a time when the Japanese were winning the war and in comparison our rations were bearable. Two years later times changed. Work as a tailor kept me in good condition for what was in store.

In this period I was about to see a change in conditions. My work as the tailor had some advantages, receiving extra presents from the Japanese for work done, of cigarettes, sugar, tea, etc. I had two other POWs helping me and we shared these "presents". One weekend while the camp had a holiday from work, the Japanese stores were broken into and a great amount of sugar was stolen. All the groups of thieves went into the store on the same day. The next day, when this was discovered, the whole camp was paraded and kept standing while our huts were searched. Unfortunately my two mates, myself and an officer with others were found with sugar. We were interrogated and I was accused of being the mastermind and broker responsible for all the stealing and dealing between the thieves and the officers; trading cigarettes and sugar for money. I was found with keys which were a second set I had made which I used at times when called out after usual working hours. When asked where I received the sugar from, I said that this was given to me by the Japanese for work done. They tortured me, trying to make me name those who stole the sugar; who had the keys to get into the stores. I was kept out in the sun with my hands above my head the whole day, and then put into solitary confinement for seven days, as were my two assistants. Every day we were beaten, trying to make us tell the names of those responsible. My other mate, who was beaten during a bout of malaria, collapsed and went into a coma. Fortunately we were released the next day because the Red Cross was to visit the camp. Some of the gangs responsible for stealing helped us when we were released from solitary confinement.

During the next few months the hard labour and beatings carried out by the Japanese indicated that the war may be ending, but there were harder times to follow. There were now bombings by the American Air Force on Formosa and one day our camp at Haito was bombed, killing Japanese and some of our POWs. This attack with anti-personnel bombs maimed some of our mates.

At the beginning of 1945 Haito Camp was closed and we were moved. While waiting to leave, the Japanese officer nicknamed "The Yank" started to beat some of

us. I was bashed on the head with his sword. We arrived at Taihoku Camp, at the other end of the island. This was a period of continual air raids and most of the days were spent in trench-type shelters. The Japanese asked for volunteers to go on a working party made up of the stronger men. Those of us who volunteered thought we may have a chance of getting more rations, but this was not to be - just the opposite!

We were transported a short way by truck, then a day's trek through treacherous rough areas over a river on a rope bridge and climbing a mountain through narrow ledges and ravines - a wild area, which was to be our camp for the next three months, named *Yama*, Japanese for mountain. We were worked hard cutting trees and high grass in the jungle areas, making *attab* huts, sleeping on the bare ground. We were above the clouds when it rained. The rations were the lowest of our three and a half years in captivity. We were beaten continually; conditions were terrible - dysentery, malaria, pellagra, malnutrition, beriberi, gangrene were rife. There were 100 prisoners who came to this camp and only half of them survived.

The end of the war came on 15 August 1945, just in time, as most of us left were emaciated and probably would have lasted only another month. Our captors cooked us a meal of meat but we were sick, unable to digest the sudden shock to our stomachs. The Japanese guards brought us back to Taihoku Camp, where we were waiting to be liberated. We were given medical supplies by the Japanese. However there were still more men who died at this time. A tragedy followed when a canister of medical and food supplies dropped by the Red Cross landed on our hut, killing one of our men. This was a time of uncertainty.

On 7 September 1945 we were liberated by American and Chinese naval forces and transported to Keyloon Docks. Although I was helped by two American sailors, I was still able to walk up the gangplank onto a destroyer. What a relief! The next day, in heavy seas, I was transferred from the destroyer by cable strapped into a winch and hoisted onto the deck of the aircraft carrier *USS Santee* where I was greeted by some of our mates from the camps. We were fumigated - deloused - our clothes and personal possessions were taken but were lost during this move, including my A.B.64. I had blood transfusions, was hospitalised, and when asked if there was anything I would like I replied "orange juice". They squeezed oranges,



*Photo taken on board aircraft carrier U.S.S. Santee, September 8th, 1945 after release from Taiwan prisoner of war camp. Pte. Harry Leslie, 5950940, 5th Battalion, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment, British Army Regiment, British Army, 18th Division.*

which tasted like the elixir of life!

We arrived in Manila on 9 September and put ashore in the ship's small craft, where ambulances were waiting. We were greeted by American WAACs, the first white women that we had seen in three years, and taken to 248 General Hospital with American and Australian doctors and nurses. We had the best of medical attention and although I weighed 96 pounds and was suffering from malnutrition and beriberi, I was able to respond to treatment and had no immediate damage to my liver or stomach and gradually started eating and gaining weight. Others were not so fortunate. The sudden shock of release affected them, and there were some who died at this time. Later, many prisoners of war found it difficult to return to a normal life.

These are a few of my diary entries after being released from Formosa, which give some day-to-day happenings:

11 September. An Australian nurse wrote the first letter to my mother for me, as I was unable to write!

16 September. Everything going well - walking about a bit - had photo taken - weighed 102 lbs.

17 September. Having a feast today. Eating double helpings of bacon and eggs, good American food. It so happened it was *Yom Kippur* when we fast back home. I wrote my first letter home. Gracie Fields was here today and entertained us. I sang along with her!!

21 September. Losing appetite. This may be reaction to treatment - for worms!!

9 October. Left hospital today. Rode through Manila in ambulance. Saw some of the battered city. Arrived at the docks. Boarded British aircraft carrier *HMS Glory* with British and Australian doctors and nurses.

20 October. Arrived in Pearl Harbour. Went on an organised tour by coach. Saw Waikiki Beach and surf riding. Before leaving we were entertained by the hula-hula girls - what a treat!!

21 October. Departed and on our way to Canada.

26 October. Arrived in Victoria B.C. We were in the military hospital. Some of the local Jewish families contacted me and Mr and Mrs Lancaster took me out for the day on a scenic tour of the city and to their home for dinner. Had fresh salmon and a very nice evening was enjoyed.

3 November. I weighed 146 pounds. We left Victoria for Vancouver. Transferred on to Canadian Pacific Railway on a five day trip across Canada. Welcome in every city. Arrived in Halifax and boarded hospital ship *Lady Nelson*. Left for Jamaica. Then on our way back to England.

Sunday, 2 December 1945. We arrived in Southampton. Letters were given out. I received 3 letters dated 27 September 1945 that followed me around the world.

These were the first letters I had received since August 1944 at Haito Camp,

Formosa, sent to me dated August-November 1943. My mother first had news officially of my being a prisoner of war on 28 May 1943!

We all started leaving the ship. On coming down the gangplank, there was my brother Sam and brother-in-law Sam Nemko, who survived the Burma Railway and had arrived home earlier. It was so unfortunate that I developed a fever the previous day and was not allowed to go home with the other troops. I was taken to military hospital for treatment and tests. The next week I went home on my own, arriving in Westcliff-on-Sea to a grand welcome.

On reflection I never cease to marvel at the way the mind and brain work - that when I was actually suffering the atrocities and unbearable hardships, everything was stark and gruesome. Yet I was able to blank out the feeling of pain by controlling the mind.

#### Conclusion

It is 51 years since being released and my general outlook of life today has changed. I do not have hatred towards the Japanese now, but I cannot forget the hardships and atrocities that I suffered. We must now work for a lasting peace and see that this part of history is taught in all our schools. Unlike the history of Passover and *Purim*, which only appears in our Jewish schools.

#### NOTES

1. On 15 February 1942 the Japanese had defeated the British and taken control of Singapore. In February 1992, fifty years later, Harry Leslie was the only known Sydney Jewish veteran to return to Singapore to commemorate this event. His experiences were reported in an article 'The Road Back to Singapore' by Walt Secord in the Australian Jewish News, Sydney Edition, 17 January 1992 and the Eastern Express, 16 January 1992.

## HISTORY OF JEWS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA - A PERSONAL INSIGHT

*David Mossenson : Hebrew, Israelite, Jew*

Talk given at meeting of Australian Jewish Historical Society, 166 Castlereagh Street, Sydney, October 1991.

### (1) Reasons for Writing the Book

I have had a personal interest in the history of West Australian Jewry for many years. This, in part, arises from my involvement in various communal activities in Perth as well as my interest in historical research more generally and, in particular, the development of education in Western Australia. However, for many years my career in senior departmental administration of education precluded the possibility of my undertaking the depth of research necessary for writing such a history. Retirement gave me the opportunity and necessary time.

Over the years I have also found myself irritated from time to time at some of the published statements and public votes of thanks at communal functions which I was quite satisfied represented hyperbole and unwarranted adulation. I felt that a more dispassionate and objective account of our community and some of the more significant individuals within it was very much needed.

On this matter of objectives I wish to refer to Carmel School with which I have a long association quite apart from several of our grandchildren being pupils there.

The school devotes an enormous amount of time to Jewish studies in general, but I have not seen any evidence of discussion at a serious level of the history of Australian Jewry in general or West Australian Jewry in particular. But, in my view such studies are singularly appropriate and so very important for developing genuine self-esteem in today's young Australian Jews. They should have reasonable familiarity with the past experience of Jews in Australia and in the State in which they live. I hope that my book will make some contribution in this regard for youthful members of Perth Jewry.

This question becomes all the more important when we realise that the standard references dealing with the general history of Western Australia make no mention of Jews as such. I hope my book makes a contribution to rectifying this omission in both the Jewish and wider Australian community.

(2) The source materials which I found most helpful

The Perth Hebrew Congregation (PHC), the oldest surviving and still largest institution in West Australian Jewry, has a complete set of almost unbroken records, minutes and annual reports, dating from 1897. The early annual reports also contained summaries of developments which had affected the community/congregation over the preceding five years before the reports were printed and preserved.

As with the Great Synagogue in Sydney, for many years the PHC regarded itself not only as the religious institution of Jews in the State but also as the institution pre-eminent and competent to act as spokesperson for the community on all subjects. In its leadership role it functioned as if it were the Board of Deputies.

Furthermore, as the organisation generally considered to have the greatest likelihood of survival, the PHC over the years also acted as a depository for the papers of many organisations that later became defunct. The minutes of the Fremantle Hebrew Congregation (which preceded the PHC) and the Kalgoorlie Congregation are kept in its archives.

A few short-lived communal periodicals and communal reports, often printed on a monthly basis, provided important insights into communal issues prior to and after WWI. A most valuable find was the minute book, excellently written, of the WA Zionist Association for the years 1915-1930. These were the WAZA's most productive years as in those days, it comprised numerous groupings including cultural, debating and dramatic groups as well as Yiddish and Hebrew debating bodies. With a membership of between 300-400 people it represented a substantial number of Perth Jews, and provided much of the community's secular activity in that crucial period.

Other primary sources used were certain official government documents such as censuses and convict records 1850-1868. These were particularly useful as, in that period, religious designation was obligatory. The documents of incorporation for the PHC (1896) include its original constitution as do the ones for the breakaway and more Orthodox Perth Jewish Association (1909), also known as the Palmerston Street or Little Shule.

I regard my most significant documentary find to be an open letter published in the local newspaper written by three ticket-of-leave convicts in 1867 to the Governor thanking him for agreeing to the creation of a Jewish section in the East Perth cemetery, and allowing the exhumation of the body of a young Jewish convict

from the Anglican section and his reburial in the Jewish section. This was the first glimmer of organised Jewish life in WA although a few Jews had been involved in WA since its foundation as the Swan River Colony.

The Melbourne *Jewish Herald* carried a regular column on Perth Jewry and supplemented the WA Jewish newspapers, such as *The Westralian Judean* and *The Maccabean*. As secondary sources, the four articles on WA Jewry in the *AJHS Journal* by David Benjamin represent a pioneering effort in the writing of the history of WA Jewry. The books of Suzanne Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, and Anne Andgel, *Fifty Years of Caring*, provided useful comparative detail of the wider Australian Jewish community.

(3) The particular problems encountered

The fundamental problem I faced was how to handle, sort, assimilate and present the great volume of available data. I used a chronological approach in presentation, splitting the work into subsections. It very quickly became apparent to me that WA Jewry represented a close subset of WA history in general. For example, Jews were associated with the establishment of Swan River Colony; the failure of the colony to achieve the expectations held for it led to the transportation of convicts who included Jews; and the 1890s gold discoveries created a sufficiently large Jewish population for the development of an organised and continuous Jewish community.

Secondly there was the problem of how to deal with the divisive and controversial periods in the life of a community which in large measure has otherwise been characterised by long periods of apathy. The public clashes attracted large audiences to meetings and created divisions within the community. The book could have easily re-ignited ill-feeling over old issues. Some examples include a conversion marriage earlier this century leading to the breakaway from the PHC and the establishment of a more Orthodox congregation. In more recent times, there was the split arising from the establishment of Progressive Judaism. This issue was not so much a question of Perth families being so Orthodox in their behaviour that they had religious objections to the new movement. Many were more concerned that previously the community had been highly unified and the split broke this unity. The issue of Kashrut had also been divisive, especially over public catering conducted by WIZO ladies, dishes often being prepared in their own homes without supervision.

My difficulties were heightened by being personally involved in some of the issues I was seeking to write about, and of the protagonists or their children still being alive. My response was to try to exclude personal judgements and instead to document as much as possible the significant points and issues involved. I like to think that, as a result of this approach, there have been no serious criticisms of the factual material in the book nor of the conclusions reached.

Another difficult issue was how to deal with the great number of successful Jews without making the book read like a listing and catalogue of achievement. I am satisfied it would have been a serious omission to underplay these successes as the achievements relate to the self-esteem I spoke of earlier. Part of my answer lay with the use of end notes rather than listing every detail in the body of the book. The aim was to achieve something that could be viewed as objective and historically sound. My worst fear was that there would be critics who would dismiss my efforts

as a whitewash or an attempt to glorify the community.

There was also the problem of what point in history I should end the narrative. Should it conclude, say, 30 years ago, or should it be brought up to the current date? The problems of population aging in Perth Jewry during the 1950s and 1960s were obscured as this was also a period of significant building developments: the Maccabi sports centre, the Aged Home, Carmel School and the new synagogue were all created in those years. In the 1960s the aging demography of WA Jewry meant its future appeared to be one of definite decline in the absence of an injection of people from overseas. This has occurred in the 1980s. Reflecting on the key issue of continuity and survival of the community, I decided to bring the book up to date although this then raised the difficulty of trying to discern what are the important recent events and what are simply "current affairs". However, it was important to deal with this recent development as the Jewish community now numbers over 5,000, the highest number in its history. The Jewish population since the 1930s had generally numbered between 2,000-3,000 with the community often being described as consisting of "600 families".

Deciding to take the book to the most recent times allowed me to convey a greater sense of optimism on which to conclude the book. The outlook for Perth Jewry is more healthy now than it has been for some generations.

#### (4) The principal themes in the history of Western Australian Jewry

As already indicated, the history of WA Jewry closely mirrors the history of the State in general. Waves of immigrants constituted a vital element in the life of the community. The first significant wave arrived during the 1890s gold rush. They were mostly Anglicised Jews, many from the Eastern States, who were second generation Australians. There were some Jews from England but few Yiddish speakers from Eastern Europe.

The second wave were Yiddish speakers who arrived from about 1909 through to 1914. They comprised two main groups: from Czarist Russia and from Palestine (largely Safed). In the 1920s the immigrants again came from Safed through a significant process of chain migration, and also from the newly-created Poland.

Subsequently there were small influxes from Austria-Germany prior to WWII and survivors of the Holocaust post-war. Since then there has been a steady influx of arrivals from England and Scotland. Recently some Israelis and Russians have settled in Perth but the far more substantial intake came from southern Africa.

The survival of the West Australian Jewish community has depended on these waves of immigration, and each wave has made a significant contribution to the development of the community.

The "Anglos" were well adjusted to Australian conditions and created the PHC and associated institutions, including the Chevra Kadisha, and the benevolent and philanthropic societies. They viewed themselves as being no different from other citizens except their being of the Jewish faith. They were responsible for the decision to appoint to the PHC Rabbi Freedman who believed strongly in the values of the Anglos including loyalty to the Empire and public service. This ethos has been a strong influence on subsequent generations.

But in the long run it has been the Yiddishers who contributed more to the community. Their inter-marriage has been less than that of the Anglos, who have virtually disappeared, and as such it is the Yiddishers who have provided the

underlying continuity for the community. They have also made the distinguishing imprint of Zionism on the community and attachment to things Jewish.

The South Africans are now starting to make their particular contribution with the establishment of a cultural group and the preliminary buildings for the Northern Suburbs synagogue.

A number of communal institutions have depended for their development on the personal strengths of certain individuals whose deaths appear to have contributed to the subsequent stagnation of these institutions. For example, in recent years B'nai B'rith is languishing and the Temple David has not gained the numbers that might have been expected given the experience of the 1950s and 1960s.

The locally-born have played a significant role in the community and were capable of maintaining a viable community but they have been subject to continual losses. The composition of tonight's Sydney audience shows the continual migration from Perth to the Eastern States, a trend which started in the early 1900s with the decline of gold mining, and it represents one of the distinctive and unfortunate features of WA Jewry. This trend gathered momentum with the 1930s depression which impacted more severely on WA than other parts of Australia, in part because rural and railway developments had been more recent and as a consequence so had government borrowings.

Some of this population loss could have been at least partly counteracted if the immigration of refugees had been supported and sponsored, particularly after WWII. But the local Welfare Society did not encourage people to come to Perth. Rather, they encouraged the post-war survivors to settle in other States of Australia. One impact of this drift was the subsequent aging of the population in following years, referred to earlier.

Added to the population drift was the impact of inter-marriage on the remaining population. In the 1890s there were more Jewish men than women in the colony. In those circumstances, the wives and children of mixed marriages were often regarded as being Jewish by the community and by themselves. Rabbi Freedman accepted a liberal approach to this issue but as he lacked the status of rabbi at the time, he possessed limited conversion powers and was under the Chief Rabbi's direction. But, by the 1920s, Freedman had adopted a very strict, almost rejectionist position towards the acceptance of conversions. The sons of the community's founding members were marrying-out at such an alarming rate that Freedman could see the Anglos no longer offered the assurance of an on-going community. This role was falling to the Yiddish speakers and Freedman carefully and effectively merged these two groups to provide future continuity for the community.

After Freedman's death in 1939, conversion continued to be extremely difficult through the PHC, which acted in consultation with the Chief Rabbi. Dr Brodie laid down very restrictive conditions for conversion during his pastoral visit to Perth and these attitudes were one of the factors leading to the emergence of Reform Judaism in the 1950s. This in turn provided one reason for the objection to Reform Judaism: not only did it physically involve a "splitting of the family", but the expectation that it could lead to conversion at unprecedented levels meant it could lead to further attrition. But after the initial flurry, Temple conversions were not so numerous while a more accepting attitude towards conversion has emerged amongst the Orthodox Rabbis.

WA Jewry has not had to face significant anti-Semitism. The main newspapers, *The West Australian* and *Kalgoorlie Miner* (in earlier times) were usually very positive if not generous in their comments and attitudes to Jews and things Jewish. This reflected the contributions being made by Jews in the development of the colony and the standing of Rabbi Freedman in the general community. In many respects his public standing was higher in the wider community than in the Jewish community. At times there was criticism that he was against the Yiddish speakers of the community and that his services were too Anglicised and Reform-orientated. Freedman came to WA as a young man in the 1890s when Perth was a very small town. He was one of the few university-educated men in Perth and this resulted in his involvement in and appointment to most of its cultural activities. In addition, he was a close personal friend of the city's two archbishops and was regarded as their equal. He made an outstanding contribution in World War I as chaplain to the Australian Jewish troops and subsequently became President of the West Australian RSL, a position not achieved by any other religious leader. Freedman's contribution was reinforced by the involvement of others in local government, masonic lodges and cultural movements.

The Perth community's dismal record in accepting refugees appears to have as its only explanation the *fear* of anti-Semitism occurring in Perth in the 1930s and '40s. It was not a question of resources, for the Adelaide and Brisbane communities, with far fewer resources, accepted more refugees than Perth.

Finally I should mention that Western Australian Jewry has developed differently from the Eastern States and it is a mistake to include WA with Australian Jewish experience too generally. The main differences may be summarised briefly as follows:

1. The smallness and the closely-knit family nature of the Perth community.
2. The concentration of community leadership in a few hands. This was broken after WWII over the issue of the location of the community's future development away from Brisbane Street.
3. The impact of the Yiddishers came earlier to Perth, being prior to World War I rather than after World War II.
4. The higher proportion of locally-born Jews from the 1930s - at least until recent years.

Taken from comments by Dr Suzanne Rutland:

Rabbi Freedman was the lone rabbinical leader to support Zionism despite his Anglo position. In 1901, for example, he visited Melbourne for the Federation celebrations and whilst there tried to establish a Zionist organisation.

The failure of WA Jewry to accept refugees both before and after WWII was exemplified by its response to accepting its percentage of refugee children. The Welfare Society wrote that it would give money to have its quota of children taken over and settled in Sydney and Melbourne.

## FIFTY YEARS OF THE JEWISH FOLK CENTRE IN SYDNEY

*by Nate Zusman*

Talk given at the meeting of the Australian Jewish Historical Society held at the Great Synagogue Auditorium on Monday, 2 September 1991.

In 1939, prior to the outbreak of the war, Dr Itzhak Nachman Steinberg<sup>1</sup> came to Australia on behalf of the Freeland League, which he had founded, to seek permission to establish an autonomous settlement for Jews in the Kimberley district of Western Australia. Steinberg's visit to Australia was unsuccessful in its primary intent, but was to have a profound impact on the cultural, social and organisational development of Sydney Jewry.

### Dr I.N. Steinberg and the Origins of the Folk Centre

Dr Steinberg was an unusual and outstanding personality within whom varying and seemingly conflicting elements were combined. On the one hand he was a left wing revolutionary, who was, for a short time, Minister of Justice in Lenin's first government. On the other hand, he was an observant orthodox Jew with Jewish national ideas and a deep love and involvement with the Yiddish language and culture.

Steinberg made a deep impression on the governments, both state and federal, and on leading citizens of Australia but he did not succeed with the Kimberley Scheme, even though the government of Western Australia did agree in principle to his proposal. I had the good fortune of being involved in organising a meeting of the Jewish community in Perth in 1939 at which Dr Steinberg spoke and captivated the large audience with his charisma and eloquent Yiddish.

Caught in Australia because of the outbreak of war in September 1939, Dr Steinberg found the lack of Yiddish social and cultural activity in Sydney almost unbearable. There had been a Yiddish cultural club in Sydney but it had almost disappeared by the end of the 1930s. It was established by Polish Jews who began to arrive in Sydney in the 1920s. As their numbers grew so did the demand for cultural activities in the Yiddish language. Even prior to this period, visiting companies, mainly from Melbourne, had presented Yiddish theatre in Sydney from time to time.<sup>2</sup> However, Yiddish activities were at a low ebb when Dr Steinberg came to Sydney and there was no functioning cultural organisation. He felt there was an urgent need to prepare a centre which could be a haven and support for the many Jews from eastern Europe he expected would immigrate to Australia after the war. No-one, at that time, had the slightest concept of the tragic fate that would overtake the majority of the Jews of Europe.

Dr Steinberg's charismatic personality, energy and dedication attracted a group of like minded people. A meeting was held at the home of A. Fremder attended by Dr Steinberg, Rabbi Frampton, Moshe Sobol, L. Stoliar, M. Kusher and Abram Stuchynski. They formed themselves into a provisional committee to establish a new Yiddish cultural organisation. A wider meeting was held in the rooms of the National Council of Jewish Women in January 1941 when the Jewish Folk Centre under the name of Sholem Aleichem was founded. The founding fathers were Dr Steinberg, Rabbi Frampton, Rabbi Falk, A. Fremder, Mendel Kusher, Moshe Sobol, L. Stoliar, Abram Stuchynski, Meyer Lasse, Morris Simons and Abraham Wells. Rabbi Frampton became the first president and continued to hold that office until 1952 when he was elected honorary life president.

The committee of the new organisation demonstrated great enthusiasm and dedication. Steps were taken immediately to raise funds to acquire premises of its own. A meeting was called at the home of Rabbi Falk and £700 was subscribed, a large sum for working people in those days. With some help from supporters in Melbourne, this sum was soon doubled.

#### Early Functions

The Folk Centre made a big impact on the community by the number and quality of its functions. Typical of these was one entitled, Jewish Literary Creativity in Australia to mark the publication of a new book, *The New House* by the famous Australian Yiddish writer Herz Bergner. Abram Stuchynski gave a critical analysis of the book. At this same meeting, Moshe Sobol gave his impressions of Pinchas Goldhar's book, *Tales From Australia* and also read his own novella, *The Bris*. Many members participated in discussing these literary works. Another function of interest was an open forum on the World Jewish Congress, which was addressed by the Australian representative, Dr Laserson. At this meeting Dr Steinberg criticised the Australian section of the World Jewish Congress for being remote from the feelings and concerns of the Jewish masses.

A special meeting devoted to the plight of the Jews in Shanghai was held in the Radio Theatre, George Street attended by 250 people. At this meeting there was strong criticism of the official Jewish community for its indifference, inactivity and seeming lack of concern for the fate of European Jews. Dr Steinberg called on the Folk Centre to take the lead in educating the community on the serious issues confronting the Jewish people and in securing a voice for the Jewish masses in the Councils of the community.

#### Formation and Evolution of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies

At that time, the beginning of the 1940s, only the synagogues had representation on the NSW Jewish Advisory Board, which regarded itself as the official body for the whole Jewish community. This Board was dominated by the leaders of the Great Synagogue who considered themselves and were, de facto, the spokesmen for the Jewish community. They had little understanding of the aspirations of the Eastern European Jews and the recently arrived refugees from Germany and Austria. There were many others, besides Dr Steinberg and the founders of the Folk Centre, who were dissatisfied with their lack of a voice in the organisation and direction of the community. They considered that the Anglo-Jewish leadership was not only unrepresentative of the views of large sections of the Jewish population, but also unable to grasp fully the enormity of the events overwhelming European Jewry.

Dr Steinberg became the catalyst for those seeking a more representative body. Members of the Folk Centre Committee, Rabbi B. Frampton, M. Phillips, M. Simons, S. Sobol, L. Stoliar, A. Stuchynski and A. Wells joined with V. Cornfield, Maurice Isaacs, Julius Karpin, Sam Karpin, M. Mann, R.A. Rabinovitch, J. Rothschild, H. Sher, S. Stedman, K. Wein, and M. Wise, to become the famous 18 signatories to a petition to the Advisory Board for a democratically elected body to represent the whole community. Dr Steinberg did not sign the petition because he was a visitor, not a resident, but he participated with all his energy and passion in enthusing the petitioners and their supporters and he was a member of the delegation that negotiated with the Advisory Board. A meeting in the Maccabean Hall attended by 500 people indicated clearly to the Advisory Board that there was widespread

support for change.

The persistent activities of the 18 signatories resulted in the establishment in 1945 of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, and it is still today the most democratic Board in Australia with half its members elected by direct franchise.<sup>3</sup> Despite the important role played by the Folk Centre in the establishment of the Board, its members believed that its initial constitution fell far short of the direct franchise that the 18 signatories had sought. In the beginning only constituent bodies could be part of the Board and there was no provision for any representation from Jews who were not members of existing organisations. For this reason members of the Folk Centre were strongly opposed to seeking affiliation with the Board of Deputies. It was not until 1948, and only after many heated debates, that the Folk Centre became affiliated to the Board.

#### The United Jewish Overseas Relief Fund

The new Folk Centre also gave a lead to the community by the establishment of a Relief Fund to assist European Jewry. In 1942 when news began to arrive in Australia of the atrocities against the Jews of Europe, the Folk Centre set up the Relief Fund. Referring to this period Stuchynski wrote, 'The dedication is hard to imagine. Jews gave up work to go round and collect money. In the evenings we would meet at the Folk Centre to report and make plans.' The Relief Fund merged with the United Emergency Committee for European Jewry which was founded by the Advisory Board in 1943.

#### Yiddish Theatre

The presentation of Yiddish theatre was another key activity of the Folk Centre during the war years. Many members questioned whether it was appropriate to present theatre at a time of such tragedy for the Jewish people. Dr Steinberg drew the analogy of the head of the Yeshiva who called on his students to keep learning even in the face of great danger. 1942 was a particularly busy year for Yiddish Theatre at the Folk Centre. This was due to the arrival from Melbourne of the famous Yiddish actor Jacob Waislitz. Jacob Waislitz also delivered lectures on Yiddish writers and dramatists. He made a tremendous contribution to the cultural programme of the Folk Centre over many years. His visits and performances always attracted large appreciative audiences. Other famous artists, Rochel Holzer, Mila Waislitz and Moshe Potashinski presented plays in Sydney and enriched the life of the members of the Folk Centre.

#### Commemoration of the Holocaust

When news of the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto reached Sydney, the Folk Centre organised the first commemoration of that heroic event on the 23rd April 1944. The hall was packed with many people standing. Addresses were given by Rabbi Falk, Dr Cymmerman, Abram Stuchynski, Mottel Phillips and Mendel Kusher. The Folk Centre continued to organise a commemoration each year until the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies assumed responsibility for the annual Holocaust memorial function. The Folk Centre has two members on the committee which arranges the programme.

When the Martyrs' Memorial was erected at Rookwood Cemetery in 1970, members of the Folk Centre discovered that no provision had been made for any inscription in the Yiddish language, the language of the majority of the Holocaust martyrs. Strong representations resulted in Yiddish language inscriptions being

added. The Folk Centre organised the first commemoration at the Martyrs' Memorial and commemorations are now conducted every year by the Holocaust Committee of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies with the participation of the Folk Centre.

#### Evolution of the Folk Centre

Notwithstanding its intense involvement in the affairs of the wider community, the Folk Centre continued a regular and varied programme of cultural activities. One function, Sholem Ash's *Mishpet*, made quite an impact. The intense debate in the Jewish world over Sholem Ash's later books such as *The Man From Nazareth*, *The Apostle*, *Jesus in the Ghetto* and *My Personal Belief* found a strong echo in the Folk Centre in 1944. It organised a *Literary Mishpet* (a trial). The subject was 'Sholem Ash: His Writing and Influence'. The Chairman of the "Court" was Advocate Dr Cymmerman. The case for the prosecution was presented by Rabbi Falk and Mendel Kusher and for the defence by Dr Emil Offner and L. Cappe. The jury consisted of Rabbi Frampton, S. Stedman and L. Stoliar. Witnesses were Dr Hans Kimmel, Hyam Brezniak, Abram Stuchynski, J. Katz and Jack Liebhaber. There was so much feeling and emotion that the "Trial" could not be completed at the one gathering.

At a subsequent meeting held on the 27 August 1944, two of the three members of the jury, S. Stedman and L. Stoliar, gave their decision: "The books written by Sholem Ash couldn't have a negative effect on the Jewish people because the books were considered by readers to be general literature." Rabbi Frampton, the other member of the jury, dissented from this viewpoint and gave critical and philosophical reasons for his decision. *The Mishpet* had generated so much interest and emotion that it was proposed that all the evidence should be collated and published.

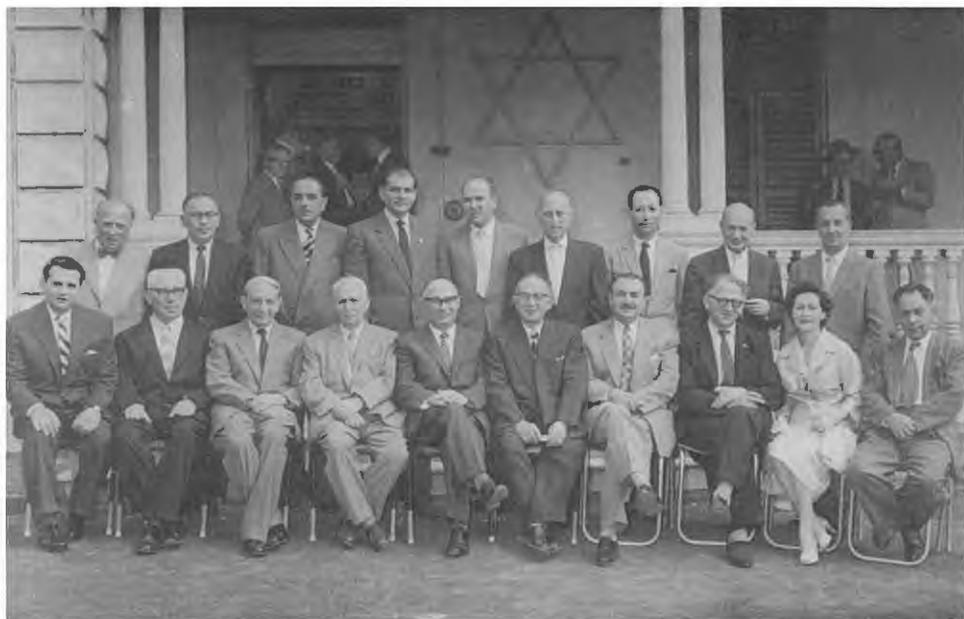
In 1943, Dr Steinberg managed to leave Australia and join his daughter in Canada. Subsequently he settled in America. His dynamic personality and intellect were missed at the Folk Centre. He maintained contact and in a letter written from America in 1944 he wrote:

Living in the biggest Jewish community in the world I understand all the more how vital such an organisation as the Folk Centre is for Australia. Every effort must be exerted to maintain such a centre where Jews of all backgrounds can come together in friendly association to express their feelings for Jewish values and culture. I thank you, more than you thank me, for enabling me to enjoy in Australia, a place where our folk language has resounded and where one was able to unburden one's soul in hours of joy and pain. I thank you for publishing my Yiddish book about Australia, *Lived and Dreamed in Australia*. With that publication you linked your community with the Jewish world.

In 1957 when news of Dr Steinberg's passing reached Sydney, the Folk Centre organised a memorial gathering at which heartfelt eulogies were given by Rabbi Frampton, S. Stedman, Hyam Brezniak, Mendel Kusher and Maurice Isaacs.

When the Folk Centre came into existence there was some concern that it would not be able to find in Sydney sufficient knowledgeable people to carry on regular cultural activities in Yiddish. This fear proved to be unfounded. The enthusiasm

and dedication of the founders ensured that stimulating functions were held very frequently. Rabbi Frampton and Rabbi Falk drew on their wide knowledge and contact with world Jewish affairs to present many lectures to appreciative audiences. The role of Rabbi Falk is particularly worthy of note. As a serving rabbi of the Great Synagogue he fearlessly championed issues that would not have pleased the Board of the Synagogue. Apart from the two rabbis, the other founders, Yehuda Fremder, Mendel Kusher, Meyer Lasse, Morris Simons, Moshe Sobol, Leib Stoliar, Abram Stuchynski and Abraham Wells participated regularly in the cultural programmes. After World War II new forces appeared with leaders such as Mottel Phillips, Isaac Turek, Severyn Pejsachowicz, Hyam Brezniak, Haskel Davis, Shimon Cappe, Dr Peter Berger, Dr Cymmerman, Yehuda Shaiak, Moshe Alexander, Jacob Horowitz and Jack Liebhaber.



*JEWISH CULTURAL CONFERENCE IN SYDNEY*

*Standing l. to r.: S. Cappe, H. Davis, M. Phillips, Dr. P. Berger, Dr. I. Sonnabend, Dr. Cymmerman, S. Pejsachowicz, D. Fromberg, I. Turek. Sitting l. to r.: S. Tigel, Mr. Stoliar, Dr. I. M. Freedman, J. Gilgitch, S. Boorstein, Mr. Silman, Mr. Sperling, H. Munz, Mrs. L. Berger, T. Rubenstein.*

The role of the Folk Centre, as envisaged by Dr Steinberg, as a haven for Yiddish speaking immigrants from Europe, became a reality after the war. The number of such immigrants was much smaller than had been hoped for, as there were so few survivors, especially of Polish Jewry which had been the centre of Yiddish culture. Those who did immigrate to Sydney found in the Folk Centre a place where they could hear a Yiddish word, read a Yiddish newspaper and book and feel at home. When the questions of restitution and reparations for the survivors arose, the Folk Centre provided guidance and assistance. These survivors are still today active members of the Folk Centre.

Right from its inception, the Folk Centre received support and co-operation from

the *Kadimah*, the Yiddish cultural organisation which was established in Melbourne in 1911. Yiddish lecturers, artists and writers from Melbourne visited the Folk Centre and enriched its cultural programme. In addition, *Kadimah* had the resources to invite to Australia outstanding personalities in the Yiddish world. Most of these overseas celebrities included the Folk Centre in their itinerary. They included Abraham Sutzkever, the famous Yiddish poet who was in the Vilna Ghetto and subsequently joined the partisans. He was a witness at the Nuremberg Trials. The hero Abba Kovner, a Yiddish and Hebrew poet, one of the commanders of the Vilna Ghetto, and the heroic Chaika Grossman also came to the Folk Centre. Other famous Yiddish writers, poets who gave lectures at the Folk Centre were Dr Szoskes, Dr Surowicz, Dov Ber Malkin, Mendl Mann, Shmuel Ruzanski, Dr Cholowski, Itzhak Korn. Dov Shilanski, the present Speaker of the *Knesset*, and many others.

Besides writers, there were leading personalities in Jewish life and culture such as Professor Israel Gutman of the Hebrew University, Jacob Pat, Jewish labor leader, Professor Tartakower, head of the World Jewish Congress cultural department, Professor Eugene Orenstein of McGill University, Canada, Professor Warshawski of the World Zionist Organisation and Professor Gershon Winer of Bar-Ilan University, who also visited the Folk Centre. These visitors brought to the Folk Centre the feeling of belonging to the wider world of Yiddish culture. They came to Sydney only because of the Folk Centre, a place where they could feel at home. It was not only the Folk Centre that gained from these visits. The whole Jewish community was afforded the opportunity to make contact with great personalities in the Jewish world. Most of them would not have come to Sydney if there had not been an active Folk Centre.

Famous Yiddish artists were also brought to Australia by the *Kadimah* and most of them gave performances for the Folk Centre in Sydney. They included Shimon Dzigan, Jenny Perelman, Rosa Turkow, Theodor Bikel, Yaffa Yarkoni, Hadassah Kestin and many others.

In 1953 Mottel Phillips took over from Rabbi Frampton as president of the Folk Centre and held that position for a number of years. He was followed in 1956 by Peter Berger who held office until 1962 when Isaac Turek was elected president.

#### The Folk Centre's Locations

The Folk Centre commenced its existence in a room in the Crystal Arcade, George Street in the same building as the Radio Theatre which it hired for large gatherings. The first building it owned was in Wallis St, Woollahra. Space in this building was let for a Kosher Restaurant. Although this caused many problems, it made the Folk Centre an important venue for the community.

In 1962 the Folk Centre convened an Extraordinary General Meeting at which a decision was taken to sell its Wallis Street property and join the proposed Community Centre. However, when the committee became aware of the heavy maintenance costs for which it would be responsible, the proposal was reconsidered and in 1963 the decision to join the Community Centre was rescinded.

The move to its present home at 23 Saber St, Bondi Junction was facilitated by a grant of US\$10,000 from the Claims Conference against Germany. As a consequence the Jewish Folk Centre is in the happy position of owning its own

building free of debt. This has been a source of great strength for the Folk Centre and an important resource for the whole community.

The Folk Centre building is used everyday of the week except the Sabbath. The Jewish Council of the Ageing carries on a busy programme in the building five days a week, the Sydney Jewish Choral Society has rehearsals one night a week and the Holocaust Survivors Organisation holds frequent functions at the Centre. Yiddish classes for adults are conducted on two nights a week and the Folk Centre presents cultural functions on Sunday afternoons two or three times a month. Yiddish and Hebrew Libraries are located in the Folk Centre and both are open to the public on Sunday mornings. There is some activity in the Folk Centre building all the time.

When the Folk Centre was founded, it set up a Yiddish Library as an important part of its cultural activities. Today that library contains 2000 volumes, expertly catalogued and maintained. The excellent condition of the Library is due to the devotion and dedication of the librarian, Isaac Turek and his co-worker Itzhak Gilberg. The books are displayed in handsome bookcases which were erected to the memory of former active members of the Folk Centre. One bookcase is in honour of Abraham Wells and Slzlamek Lipman. Another is named for Dr Peter Berger, Mottel Phillips and Y. Fromberg and the third commemorates Shimon Cappe and Myer Langman.

#### The Peretz Centre

The Folk Centre was established as a non-political cultural organisation. Some of the founders were supporters of the Bund, others were active Zionists and some had left wing sympathies. It was, therefore, inevitable that, at times, political differences would surface. At the Annual General Meeting in 1953, two groups vied for office. One group consisting of Shimon Cappe, Severyn Pejsachowicz, Hyam Brezniak and Jacob Horowitz moved out of the Folk Centre and established a rival Yiddish cultural organisation which was called the Peretz Centre. Shimon Cappe was the president and Severyn Pejsachowicz the secretary. Rabbi Falk supported the Peretz Centre which had close links with the Sydney Council to Combat Fascism and Anti-Semitism. The Peretz Centre met in the Maccabean Hall and carried on an active cultural programme until 1955 when most of its members returned to the Folk Centre.

In 1969 Shimon Cappe was elected president of the Folk Centre and he was succeeded by Severyn Pejsachowicz in 1970. Shimon Cappe personified an intense love for Yiddish. He was indefatigable as writer in the Yiddish press and on the platform in promoting Yiddish language and culture. As a delegate to the Board of Deputies he insisted on speaking Yiddish at Board meetings.

Haskel Davis became president in 1972 and continued in office until 1974 when Severyn Pejsachowicz was again elected. In 1975 Haskel Davis was re-elected president and held that position until the end of 1987, making him the longest serving president in the history of the Folk Centre.

#### Literary Competition

In 1970 the Folk Centre established an international literary and artistic competition for Yiddish writers and artists. It was known as the Waislitz-Cymmerman Prize to honour the memory of two men who had made major cultural contributions to the Folk Centre.

The competition was advertised throughout the Yiddish world and entries were

received from many countries. The competition continued until 1982. The prize winners were Rochel Holzer, Itzhak Kahan, the Australian Yiddish writer, Yehuda Elberg from Canada, Faivel Ziegelbaum, who came to Australia to receive the award, Lily Berger and Benjamin Shlevin.

#### Yiddish Radio

In 1975, through the initiative of Severyn Pejsachowicz, the Folk Centre applied for and obtained, time on the newly established Ethnic Radio 2EA. This became the Jewish Hour, broadcast three times a week.

The concept of Jews as an ethnic group was not easily accepted in the community at that time. There were strong differences in the Board of Deputies which did not wish to be connected to the Ethnic Radio and was pleased to designate the Folk Centre as the body to deal with the Radio. Today, opinions have changed and the Board of Deputies is fully supportive of the Ethnic Radio and is even represented on the executive of the Ethnic Communities Council.

For the first eleven years Severyn Pejsachowicz was the co-ordinator and announcer of the Jewish Hour. The other announcers were Alisa Siderowitz and Haskel Davis who were supported by Dr Abrusha Wajnryb and Hyam Brezniak in the preparation of news items. The first Yiddish programme that went to air was prepared by Isaac Turek.

New government regulations required Severyn Pejsachowicz and Haskel Davis to retire after 11 years. By that time the Jewish Hour, consisting of Yiddish, Hebrew and English segments was firmly established and appreciated by the community. Chaim Opperman took over as co-ordinator of the Yiddish segment and is also the announcer on the Sunday morning programme. Until 1992 the arrangement was that Alisa Siderowitz continued as the Yiddish announcer on the Friday afternoon, *Shabbat Shalom* session, and Ruth Leiser conducted the Wednesday evening session. On each day there was an English segment, presented by Margaret Gutman on Sundays, and Rochelle Eisenberg and Colin Cohn on one of the other days. A Hebrew programme followed the Yiddish on each of the three days. This was conducted by Nitza Lowenstein.

The significant factor is that, due to the initiative of the Folk Centre in 1975, the Jewish community gained and has maintained access to Radio 2EA, which is fully funded by the Commonwealth Government. Today, the Jewish programmes on 2EA are valued and important cultural and information links for all members of the community especially those whose mother tongue is Yiddish or Hebrew.

#### Recent Developments

In 1988, Severyn Pejsachowicz was again elected president with Sam Mane vice president, Nate Zusman, secretary and Haskel Davis, treasurer. They took office at a critical moment in the life of the Folk Centre. Time had taken its toll of the dynamic activists who founded and developed the Folk Centre. Migration of survivors had long since ceased. New forces were needed to maintain an active programme for the Folk Centre.

The new executive approached this problem with a degree of optimism. The migration of Jews from Russia and South Africa offered possibilities for new forces and the world wide revival of interest in Yiddish, particularly in universities, offered new opportunities to attract the younger generation. To tap these sources, the Folk Centre offered free membership to newcomers and re-introduced Yiddish classes

for adults. It adopted a policy of free admission to the majority of its functions. It also gave support to the efforts of Professor Alan Crown to introduce Yiddish into Sydney University.

The results which followed, far exceeded the expectations of the new executive. Well attended functions were held every fortnight. In the entertainment field the highlights were the Concert by Theodor Bikel and the presentation by the David Herman Theatre of Melbourne of the Yiddish play, *My Mother the General* — two performances in one day attended by 520 people. There were four Yiddish Concerts at the Folk Centre, arranged by Oscar Borecki with 100 present on each occasion and there were two screenings of the Yiddish film *Grine Felder* also to packed houses.

Yiddish lectures and *Living Newspapers* were a regular part of the programme. Special mention must be made of the scholarly lecture on Isaac Bashevis Singer by the Yiddish writer Itzchak Kahan. Isaac Bashevis Singer brought Yiddish to the attention of the whole world when he won the Nobel Prize. His obituary in *The Sydney Morning Herald* quoted him as asserting at every opportunity that “Yiddish would survive because it has vitamins that other languages do not. It is rich in words and expressions signifying character.” His passing was a great loss, but his writings will draw more and more Jewish people to Yiddish so that his fascinating stories can be read in the language in which they were written.

The outstanding event of 1988 was the visit of Professor Gershon Winer, Head of the Department of Yiddish at Bar-Ilan University in Israel. Brought to Australia by the *Kadimah*, Melbourne, the Folk Centre was fortunate to have him in Sydney for a few days. In that brief period he gave two brilliant talks, one of which was on the revival, interest and importance of Yiddish in conveying the essence of Jewish culture. He reinforced the conviction of the Folk Centre that a Chair of Yiddish at Sydney University would be a significant asset for the whole Jewish community. He was confident that it could be achieved. He offered to return to Sydney to lend his support for the realisation of this goal.

Probably inspired by Professor Winer there was a noticeable increase in the interest in Yiddish. This found a response in the number and calibre of applicants for the Yiddish classes for Adults.

The executive of Severyn Pejsachowicz, president, Sam Mane, vice president, Nate Zusman, secretary and Haskel Davis, treasurer was re-elected for 1989. Encouraged by the increased support for the Folk Centre in 1988, the executive determined to maintain the momentum in 1989. Functions continued to be held every fortnight and some of these aroused great interest. Such an event was the Yiddish lecture by Professor Israel Gutman of the Hebrew University on the famous historian of the Warsaw Ghetto, Emanuel Ringelblum. It was one of the most profound and moving lectures ever delivered at the Folk Centre. Outstanding also was the presentation of Yiddish classics by the Israeli actress Hadassah Kestin. She made an unforgettable impression on the audience that packed the hall. A highlight of the year was the visit and lecture by Abram Stuchynski, the only survivor of the founders of the Folk Centre, who now lives in Israel. He recalled the enthusiasm and excitement engendered by Dr Steinberg, which led to the founding of the Folk Centre.

Revival of interest in Yiddish Theatre  
and the Study of the Yiddish Language

The visit to Sydney by the Ester Rachel Kaminska Yiddish Theatre from Warsaw raised questions in the Folk Centre as to whether the group should be received by the Folk Centre. Discussions were held with the Board of Deputies which indicated that the Board had no reservations against contact with the group. As it turned out the Israeli Consul was interested in meeting the Polish Consul-General on neutral ground and the reception that the Folk Centre made for the visitors provided a convenient venue. Apart from the group of actors, guests at the reception were the Consul-General and Cultural Consul of Poland, the Israeli Consul, the president of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies and other communal leaders. This gave the occasion a deeper significance than just a reception for a visiting theatrical group.

Each of the actors presented some excerpts from their repertoire and their leader, Mr Szurmiej, a Jewish member of the Polish Parliament, spoke on the support that Yiddish theatre was receiving from the Polish Government. It was an enjoyable and memorable evening. The Ester Rochel Kaminska group gave four performances in Yiddish at the Seymour Theatre and provided facilities for instant translation from Yiddish to English.

1989 was a big year for entertainment. Apart from the visit of the Ester Rochel Kaminska Theatre group from Poland, the Folk Centre joined with the Hakoah Club in presenting three concerts by the famous artist Yaffa Yarkoni. Each concert was a sellout. The David Herman Theatre Group of Melbourne came to Sydney and presented two performances of the Yiddish play, *High Society*, directed by Rosa Turkow. As in the previous year the Folk Centre Theatre Group under the direction of Oscar Borecki presented a number of concerts in the Folk Centre to capacity audiences. During the year arrangements were made with the *Kadimah*, which owned a number of 35mm Yiddish films, for the Folk Centre to gain a copy of each of these films transferred onto video cassette. The Folk Centre paid the cost of making the video cassettes. This enabled the Folk Centre to show Yiddish films in its own hall. There were two showings of each of the films, *Der Yiddishe Kenig Lear* The Jewish King Lear and *As Men Git Namt Men*. Shalom College made its large video projector available to the Folk Centre for these showings. A source of great satisfaction was the growing support for the Yiddish classes for adults. At the end of the year the students gave a public demonstration of the remarkable progress they had made.

After two outstandingly successful years as president, Severyn Pejsachowicz relinquished that position but became vice president. Sam Mane was elected president for 1990 and the other members of the executive were Nate Zusman, secretary and Haskel Davis, treasurer. The new executive determined to maintain the momentum of the two previous years and continued to hold public functions every fortnight. It was very encouraged to have new and younger participants in the cultural programme. The first lecture of the year was by the new youthful Israeli Consul, Ahron Ram, who spoke in Yiddish on 'Yiddish in Israel Today'. He was followed by Rabbi Marc Sevy of the Sephardi Synagogue, who also spoke in Yiddish. His theme was 'Chassidism and Its Opponents'.

It was the lecture in Yiddish by Professor Sol Encel that gave the greatest satisfaction. That a lecturer of the calibre of Professor Encel was prepared to deliver

a lecture in Yiddish was considered indicative of the growing interest in Yiddish by the generations not brought up in eastern Europe but seeking to know more of the culture of their parents and grandparents.

Two other events during the year reinforced this view — the large attendances at the Klezmer Concerts in the State Theatre and the popularity with young people of the films in Yiddish at the first Jewish Film Festival presented by the Australian Film Institute.

### The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Folk Centre

A major preoccupation during the year was the planning for the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Folk Centre in 1991. A special sub-committee consisting of Severyn Pejsachowicz, Sam Mane and Nate Zusman, was set up to make the arrangements for that important event. The principal goal set for the fiftieth anniversary was to advance the establishment of a Chair of Yiddish at Sydney University. The groundwork had been laid by Professor Alan Crown. The university was receptive to the proposal but it required a guarantee that it would be fully funded by the Jewish community for a number of years. It was decided to invite Professor Gershen Winer of Bar-Ilan University to be the principal guest at the celebrations and to take up the offer made on his previous visit to use his undoubted talent to assist in raising funds for the Yiddish Chair.

A history of the fifty years of the Folk Centre was also to be produced in 1991. Moshe Ajzenbud, Yiddish writer and president of the Kadimah was commissioned to research and write the history. This will be published together with an English translation later in the year.

Sam Mane was re-elected president for 1991 with Severyn Pejsachowicz, vice president, Nate Zusman, secretary and

Henry Roland, treasurer. A most heartening aspect of the Annual General Meeting was the election by secret ballot of two young members to the Committee, John Lenn and Chaim Opperman. This gave further confirmation to the trend of growing interest in Yiddish by the younger generation.

The Fiftieth Anniversary Celebrations began with the Golden Jubilee Party held in the rooms of the National Council of Jewish Women in Woollahra on Sunday 9 June 1991. It was a memorable and happy occasion. The hall normally accommodates 200 people seated at tables, but room was made for 240. The guest of honour, Professor Gershen Winer was accompanied by his wife. Special guests



1941 Jewish Folk Centre and Library 1991

1941 — — — — — 1991

**50 יאר**  
**פאלקס-צענטער**  
און סיידוני  
א.נ.ו. פון שלום עליכם

פראגראם פון דער פייערונג

זונטיק, דעם 9-טן יוני 1991, 2.30 נ.מ.

אין סאקאל פון נאציאנאל-ראט פון יידישע מדינה

*Souvenir Programme*  
for the  
*Golden Jubilee Party*  
at the  
National Council Hall, 111 Queen St. Woollahra  
on  
Sunday 9th June 1991 at 2.30 pm

Guest of Honour  
Professor Gershen Winer  
Head of Department of Yiddish at  
Bar-Ilan University, Israel

Guest Artist  
JUDITH LECHTER  
Internationally Acclaimed Soprano  
from Montreal, Canada

Jewish Folk Centre and Library  
23 Sabar St., Woollahra, N.S.W. 2025, Australia  
Telephone (02) 389-3565

Jewish Folk Centre and Library  
23 Sabar St., Woollahra, N.S.W. 2025, Australia  
Telephone (02) 389-3565

were Mr and Mrs Sydney D. Einfeld, Rabbi Raymond Apple, Professor and Mrs Alan Crown, Professor Sol Encel, Mr Norton Whitmont, president of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society, Mrs Leila Share, president of WIZO and Mr Share, Dr Ivan Cher, Chairman of the Joint Committee for Tertiary Jewish Studies and Mrs Cher, Mr Myer Kangan, president of C.O.A., Mr Stephan Kerkyasharian, chairman of the Ethnic Affairs Commission of N.S.W., Mr Quang Luu, head of SBS Radio and Mr Bill Jegorow of the Ethnic Committees Council.

Professor Winer gave an inspiring address on the incomparable role of Yiddish in expressing and spreading Jewish values. Through his good offices, Judith Lechter, the internationally acclaimed Jewish soprano from Montreal had come to Sydney especially to participate in the Folk Centre celebrations. She delighted everyone with her singing of Yiddish and Hebrew songs.

Professor Winer gave a number of outstanding lectures during his stay in Sydney, but his most important activity was at small gatherings and private meetings with individuals and groups in the community to gain practical support for funding the Yiddish Chair. He was indefatigable and most convincing. He addressed the staff of the Faculty of Arts at Sydney University and established the closest rapport with the Dean of the Faculty, so much so that the Dean is now an enthusiastic supporter for a Chair of Yiddish. He laid down strict guidelines for the Yiddish Chair which, if accepted by the University, would result in Bar-Ilan University making professors and lecturers available to Sydney.

The basic condition was that Yiddish should be taught as a living language and accepted as a subject for a major. To major in Yiddish, students would be required to pass in Hebrew and Jewish civilisation. Thus the Yiddish Chair would encompass not only Yiddish language and literature, but would be the most important centre of Jewish Studies in Australia and the source for Jewish Studies teachers for the Jewish Day Schools. Right from the outset scholarships would be available to outstanding students who undertake to major in Yiddish. At a time when there is an urgent need to involve more students in Jewish tertiary studies, the Yiddish Chair could be the means of achieving this goal.

The groundwork for the Yiddish Chair has been laid by Professor Alan Crown and taken close to realisation by Professor Winer and the Jewish Folk Centre. All that is needed to bring it to fruition are the funds to endow the Chair. Already a number of philanthropists have indicated support. More are needed. The Folk Centre is confident they will come forward. The Yiddish Chair remains the principal



*Professor G. Winer  
June, 1991 Folk Centre 50th Anniversary*

goal of the Folk Centre's Fiftieth Anniversary. It will not let up until it is achieved.

#### Conclusion

For the past 50 years, the Jewish Folk Centre has been a haven for residents and newcomers seeking to meet Jews with similar backgrounds and to enjoy a wide range of Yiddish cultural activities. It has been the only place in Sydney where important visitors, whose mother-tongue was Yiddish, could express themselves freely and fully. From its inception, it made an important impact on the Jewish community by the central role it played in the events leading to the establishment of the N.S.W. Jewish Board of Deputies. It has given active support to all community endeavours, in particular participation in the United Israel Appeal and Jewish Communal Appeals. Its building is a valuable community resource utilised by wide sections of the community. Despite all these achievements over the past 50 years, the Folk Centre enters its fifty-first year determined to make an even greater contribution by the establishment of a Yiddish Chair, which will provide the opportunity for Jewish youth to acquire deeper knowledge and appreciation of Jewish culture and values.

The fortuitous presence in Sydney, 50 years ago of Dr Israel Nachman Steinberg, probably one of the most outstanding Jewish personalities ever to have visited Australia, led to the founding of the Jewish Folk Centre. The visit to Sydney in 1991 of Professor Gershon Winer, another charismatic personality, inspired the Jewish Folk Centre to pursue the establishment of a Chair of Yiddish. Dr Steinberg could well be pleased with the Folk Centre's 50 years continuous activities and its goal to establish a Chair of Yiddish at Sydney University.

#### Acknowledgments

The writer has drawn on the unpublished Yiddish history of the Jewish Folk Centre by Moshe Ajzenbud and is indebted to Chaim Opperman for translation of this work.

#### NOTES

- 1 Stedman, S. 'Dr Steinberg in Australia' *A.J.H.S. Journal* Vol. V Part 4.
- 2 Liberman, Serge 'Yiddish Theatre in Perth, Brisbane and Sydney' *A.J.H.S. Journal* Vol. IX Part I.
- 3 Stedman, S. 'The Eighteen Signatories' *A.J.H.S. Journal* Vol. VI Part 8.

## 'I AM MY BROTHER'S KEEPER': THE CENTRAL ROLE PLAYED BY OVRESEAS JEWRY IN THE RECEPTION AND INTEGRATION OF POSTWAR JEWISH IMMIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA

by Suzanne D. Rutland

As has been shown in a number of studies, Australian Jewry was changed dramatically by postwar Jewish immigration. In the period 1945 to 1954 17,000 Jewish immigrants made Australia their home, with most settling in Melbourne (which received 60 percent) and Sydney (which received about 40 percent). As I have argued in my book *Edge of the Diaspora*, these figures could have been larger had it not been for the discriminatory policy introduced by the Australian government, and the Jewish community continued to constitute only half a percent of the general population. However, the Jewish community did double

in size and the postwar immigrants radically changed every aspect of Jewish life in Australia. This significant development could not have occurred so successfully without the financial assistance of overseas Jewish organisations, in particular in the years until 1954 from the United States and, after 1954, from the Claims Conferences. This article seeks to outline these important developments for Australian Jewry.<sup>1</sup>

The Australian government, both Labor and Liberal, insisted that the reception and integration of the refugees was the responsibility of the Jewish community. No government funds were to be expended on Jews because of the fear of political repercussions. The task of accommodating the newcomers and helping those in need to find their feet in a new land was assumed by the sponsors of the refugees. Australian Jewish Welfare Societies (AJWS, Sydney and the AJW&RS, Melbourne) directly sponsored some of the refugees and acted as a backup service for those who were sponsored privately but required assistance. Boats were met, immigrants were helped with finding employment or setting up in business through interest free loans and there were two different schemes to assist orphan survivors of the Holocaust who wished to immigrate to Australia. This was too immense an undertaking for Australian Jewry to finance alone and they appealed to overseas Jewish communities, particularly in the United States. The absorption of Jewish immigrants into Australia in the post-war era became a joint enterprise between the local and overseas Jewries.

In spite of initial problems in some areas due to anti-foreign discrimination, most of the post-war immigrants managed to re-establish themselves successfully and to put behind them the horrors of their experiences during the European Holocaust. By the late 1950s the Australian Jewish Welfare Society (AJWS) moved from an ad-hoc approach to integration and welfare to the introduction of professionalisation and the expansion of services, encompassing the unemployed, the aged, the orphaned, sick, mentally ill and people suffering from social problems such as alcoholism. Thus, the situation had changed from the 1930s and 1940s when the newcomers complained bitterly of being patronised by noble-minded yet heavy-handed honorary workers and officials.<sup>2</sup> In the same period, Australian Jewry's demographic structure also changed, with further concentration of Jewish settlement in Sydney and Melbourne, the latter community emerging as the largest and strongest Jewish community in Australia as a result of the efforts of the Australian Jewish Welfare and Relief Society (AJW&RS).

#### I

In order to carry out the Welfare Societies' tasks of reception and absorption, ample finance was required. The pre-war activities had been funded partly by local appeals the first of which was conducted by the German Jewish Refugees' Fund in 1936, raising approximately £50,000. A further appeal was conducted by the AJWS in 1938, also raising £50,000 of which Sydney contributed £20,000. In addition, the NSW Jewish Welfare Society received financial assistance from American Jewry following visits by Paul Cohen (later Cullen) and Gerald de Vahl Davis to New York. Most of the funds came from the Refugee Economic Corporation (REC) under the chairmanship of Charles J. Liebman. The REC allocated US\$40,000 in 1938 for the creation of Mutual Farms and Mutual Enterprises and a further US\$100,000 in 1939, as well as an American Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) allocation to the

AJWS of US\$31,000. During the war years, smaller sums were allocated by the JDC, for example \$3,500 was donated towards the maintenance of 50 Polish Jewish refugees who arrived from Japan in 1941 and \$4,521 was given in 1943.<sup>1</sup>

From 1945 to 1947 the activities of the Welfare Society in Sydney were financed by personal donations and contributions from families who were sponsoring surviving relatives in Europe. The Sydney Society refused to give financial assistance to recent newcomers, except in very exceptional cases, as they believed that guarantors had to live up to their obligations or the whole scheme would be jeopardised. In Melbourne, the situation was very different as funds were provided through United Jewish Overseas Relief Fund (UJORF) and relief payments were given to newcomers in need. In Melbourne, money was also collected from families applying for landing permits and this money was put into a 'so-called immigration fund' which was not directly under the jurisdiction of the Welfare Society.<sup>2</sup> Once a landing permit was issued, the sponsoring family was required if possible to make a deposit towards transportation costs. In 1947 £60,000 was held in deposit for family sponsors in Sydney and over £125,000 in Melbourne.<sup>3</sup>

In January 1947, with the end of the close relatives' scheme, Calwell agreed that the AJWS could, itself, sponsor immigrants from Europe and Shanghai provided that they had trade qualifications suitable for Australia and that they would not compete with Australians for accommodation. By June 1947, as Masel's negotiations in regard to Shanghai appeared to be progressing favourably, the need for adequate finance and good organisation became more pressing. In order to assist in these areas, as well as to become better acquainted with the position of Australian Jewry in general, the JDC representative in Shanghai, Charles Jordan, visited Australia. He met with many people involved with immigration<sup>4</sup> and stressed the need to provide proper reception and emergency shelter, as well as relief and rehabilitation, to ensure that the immigrants did not become a 'public menace'<sup>5</sup> He believed that the refugees from Shanghai would initially arrive in Brisbane and those from Europe in Perth and that it was important to provide good reception centres to ensure that they would settle in the less populous states and not congregate in Sydney or Melbourne.<sup>6</sup>

Jordan was confident that the JDC would be willing to provide adequate financial backing for his proposals but advised that an active federal organisation was required since 'we [in the JDC] are not prepared to deal with 17 different societies or agencies',<sup>7</sup> a concept which Brand had proposed shortly before Jordan's visit, by Brand.<sup>8</sup> With the impetus of Jordan's visit, an interstate immigration conference was held in Melbourne on 7 & 8 September 1947. The state Welfare Societies agreed to federate, with the head office of the Federation of the Australian Jewish Welfare Societies (FAJWSs) being in Sydney and Brand its chief executive officer and liaison person with the government. All Welfare Society Form 47 cases were to be sponsored by the Federation which would provide maintenance and accommodation guarantees. The Federation also aimed at co-ordinating the activities of the state Welfare Societies. It was decided that 40 per cent of the migrant intake would go to NSW and Victoria respectively, 8 per cent to Queensland and Western Australia, respectively, 3 per cent to South Australia and one per cent to Tasmania.<sup>9</sup> This breakup did not eventuate as planned and 60 per cent of the newcomers arrived in Melbourne, almost 40 per cent to Sydney with a

few hundred settling in Brisbane and Adelaide.

In November 1947 the government approved of the creation of the FAJWSs and accepted their guarantee for maintenance of Federation sponsored cases (Form 47) who were not to be a charge on the state for up to five years. The Federation was also required by the government to provide temporary shelter for married Jewish immigrants sponsored by them for a period of six to twelve months and to assist in finding them employment. For those cases where maintenance was not guaranteed, the commonwealth migration officers were instructed to ensure that:

The person on whose behalf the application has been lodged:-

- (i) in cases where the nominees will engage in employment in Australia is in a position to find them suitable employment.
- (ii) has made satisfactory arrangements for the accommodation of his nominees without detriment to local persons.
- (iii) does not constitute a security risk to the Commonwealth.<sup>10</sup>

The Welfare Society was also informed that the number of Jewish immigrants suggested at the conference with Jordan was unrealistic. It was stressed that only 15 per cent of International Refugee Organisation (IRO) selectees would be Jewish since Jews would not be dealt with as a separate category, while only 300 Jews would be admitted from Shanghai for the twelve month period from November 1947.<sup>11</sup> The drafting of the final form of the constitution of the FAJWSs was left to the NSW delegation, but interstate problems between Sydney and Melbourne delayed its finalisation. Symonds requested Melbourne to advance £100 to the Federation, but Melbourne refused, insisting that they wished to see the constitution. Consequently, it took over six months after Jordan's departure for the details of the Federation to be finalised.<sup>12</sup>

The government's stipulation of an accommodation guarantee for couples and families, together with the guarantee that Federation sponsored immigrants would not become a burden on the state, placed great financial strains on the FAJWS. The local Australian Jewish community was not large enough and did not have sufficient finance to carry out such guarantees. Appeals were made for further financial assistance to American Jewry. Already in May 1947, before the creation of the Federation, Harry Lesnie had written to Liebman for further financial support. Liebman replied offering full American support and also mentioned that he had met Edward Warburg, chairman of the JDC, in regard to finance for Australia and that it had been agreed that in future all JDC and REC matters pertaining to co-operation with Australia would be handled by the REC. Liebman believed that the REC was the correct organisation in America to assist since the JDC largely dealt with emergency relief while the REC concentrated on economic rehabilitation.<sup>13</sup>

In September 1947 Cullen wrote to Liebman requesting a grant from the REC. This request was discussed at a REC meeting held on 15 October 1947 and it was agreed in principle that US\$50,000 would be allocated to Australia<sup>14</sup> but there was a delay in Australian Jewry requesting the money because of the transportation problems. In March 1948 Liebman wrote to Symonds expressing his disappointment at the delay and suggested that the money be used for acquiring hostels and granting interim loans to newcomers because 'the plight of Jews is such that it seems anomalous that all the funds are not put to use'.<sup>15</sup> After further correspondence, involving the question of whether the money should be sent direct

to the AJWS or to Mutual Enterprises because Symonds did not wish the latter's chairman, Felix Freeman, to be in the position where he could interfere, US\$25,000 was remitted to Australia in September 1948 and in January 1949 the balance of the money was sent.<sup>16</sup> A further US\$12,500 was sent to be specifically utilised by Mutual Enterprise's loan assistance programme.<sup>17</sup>

The granting of funds from America was dependent upon Australian Jewry raising an equivalent amount. In 1948 the Welfare Society launched its first Australia-wide appeal for a decade. The chances of a successful campaign were doubtful because the Emergency Jewish State Appeal had been run by the Zionists in early 1948 when large sums had been raised.<sup>18</sup> Appeals were made to the Jewish communities to support the work of the Welfare Societies. Dr Hans Kimmel wrote:

The cause of the campaign is so worthy that even those newcomers whom the Welfare Society treated as 'unwanted foreigners' will feel inclined to forget the past record of the Society and look to the future. In the last few years the service of the Welfare Society has improved. The Executive has tackled problems with energy... it is an obligation to old and new citizens to help in fund-raising.<sup>19</sup>

Despite such pleas for support, the results of the appeal were disappointing because of calls made on the community by the previous appeals for the Children's Scheme and the Zionist appeals. In addition, many of the newcomers, especially those who arrived before 1940, retained a great sense of bitterness towards the AJWS and refused to donate to the appeal. In Sydney only £11,000 was raised instead of the £25,000 hoped for while in Melbourne the response was not substantially better.<sup>20</sup>

Financial problems continued to beset the work of the Federation and in 1949 further requests were made to the REC.<sup>21</sup> By mid-1949 Symonds decided that no further applications could be made for Federation sponsored cases because it was impossible to honour the accommodation guarantee with the Society's limited financial resources.<sup>22</sup> The situation was even more acute in Melbourne because many more applications had been put forward on behalf of various *landsmannschaften*, townsfolk organisations representing Jews from various towns from Poland such as Bialystok and Warsaw who had immigrated to Melbourne in the 1920s and 1930s. Brand wrote to New York to Emery H. Komlos begging that he, or one of his colleagues, come to Australia to investigate the situation in person. Komlos agreed to visit Australia as a representative of the JDC, HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) and the REC to study the exact needs of the FAJWS. Komlos had been involved with Australian financial problems since early 1949 and had quite a detailed knowledge of the Australian situation through his lengthy correspondence with Symonds.<sup>23</sup>

On arrival in Australia in September 1949, Komlos held discussions with Welfare Society officials in Sydney, especially in regard to accommodation, and then visited the various Australian states.<sup>24</sup> He explained the difference between the three organisations he represented and stressed that they were very hard pressed for funds.<sup>25</sup> After his investigations, Komlos flew on to Paris where he wrote a preliminary report, a copy of which he left with Jordan. He himself did not live to complete his task as he died in an Air France disaster on his flight to New York.<sup>26</sup>

Komlos' death was felt as a great loss to Australian Jewry where, as Rabbi Rubin-Zacks of Perth wrote, 'his quiet, persuasive manner, coupled with singular charm and tact and added to sound knowledge and judgement, made him the centre of admiration'.<sup>27</sup> On the basis of Komlos's preliminary report combined with a visit to New York by Fink in November 1949, US\$200,000 was set aside for Australia in 1950 to be paid in installments.<sup>28</sup>

The Federation continued to be plagued by lack of funds. In 1952, after lengthy correspondence and Australian insistence that unless more funds were made available immigration would cease, £23,000 was allotted to NSW with remittances being made in February and April 1952.<sup>29</sup> After 1954, the Claims Conferences took over from the JDC the role of providing financial assistance for immigration to Australia and negotiations with the Claims Conferences became the domain of the ECAJ leadership.<sup>30</sup>

Other avenues for finance were also sought for Federation cases. In 1953 contact was made with the Jewish Colonisation Association (ICA) in England. In December 1953, Leslie Prince of the ICA Board arrived in Australia to study the situation, partly because the Department had agreed to the immigration of a number of Jewish survivors from Foehrenwald, Munich.<sup>31</sup> After spending a few weeks in Australia, visiting Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra, Prince returned to London.<sup>32</sup> When Einfeld was in London en route to representing Australia at the 1954 first Claims Conference, he met a number of members of the ICA executive to discuss Australian Jewry's future needs.<sup>33</sup> Following these discussions ICA and JDC offered £25,000 to help Jewish immigrants who had settled in Australia since 1945, with the monies to be administered jointly by the AJWS, Sydney and the AJW&RS, Melbourne.<sup>34</sup> ICA later added the condition that the monies, which were to be used for short term loans up to £A1,000, could be allocated only to migrants who had been in Australia for at least six months and had not arrived earlier than 1 January 1953.<sup>35</sup> Einfeld was dissatisfied with this condition which had not been mentioned when he was in England and it was finally agreed that the money could be used for cases who had arrived earlier provided that £2,500 was kept in reserve for newcomers who had arrived after January 1953.<sup>36</sup> The monies were divided jointly between Sydney and Melbourne and in 1955 a further allocation of £12,500 for each city was made.<sup>37</sup> With the Hungarian influx ICA and JDC again offered financial assistance, up to a total of £65,000, to Einfeld and Brand during their stay in Europe between December 1956 and January 1957.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, with the arrival of Polish Jews in 1958 the JDC granted £10,000 to Melbourne Jewry, the destination of most of these immigrants with a further grant of £25,000 in 1959.<sup>39</sup>

The allocation of these sums of money from American Jewry marked a significant policy change for Australian Jewry. Whereas before 1939 most Australian Jewish contacts had been primarily with Britain and, to a lesser extent with European Jewry, after the war there was a reorientation towards the United States which also occurred within the general community, especially in foreign policy. The importance of American Jewry as numerically the largest Jewish community in the world was recognised by the Australian Jewish leadership.<sup>40</sup> Without the American financial assistance, Australian Jewry would not have been able to implement its post-war immigration welfare programme which included meeting boats, providing accommodation, child migration schemes and assisting with

employment, medical needs and social readjustment.

## II

After 1954, the financial assistance which had been given by American Jewry was taken over by the Claims Conferences. The negotiations for this development and the subsequent yearly allocations were carried out by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) which took over this responsibility from the FAJWSs although, in Sydney, these two roles were represented in the one man — Sydney D. Einfeld. The restitution, compensation and indemnification for the loss of property, both real and personal, formerly belonging to Jewish victims of Nazism by the West German government, was a burning issue for postwar Jewry. As early as 1945 the issue of indemnification was raised in Australia and in 1946 Dr George Berger, Honorary Secretary of the Jewish Unity Committee in Sydney, corresponded with Chifley, then Federal Treasurer, in relation to Australian government support for claims by Australian citizens against Germany. Chifley promised to look into the matter but nothing definite eventuated.<sup>1</sup> The lack of interest of the Australian government in this matter led Dr S.W. Krieger to claim later in the *New Citizen* that while the Commonwealth government was actively sponsoring the claims of the Templars for £3,500,000 from the Israeli government, it was not giving any assistance to the Jewish refugees with claims in Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria and Hungary.<sup>2</sup>

In 1951 the West German government proposed that both moral and material reparations should be made for the destruction of European Jewry by allocating funds to the various Jewish communities throughout the world. This money was to be for 'heirless' property which had become part of the assets of the West German government. In October 1951 a meeting was called in New York with representatives from the USA, France, England, Canada, Australia, South Africa and South America to discuss the issue of restitution. The ECAJ was unable to send a representative to this meeting and Maurice Perlzweig of the WJC represented Australian Jewry.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this meeting, an organisation called the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (COJMCAG) was incorporated in the USA to lodge a claim on Jewish heirless property in West Germany in the name of the Jewish people as a whole. After much debate, the Israeli government decided that it would claim 'reparations in lieu of restitution of heirless Jewish property to assist in the tremendous task of rehabilitating Jewish victims of Hitler's persecution in the State of Israel'.<sup>4</sup> Initially it was hoped that Israel, and the Jewish Conference for Material Claims against Germany, would be able to negotiate with Germany through an intermediary such as the UN or one of the great powers but none agreed to act as mediator and Israel and the Jewish Claims Conference decided to deal directly with Germany.<sup>5</sup>

After lengthy negotiations between the government of Israel, the Conference and West Germany, an agreement for the disposition of the property and the proceeds was signed at Luxemburg in September 1952. This agreement provided that the property should become vested in the West German Government and that cash or goods to its value should be made available, over a term of twelve years, to Israel. A proportion of the value would then be paid by Israel to the Conference for distribution in accordance with a carefully drawn up set of rules to Jewish organisations throughout the world which were engaged in the relief, rehabilitation

and resettlement of the Jewish victims of Nazi persecution.<sup>6</sup>

This decision sparked a great debate within Australian Jewry mirroring reactions in other parts of the Jewish world. Some favoured the acceptance of reparations as it was only right that the victims of Nazism should be assisted by their former persecutors; others considered reparations as 'blood money' and believed that there should not be any relationship with Germany.<sup>7</sup> In an emotive sermon at the Great Synagogue in August 1950, Rabbi L.A. Falk strongly criticised those claiming compensation which he referred to as 'blood money' and he argued that Jews should maintain their dignity.<sup>8</sup> These differences of opinion were reflected in the opposing positions taken by New South Wales and Victoria. The New South Wales Board voted in support of Israel's position, whereas in Victoria, under Ashkanasy's presidency, the ECAJ voted against the negotiations with West Germany. Further debate and discussion, with Einfeld strongly supporting reparations, led to a reversal of the Victorian position and in July 1952 the Australian Jewish community decided to participate in German reparations through the ECAJ, with Einfeld as a director of the COJMCAG.<sup>9</sup>

Another area of debate was the question of which was the appropriate body to represent the claims of the Jewish victims of Nazism. In Sydney, the Association of New Citizens (ANC) led by Dr Max Joseph believed that the Association should be the representative body in regard to reparations. Dr Joseph argued that the Association represented the victims of Nazism and as such it was entitled to the funds. He claimed that the ANC had been concerned with reparations since 1945 and that at the signing of the 1952 agreement with West Germany the ANC had been represented through the Council for German Jews, UK.<sup>10</sup> Thus, it was the body most qualified to deal with the issue.<sup>11</sup>



*Sydney D. Einfeld*

This view was strongly opposed by Einfeld who believed that only the ECAJ as the roof body of Australian Jewry could represent the claimants. In September 1953 Einfeld wrote to Saul Kagan, secretary of COJMCAG, that the ANC was not a Jewish organisation, as its membership comprised both Jews and non-Jews.<sup>12</sup> The ANC sought to negotiate with Einfeld over the issue of representation. At a fiery meeting on 10 November 1953 a motion was proposed that ANC three members, who were also members of the Board of Deputies, approach the Board in a private capacity to try and bring about co-operation between the ECAJ and the ANC. No vote, however, was taken as Dr Joseph, while agreeing with the spirit of the motion felt that it would interfere with the freedom of his Executive.<sup>13</sup> On 13 November 1953 Dr Joseph met with Einfeld and argued that the ANC should have a consultative voice in decisions relating to the distribution of funds. At the ANC's tenth AGM a motion was passed that the

ANC 'would welcome continued co-operation between our Association and the ECAJ in matters referring to German and Austrian restitution, compensation and indemnification'.<sup>14</sup> Further correspondence ensued but in February 1954 Joseph announced that the ECAJ did not wish to co-operate and that the ANC could not continue as its secretary, Dr S.W. Krieger was resigning in April 1954.<sup>15</sup> At a general meeting held in March 1954 Dr Joseph stressed that there was no way of keeping the ANC alive either as a voluntary scheme or functioning with part-time staff as there was a lack of time and expert experience among the voluntary workers as well as a general waning of interest in the ANC.<sup>16</sup> He spoke bitterly about the local Jewish community and claimed in regard to indemnification that:

There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that the community of refugees is the only community entitled, legally and morally, to the indemnification money which is to be distributed by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims. The refusal of the Conference to entrust us with the administration of monies destined for us is based on the reasoning that our organisation is not Jewish...

We have made our hardest efforts to co-operate with the local Jewish Organisations. We have never met with any friendly attitude and, particularly in the most recent past, it became obvious that there is not the slightest inclination on the other side to work out a workable compromise between the naturally different attitudes.<sup>17</sup>

The ANC met for the last time on 8 April 1954 when the vote was taken to wind up the Association.

The first Claims Conference to distribute funds from the West German government was held in 1954. This assistance proved invaluable for Australian Jewry's absorption of immigrants, since the local community could only raise 25 per cent of the money required for immigrant welfare and it replaced earlier allocations from the American Jewish welfare organisations. All claims on behalf of the Federation of the AJWSs for victims of Nazi persecution were to be made through the ECAJ, a 'Jewish victim' being defined as:

Every Jew who was displaced by Nazi persecution, which would include all Jews resident in the European countries under Hitler's rule, starting with 1933, is a victim of National Socialist persecution in the meaning of the above resolution. Persecution may have taken the form of deprivation of means of livelihood, as well as deprivation of liberty. The controlling factor in my opinion is whether the individual suffered damage in one form or another as a result of Nazi action.<sup>18</sup>

Each year a specific amount was allotted to various organisations according to their role in migrant absorption. An office was set up under the auspices of the ECAJ to process the applications from the various Jewish organisations and forward these applications with comments to the Claims Conference which made the final decisions.<sup>19</sup>

The ECAJ presidents (alternatively Ashkanasy and Einfeld)<sup>20</sup> travelled overseas to represent Australia's interests at the Claims Conference meetings. Einfeld attended

the first Claims Conference held in New York in March 1954 when Australian Jewry was allocated £40,000 for the relief, rehabilitation and resettlement of Jewish refugees. These funds were to be supervised by the American Joint Distribution Committee since 'the conference is fully aware of the close and continual relationship between the AJDC and the Australian Jewish Community'.<sup>21</sup> In addition £2,000 was granted by the Department of Cultural and Educational Reconstruction in the form of stipends for two students studying at the *Lubavitch Yeshivab* in Melbourne.<sup>22</sup> At each subsequent conference the president of the ECAJ faced a battle to have the needs of Australian Jewry recognised. At the second Claims Conference held in December 1954 Ashkanasy put the case for Australian Jewry very forcefully stressing that the local community was 'swamped by the flood of post-war refugees', and that the community 'would be in severe straits without overseas assistance'. He pointed out that since 1933 the Australian Jewish community had experienced an increase through immigration of more than 100%, 'a figure which was substantially greater than that of any other Jewish community outside of Israel'.<sup>23</sup> Despite these arguments, when he met with Moses A. Leavitt in New York, Ashkanasy found that Leavitt 'scoffed at what we regard so proudly as our achievements'.<sup>24</sup> Ashkanasy was not defeated by Leavitt's attitude and he sought allies among other COJMCAG directors so that in January 1955 Australia received a substantial proportion of the monies requested.<sup>25</sup>



*Maurice J. Ashkanasy, leading Melbourne communal figure and ECAJ president and senior vice-president, 1948 to 1970.*

Similarly, Einfeld faced many difficulties especially in 1958 when he experienced problems in achieving recognition for the Australian claims for cultural and educational reconstruction. After strong representation, a precedent was set with £5,000 being granted to Moriah College, Sydney, £1,000 to the St Kilda and Elwood Talmud Torahs, and £4,500 for the *Yeshivab*, Melbourne.<sup>26</sup> In response to this achievement, David Feiglin, president of *Yeshivab* College, Melbourne, congratulated Einfeld on his efforts and wrote that '[It] is abundantly clear from reports leaking through that it was your personal zeal and drive which brought your advocacy to a successful conclusion.'<sup>27</sup> Further difficulties were experienced in 1959 resulting in lengthy correspondence and negotiations.<sup>28</sup>

In order to establish procedures in the analysis of applications and to help assess the various applications COJMCAG decided to send 'rapporteurs' to Australia. This was because requests for assistance from the various Jewish communities were much greater than the available funds.<sup>29</sup> In August 1956, Herbert Katzki, who was Assistant Director-General of AJDC, Paris, and had been associated with AJDC since 1936, working in many European countries, was sent to Australia to act in such a

capacity. Katzki spent three weeks in Australia during which time he visited Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide and Brisbane and was accompanied by Walter Brand.<sup>30</sup> In 1957 by Moses Leavitt, Executive Vice-Chairman of AJDC since 1947 and honorary secretary of COJMCAG was chosen while in 1959 Dr Judah Shapiro, who had been Director of the Department of Cultural and Educational Reconstruction (part of COJMCAG) until 1956 was the rapporteur.

The processing of the applications as well as of monies received was complicated. Each organisation which received a grant was expected to supply quarterly accounting of how the money was spent and the ECAJ was responsible for administering these reports.<sup>31</sup> The cost of administering the various applications was over £1,000 each year and the ECAJ did not have such funds. At first the COJMCAG executives expected the ECAJ to cover its administrative costs<sup>32</sup> but by 1956 Katzki, after his visit to Australia, realised the difficulties and wrote that 'I imagine that the cash position of the ECAJ is not too brilliant and that there are subvention payments on Conference allocations which are due'.<sup>33</sup> The issue of the ECAJ using Conference Claims' funds for administration expenses remained a matter of contention and was still not resolved in 1958.<sup>34</sup> A further complicating factor was that when the ECAJ moved between Sydney and Melbourne, the Claims Conference office moved to the city with the ECAJ headquarters. In August 1958, when the ECAJ moved to Melbourne after a two year period in Sydney, Katzki suggested that the Claims office remain in Sydney but Einfeld informed him that this would not be possible as it was a matter of prestige for Melbourne Jewry which 'would not like it to be thought by anybody that their efficiency was less than that achieved by their Sydney confreres'.<sup>35</sup>

Conflicts also arose over the allocations of funds through the ECAJ. In 1955, for example, Ashkanasy obtained the allocation of £36,000 over a three year period for Mount Scopus College, in Melbourne. Ashkanasy considered the allocation of this grant a great achievement because it broke a conference rule and paved the way for educational and cultural grants for other Australian Jewish institutions in the future, an opinion endorsed by Dr M. Perlzweig who wrote:

Some of the people quite obviously do not realise how great an achievement it was to obtain as much as you did for help in a country which was never occupied, and in which the Jewish community is free and prosperous.<sup>36</sup>

The Sydney community was very bitter at the size of the Scopus grant, especially as Moriah College did not receive any financial help from the Claims Conference for some years although it was argued that 90 per cent of the school's enrolment were children of Holocaust survivors.<sup>37</sup> Criticism of the allocation was expressed by John Shaiak, editor of the *Australian Jewish Times*, in an editorial of 13 May 1955 and in a further article of 27 May 1955 he again expressed the hope that the 1956 allocation would be made 'on a more fair and just basis'.<sup>38</sup>

When Einfeld represented Australian Jewry at the Claims Conference held in New York in January 1957 he was determined to press Moriah's claims but was informed by Saul Kagan, COJMCAG Secretary, that his predecessor, Ashkanasy, had agreed that no further claims for Australian educational institutions would be made during the three year term of the grant. On Einfeld's return Ashkanasy denied that such an agreement had been made.<sup>39</sup> In mid 1957, when considering Moriah's

claims, Einfeld decided that, unlike Mount Scopus, Moriah was not a community owned school since the trustees were the authority responsible for the control of the whole affairs of the College and he suggested that the school's constitution be changed. At first the trustees refused to agree, but after further negotiation the school's president Abraham Rabinovitch decided that the trust deed would be altered 'so that, when a vacancy occurs in the number of the Trustees, the same shall be filled by a person being a member of the North Bondi Jewish Day School and Kindergarten Association, appointed by a General Meeting of the members of such Association'.<sup>40</sup> In 1958 £5,000 was allocated to Moriah and further sums of a similar nature were granted later. In 1959, when Ashkanasy was again a director, he once more argued for Mount Scopus because it was 'sponsored by the community and outweighs in size, responsibility and burdens all others',<sup>41</sup> but this time the Directors decided that they would not give priority to Mount Scopus.

The 1952 agreement also allowed for individual restitution for the victims of Nazism and the United Restitution Office (URO) was created to help administer such claims. In 1953 Einfeld, then president of the ECAJ, was appointed to the URO governing board through the efforts of Dr Nehemiah Robinson of the WJC. This appointment provided official recognition of the ECAJ in its work on behalf of Jewish refugees from Europe.<sup>42</sup> A United Restitution Office was set up in Australia with branches in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth to assist individual Jews in their reparation claims. By 1955 the Sydney branch had four employees with Dr and Mrs Kurt Honigbaum, Dr S.W. Krieger and Mrs S. Fein while in Melbourne the URO branch was administered by Dr H. Ebner and Mrs I. Kohn. Only those who earned less than £A1,000 p.a were assisted while those with larger incomes had to seek the assistance of private solicitors or agencies. In Melbourne it was estimated that the URO branch dealt with about one fifth of the claimants.<sup>43</sup>

In 1957 there were still 10,000 individual claims still outstanding from Australia, totalling £7,500,000. Walter Lippmann compiled a report which analysed the reasons for the slow pace of the settlement of individual claims. Using evidence compiled by Kurt Grossman in Germany, Lippmann argued that the personnel in Germany could be inadequate in both numbers and calibre of person and that there were often delays due to inefficiencies in the public service. Many claimants from Europe, USA and Israel were able to visit Germany in person to speed up the process but those in Australia were disadvantaged because the greater distance meant higher costs as well as the loss of time for those who wished to visit Germany in person. In order to overcome these problems, the ECAJ suggested that the Australian government appoint an officer who would be added to the Australian legation at Bonn and would act specifically on behalf of the claims of Australian citizens but this suggestion was not implemented.<sup>44</sup> In March 1957, during the visit of Dr von Bertano, Foreign Minister of the West German government to Australia, Einfeld together with David J. Benjamin, then honorary secretary of the ECAJ, met with Bertano and Dr Walter Hess, German ambassador to Australia, to discuss these problems. Although this interview did not lead to any specific changes in the system, Dr Bertano promised to act on any special ECAJ representations and Einfeld was confident that the meeting would assist in the speeding up of the process.<sup>45</sup>

As the restitution money began to flow into Australia, it was discovered that the money was assessable as income tax.<sup>46</sup> The claimants were distressed at this

decision as the West German government did not tax the restitution payments and, since they were issued as compensation for lost property, it was felt that the Australian government should not tax them either. Dr Joseph corresponded with overseas groups and was advised by his solicitor in Germany that since Israel, the USA and the UK did not tax restitution payments, Jews receiving compensation should leave Australia. As this suggestion had no appeal since 'Australia could lose quite a number of members', Joseph wrote to Einfeld suggesting that the ECAJ make representations to the federal treasurer, Sir Arthur Fadden, on the matter.<sup>47</sup> In October 1957 Einfeld, assisted by Joseph, submitted a memorandum but the government refused to remove the tax for fear that it would set a precedence in the case of widows' pensions. Einfeld wrote repeatedly to Canberra requesting a personal interview with Fadden but was informed that the treasurer could not spare the time.<sup>48</sup> In mid 1958 the ECAJ headquarters moved to Melbourne and Ashkanasy continued to pursue the matter by planning to take the case of A. Lustig to the High Court as a test case.<sup>49</sup> When Holt assumed the position of federal treasurer in 1959 Ashkanasy took up the matter with him and in Holt's budget speech of August 1959 he announced that restitution payments from Germany would be exempt from taxation from 1 July 1959, although it was decided that the exemption would not be retrospective. At the same time, the government also agreed that the Council for Jewish Education would be exempt from taxation. Holt's decision was welcomed by the Jewish community and Ashkanasy wrote to him thanking him for 'his warm and sympathetic understanding'.<sup>50</sup>

There were other problems which the ECAJ faced as a large number of Jews in Australia were not entitled to restitution. For example, unlike West Germany, Austria refused to accept any responsibility for material reparations so that many Austrian Jewish refugees in Australia found themselves without recourse to restitution. In 1953 the ECAJ began to negotiate with R.G. Casey, Minister for External Affairs, but after a meeting between A.S. Leibler, Caroline Isaacson of the VJBD and Casey, Leibler commented that Casey 'was not fully conversant with Jewish affairs, especially overseas'<sup>51</sup> and in March 1955 Casey decided that 'it is difficult to see how there could be any legal obligation on the Austrian government' as the persecution of Jews took place while Austria was governed as part of Germany.<sup>52</sup> The case of Betty Lissing, who believed that she had been unfairly denied restitution payments, was featured in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1957 and Einfeld, commenting on the article to Kagan, stated that 'those people who, I believe, have a just and proper grievance, feel that we are not doing nearly enough for them in this matter'.<sup>53</sup> In Melbourne many of these victims joined together to form the Association of Ex-Concentration Camp Inmates in order to assist in their claims for restitution.

Overall, the monies allocated by the Claims Conferences to the Jewish community in Australia, as well as those received by individuals through restitution, were important in the growth of Australian Jewry in the post-war years. The ECAJ leadership played a vital role in the allocation of this financial assistance, especially through the effective overseas representations by Ashkanasy and Einfeld. As such, these developments were important in the growing maturity of approach of the local communities and were built on the earlier negotiations of the AJWS and the FAJWSs which had played such a key role in their negotiations with American Jewry between 1938 and 1954.

## NOTES

- 1 This article is based on work from my PhD thesis, 'A History of Australian Jewry, 1945-1960', University of Sydney, 1990.
- 2 Written communication from Walter Lippmann, Melbourne, October 1987.

## PART I

- 1 Charles Jordan, 'Report on Trip to Australia, 20 August 1947-20 September 1947', p.18, Sydney. Michael Blakeney was critical of the policy of the AJWS not to seek Australian government assistance for Jewish refugee migration before World War II. He noted that 'with the determination of the Society to look after its own resources in funding Jewish refugee immigration to Australia, it inevitably conceived only small-scale relief'. M. Blakeney, *Australia and the Jewish Refugees, 1933-1948*, Sydney 1985, p.116. However, the refusal of Calwell to provide any government assistance for Jewish refugees after the war for fear of an anti-Semitic backlash, indicates that the policy of the AJWS was a realistic one.
- 2 Jordan, 'Report, 1947'. cit. sup., p.9.
- 3 Ibid., p.17.
- 4 Ibid., p.3. Jordan met with members of the boards of the Welfare Societies in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide, as well as Arthur Calwell, Caroline Kelly, of the Department of Anthropology, University of Sydney, an expert in immigration matters, Mollie Booth, of the Council of Social Service for Immigration in Sydney, Dr Fanny Reading, president of NCJW, and Ida Wynn, federal president of WIZO.
- 5 Australian Jewish Welfare Society (AJWS), Sydney, Executive Council Minutes, 4 September 1947.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 *Sydney Jewish News (SJN)*, 31 October 1947 and Minutes of the Conference on Immigration, 7/8 September 1947, in AJWS Archives, Sydney.
- 10 Heyes to Brand, 26 November 1947, 'Australia: Federation of Jewish Welfare Society', Department of Immigration, Australian Archive Office, CRS A434, Item 50/3/8948.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Jordan to Symonds, 22 March 1948, Box E30; Symonds to Jordan, 1 April 1948, Box E12, ECAJ Corres. Files, Archive of Australian Judaica.
- 13 Liebman to Lesnie, 17 June 1947, Corres. Files, AJWS, Sydney.
- 14 Liebman to Symonds, 20 October 1947, Box E30, ECAJ Corres. Files, Archive of Australian Judaica.
- 15 Ibid., Symonds to Liebman, 12 November 1947, 20 January 1948, and Liebman to Symonds, 12 March 1948.
- 16 Ibid., Symonds to Liebman, 1 April 1948, Symonds to Liebman, 7 May 1948, and Symonds to Jordan, 1 September 1948. Felix Freeman was president of Mutual Enterprises.
- 17 Memo, Mutual Farms Pty Ltd, 1949, in Folder 3, Mutual Farms, 1947-1949, Corres. Files, AJWS, Sydney.
- 18 Symonds to Liebman, 1 April 1948, Box E30, ECAJ Corres. Files, Archive of Australian Judaica.
- 19 'Sydney Diary', *SJN*, 7 May 1948.
- 20 Ibid., 2 July 1948.
- 21 AJWS Executive Council Minutes, Sydney, 7 March 1949.
- 22 Brand to E.H. Komlos, 18 July 1949, Box E14, ECAJ Corres. Files, Archive of Australian Judaica.
- 23 See for example letter 5 April 1949, Symonds to Komlos, nine pages of detailed replies to questions, Corres. Files, AJWS, Sydney.
- 24 AJWS Ex. Council Minutes, Sydney, 6 September 1949.
- 25 Ibid., and *SJN*, 9 September 1949. The American Jewish welfare organisations also had to assist in the transportation of Jewish displaced persons to Israel, as well as helping needy Jews in Europe and North Africa.
- 26 Minutes AJWS, Sydney, General Secretary's Report, 12 December 1949, and *SJN*, 4 November 1949.
- 27 Rubin-Zacks re Komlos to ECAJ, St Coms, Box E45, ECAJ Corres. Files, June 1949-June 1950, Archive of Australian Judaica.
- 28 AJWS Ex. Council Minutes, Sydney, 18 October 1949 and 5 June and 7 August 1950.
- 29 Ibid., General Secretary's Report, 18 February 1952.
- 30 Ibid., 31 May 1954. In 1954 New South Wales was allocated £16,000 from the First Claims Conference compared with £13,000 which had previously been received from the JDC. For a more detailed discussion of the Claims Conferences see Chapter 4.
- 31 Fohrenwald was the last Jewish displaced persons camp in Europe and in 1953 the JDC wished to see it closed as quickly as possible. *SJN*, 24 December 1953.
- 32 Ibid., 8 January 1954 and AJW&RS Ex. Council Minutes, Melbourne, 27 January 1954.
- 33 AJWS Ex. Council Minutes, Sydney, General Secretary's Report, 12 April 1954.
- 34 *SJN*, 30 April 1954.
- 35 AJWS Ex. Council Minutes, Sydney, 15 June 1954.
- 36 Ibid., 7 February 1955.
- 37 AJW&RS Minutes, Melbourne, 29 September 1955.
- 38 AJWS Ex. Council Minutes, Sydney, 30 June 1958.
- 39 AJW&RS Minutes, Melbourne, 26 June 1958 and December 1959.
- 40 See for example letter by Evelyn Rothfield to ECAJ 27 September 1949, 'Constituent Bodies, June 1949-June 1950', Box E25, ECAJ Corres. Files, Archive of Australian Judaica.

PART II

- 1 *SJN*, 20 September 1946.
- 2 *New Citizen*, Vol 5, No 9, 15 September 1950 and Vol 6, No 2, 15 February 1951.
- 3 Nahum Goldman, Jewish Agency for Palestine, New York, to ECAJ, 2 September 1951, and Lippmann to Goldman, 17 October 1951, 'Overseas Jewry, 1950-1951', Box E18, ECAJ Corres. Files, Archive of Australian Judaism.
- 4 *SJN*, 11 January 1952.
- 5 *Ibid.*, 27 June and 25 July 1952.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 16 September 1955.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 14 December 1951.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 18 August 1950 and NC, Vol 5, No 9, 15 September 1950. The editor of the NC, Dr S.W. Krieger argued that there was a difference between monetary compensation for the loss of murdered relatives which was 'blood money' and restitution for property looted by the Nazis in Germany and Austria.
- 9 *SJN*, 25 July 1952.
- 10 Association of New Citizens Council Meeting, 2 November 1952, Dr Max Joseph collection, Archive of Australian Judaism.
- 11 *SJN*, 11 December 1953.
- 12 Einfeld to Kagan, 17 September 1953, Box G1, Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (COJMCAG), Archive of Australian Judaism.
- 13 ANC Council Minutes, 10 November 1953.
- 14 ANC Council Minutes, 2 December 1953. At this meeting Kimmel's motion that 'The Annual Meeting of the ANC requests for *pourparler* re a common line of action in matters of German and Austrian indemnification in the interests of the victims of Nazism of the Sydney Jewish community' was rejected.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 25 February 1954.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 25 March 1954.
- 17 Speech by Dr Max Joseph, ANC Council Meeting, 25 March 1954, copy in Joseph collection, Archive of Australian Judaism.
- 18 Kagan to Einfeld, 3 September 1953, Box G1, COJMCAG, Archive of Australian Judaism.
- 19 These applications were divided into two categories: relief, rehabilitation and resettlement; and cultural and educational reconstruction.
- 20 Einfeld represented Australia in 1954; Ashkanasy in 1955 and 1956; Einfeld in 1957 and 1958; and Ashkanasy in 1959 and 1960. For a complete list of grants see Appendix III.
- 21 1 April 1954, Box G1, COJMCAG, Archive of Australian Judaism.
- 22 *Ibid.*, Dr Judah J. Shapiro, Director of Cultural and Educational Reconstruction to ECAJ, 12 May 1954.
- 23 Memo for members of the Allocation Committee COJMCAG, 'Vice-Pres. and NSW Constituents, 1954-1955', Box E28, ECAJ Corres. Files, Archive of Australian Judaism.
- 24 *Ibid.*, Ashkanasy to Fink, 21 December 1954.
- 25 *Ibid.*, Ashkanasy to Fink, 1 January 1955, 'Gen. Correspondence, 1 Oct 1954 - 31 July 1955', Box E15.
- 26 *Ibid.*, Einfeld to Ashkanasy, 21 February 1958, 'CoM Interstate Constituents and Press Releases, 27 August 1957 - 24 November 1958', Box E37.
- 27 Feiglin to Einfeld, 4 March 1958, Box G6, COJMCAG, Archive of Australian Judaism.
- 28 See 'Immigration and Welfare, June July 1959', Box E37, ECAJ Corres. Files, Archive of Australian Judaism.
- 29 In 1957 for example COJMCAG had over 300 applications from 26 countries for a sum of \$35,000,000 which was much greater than the amount available for distribution, 25 January 1957, Box G2, COJMCAG, Archive of Australian Judaism.
- 30 *Ibid.*, Lippmann to Einfeld, 8 August 1956, Box G5.
- 31 *Ibid.*, Katzki to Einfeld, referring to the fact that a number of receiving organisations were not up to date with their accounts, 7 June 1957, Box G2.
- 32 *Ibid.*, Kagan to Lippmann, 26 July 1955, Box G5.
- 33 *Ibid.*, Katzki to Einfeld, 14 September 1956, Box G2.
- 34 *Ibid.*, Katzki to Newman, 20 January 1958, Box G3.
- 35 Einfeld to Katzki, 26 August 1958, 'ECAJ Post-Conf & Functions, August 1958-August 1959', Box E6, ECAJ Corres. Files, Archive of Australian Judaism.
- 36 *Ibid.*, Perlzweig to Ashkanasy, 6 July 1955, 'WJC Corres. 1954-1956', Box E1.
- 37 See Claims Conference Files, Boxes C1-C9, Archive of Australian Judaism.
- 38 *Australian Jewish Times (AJT)*, 27 May 1955. Einfeld was critical of the *AJT's* editorial which he called irresponsible because he was concerned that it threatened Australian Jewish unity.
- 39 Ashkanasy to Kagan, 29 July 1957, Box G5, COJMCAG, Archive of Australian Judaism.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 30 May 1958.
- 41 *Ibid.*, Confidential Report dated 1 June 1959 of Com Meeting of Board of Directors, 17-18 January 1959.
- 42 Robinson to Einfeld, 4 December 1953, and Einfeld to Robinson, 29 January 1954, 'WJC, 1952-1954', Box E5, ECAJ Corres. Files, Archive of Australian Judaism.
- 43 *Ibid.*, Meino T. Rapke to Ashkanasy, 11 February 1957, 'C. M Interstate Press Releases, 20 August 1956 to 14 June 1957', Box E41.
- 44 *Ibid.*, Walter Lippmann, 'How Much Longer? Germany's Promise of Indemnification', 11 February 1957.

- 45 Ibid.. Report by Einfeld on interview with Dr von Bertano, 25 March 1957.  
46 This policy was confirmed in a letter to Charles J. Berg & Assoc. from the Federal Taxation Office, Canberra, 8 January 1957, Box 3, Joseph collection, Archive of Australian Judaica.  
47 Ibid.. Joseph to Einfeld, 8 May 1957.  
48 See Fadden to Einfeld, 29 November 1957 and 9 May 1958, Box C4, COJMCAG, Archive of Australian Judaica.  
49 Ibid.. Ashkanasy to Reichman, URO, London, 14 April 1959. Such a case would cost £750 sterling and Reichman sent a cable of 7 May 1959 agreeing that the URO, London, would pay half the cost of the case.  
50 Ibid.. Ashkanasy to Holt, 20 August 1959.  
51 Leibler to Wolfensohn, 8 July 1953, 'PR St. Com.', Box E5, ECAJ Corres. Files, Archive of Australian Judaica.  
52 Ibid., Casey to the ECAJ, 14 December 1954 and 10 March 1955, Box E15.  
53 Einfeld to Kagan, 22 August 1957, Box G2, COJMCAG, Archive of Australian Judaica.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### MOLLY AND THE RAJAH.

*Race, Romance and the Raj* by Edward Duyker  
and Coralie Younger. *Sylvania, NSW, Australian Mauritian Press, 1991.*

The little-known story of the marriage in 1915 of Melbourne-born Molly Fink to the Rajah of Pudukkottai and its effect on Australian, Indian and British society in the early Twentieth Century is fascinating. This book which focuses on the story, is extremely well-researched and documented in this limited edition published by the authors. The authors take pains in their introduction to explain the lessons to be learnt from the kind of treatment meted out to Molly and her husband and they describe the lessons they themselves learnt about human behaviour as they researched and wrote this story.

There are well-reproduced illustrations, many from the authors' own collections with others from the Pudukkottai Royal Family; excellent footnotes; a good bibliography and index; a very useful glossary; and a long and fascinating list of acknowledgements which underlines the painstaking research which went into writing and producing this slim volume.

Molly herself was not born Jewish although her father, Wolfe Fink, was. However he converted to the Church of England. She was baptised a Catholic as Esme Mary Sorrett Fink, but was always known as "Molly". The family moved in good social circles in Melbourne despite some of the wider Fink families' financial misfortunes. The book paints a wonderful picture of Melbourne in the late 1800's and early 1900's in describing Molly's Australian background. Similarly the Rajah's background is detailed and his position as an Indian Prince in the times of the Raj clearly evoked. In an eminently readable story one is easily able to discern the prejudices of the period both towards Molly and her Hindu Prince as the social atmosphere is vividly brought to life. While the Rajah was acceptable in Australia through careful juggling of the White Australia policy, Molly was not acceptable to the British and her son was never recognised as heir to his father's State of Pudukkottai. The Rajah died in France in 1928 at the age of 53, never having been able to have his beloved wife accepted by the British rulers of India and having exiled himself from his native land. Molly lived on until 1967 also dying in France.

Her only child, Martanda Sydney Tondaiman, born in Sydney in 1916, died alone in Florence in 1984 having never been able to claim his birthright as Rajah of Pudukkottai.

Edward Duyker and Coralie Younger set an excellent example of painstaking historical research and attention to detail yet report the results of their work in an uncomplicated, clear and eminently readable form which adds to our knowledge of the times in a most personal way.

Helen Bersten

## MIGRANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE LITERATURE OF AUSTRALIA

*Judah Waten & the old tradition in the New World*  
by Rosanna Rosini, Calcutta, Writers Workshop, 1987  
88p. hardback Rs100, flexiback Rs 80.

This amazing book combines several traditions of the Old and New Worlds. It was written by a Jewish Italian University lecturer who was born in Trieste but grew up in Australia and it was printed in India and published by a small group devoted to Indian creative writing in English!

Rosanna Rosini is obviously a fascinating person. Her title at the University of Trieste is Dottore Professore and her specialty is translating and interpreting. The titles of some of her other writings attest to her esoteric interests. "Dictionary of Footwear Terminology", "Pinocchio and his Fairy" (the meaning of 'blue' in translations), "Quipucoruyoc" (translating a non-existent written literature...in the Inca Empire), "Purple the Sails" ( a discourse on colour translation), "Hemispheric Transfert" (poems) and "Stars and Stripes and Stars of David in the Southern Cross" (Anglo-Jewish writing in the new worlds). This last book, written in Italian, was sent to us by Professor Rosini and I hope to review it in a future *AJHS Journal*.

*Migrant Contribution to the Literature of Australia* deals mainly with the writings of Judah Waten but refers to other writers as well, both Australian and American. Professor Rosini obviously has studied her material well. Besides references to Patrick White's Jewish character, Mordechai Himmelfarb, she quotes from D.H. Lawrence, Thomas Keneally, New Zealander, Janet Frame, and mentions the writing of Leone Sperling, Nancy Keesing, Morris Lurie and David Martin. There are not only 112 endnotes in this small volume, but 66 items in the bibliography and 47 authors' names in the index.

The study of Waten's writings is divided into the following subjects and each comment is fully backed up by quotations and comparisons with other writers dealing with similar themes: Migration to the New World, Old portraits and patterns in new frames, Jews in the "Bush", Mateship and fraternity brothers, Emancipation and second chances, At home in Australia, Diggers and depression, War, Conscription and side-effects, As time goes by.

Rosini compares Waten's writing to American Jewish writing and finds many similarities particularly the "seize the day" attitude to which she refers frequently. She finds similarities in the transition from old to new cultures, but finds special Australian attitudes in the bush life and mateship which she feels can yet be considered in a Jewish perspective where the bushman belongs to a wandering

community with communication transmitted basically by oral tradition.

The quotations she chooses to illustrate her points are very apt as in the chapter "Old portraits and patterns in new frames" where a young girl is explaining to her Catholic boyfriend her non-understanding of the ritual of the Sabbath candles: "Mother never lights the candles on Friday night. She's a collector of all sorts of religious objects and works of art." (Waten : *So Far, No Further*) In the "Diggers and depression " chapter she quotes from Waten's 'To a country town ' in *Alien Son* to illustrate the old Jew dressed up like a Digger but eating radish, onion, cucumber and herring and wishing nothing more than to be buried in the Promised Land. In contrast is Joshua Kuperschmidt from *Distant Land* who at the end of his life felt he had formed deep ties with his new land, would become part of it and find new ideals in it to satisfy himself.

Technically the book is interesting - handprinted on an Indian made hand operated machine on offset paper made in India and handbound with cotton handloom sari cloth woven and designed in India. Of course there are some errors because although the Writers Workshop might be devoted to writing in English, obviously the typesetter was not familiar with many words and perhaps in some cases had trouble with them. However there is only one instance where the sense of the sentence could not be grasped.

A good knowledge of Waten's writings is not essential to enjoy this book, but it would be better than a passing acquaintance. It is like an excellently researched thesis and well worth the time taken to read and enjoy its insights into Australian migrant literature. The book is available from Rosanna Rosini, c/- 34142 Trieste, Campo S. Luigi 4, Italy.

Helen Bersten

## JEWELS AND ASHES

*Except for members of my immediate family, the names, and some personal details of the people described in this book who are still living have been changed so as to protect their privacy. All place-names and historical events have been thoroughly researched and, wherever possible, authenticated. But this is not primarily a book of history. Instead, it is concerned with the way in which family stories become, in time, ancestral legends. And as the author, recreating such stories, I am, of course, a part of this process.*

*by Arnold Zable Scribe Publications, 210 pages*

Jewels and Ashes is at once a riotous and melancholy dance through time. At moments its prose leaps with the energy and skill of a young Nureyev and, at others, it moves with the precision and symmetry of a cotillion. But always Arnold Zable spins a devastating and memorable yarn — in the grand tradition of the descendants of wordsmiths and textile workers, upon whom it is incumbent, I believe, that they possess the ability to spin a yarn of any texture: words as the fabric of the story-teller.

The reader is presented with the lives of the families Zabludowski and Probutski: two corners of a triangle which reaches its apex in the author: their son. He makes a journey from the New World back to the Old and, as he tells his tale, a rhythm develops between the past and the present; bravery and fear; laughter and

anger; life and death; between jewels and ashes.

Writing of the youthful ideologies of the *Tsukunft* and the *Bund* which so influenced his parents before they left Europe forever in the thirties, Zable states:

Their vision was shattered by a catastrophe our communal elders called the Annihilation; but stories survived, countless tales of partisans and revolutionaries, resistance fighters and firebrands, engaged in a fiery struggle for redemption and deliverance.

In search of the source of these tales of high adventure within which are always concealed undercurrents of terror, Mr Zable also asks questions. With his mother, he is gentle: 'What are you thinking?' or 'What did you dream last night?' hoping that the reply will illuminate the darkness of a past he is grappling to understand. With his father he is more insistent: 'Do you ever think about those you left behind?'

It is the voices of both the father, old Meier Zabłudowski, and the son that try to make sense of a catastrophe larger than all the words they both know and love to spin. The mother's voice, at times stridently filled with inarticulate pain, is a plaintive chorus:

I've got a story to tell. No one sees! No one understands! No one knows who I am!

Part One is poetic, descriptive — full of strange and lively tales of this and the other world.

Whenever one dish is empty, Bulinsky (one of the last Jews of Bialystock) dashes back into the kitchen and emerges with reinforcements...

'You are like a Yiddishe mamma', I protest.

I'm better than a Yiddishe mamma. No Yiddishe mamma makes blintzes like mine...

Bulinski hovers around the table restless, imploring, prodding, scolding: 'Eat! I won't sit down until you eat!'

Where have I heard these familiar words, the same pleas, this same script? Where have I seen that same intensity, and felt that same tinge of menace in the voice? I have known other Bulinskis. They stood in Melbourne homes, by tables overflowing with food and drinks, and talked of hunger and mud.

Always after the rollicking anecdote comes the almost savage undercut, even in Part One which deals mainly with times 'over there' before the blow fell. Describing a streetscape in Kievka, Mr Zable evokes the vague, and dreamlike quality of the area with the clarity of a line-drawing etched in Indian ink. The reader is actually in Bialystok, getting wet with the author, inside the Zable reverie:

An elderly couple walks along the pavement, where tufts of grass spring from gaps between the cobblestones. Kievka on this rain soaked day seems so familiar; yet so down-trodden and desolate, empty of the souls it once housed. *Judenrein*.

The author has shattered the dream.

Like all good historical chronicling, even though the background events are known to readers, it becomes a matter of necessity to keep turning the pages to see what will become of the characters. The narrative possesses a momentum of

heightened inevitability.

'There must be a way beyond this grim inheritance.' Zable writes at the end of Part One. 'It is as if coming this far, I have no choice but to continue the journey, completing tales half told and half imagined, as I follow my forbears on their final trek, wherever it may have taken them, and beyond, far beyonds, so that I will never have to return'.

In Part Two, the sections within the chapters become shorter, the rhythms more insistent. The tragedy only hinted at till now, begins to resonate and then echo with compelling impact. Alongside the author, we move across Poland into forests; to sites of ghettos and concentration camps; into synagogues and into houses of Poles and Jews alike. Individual voices of those who perished in the Annihilation emerge in clear and eloquent testimony to the cruelty of which man is capable; but more than that, they testify to a heroism and beauty of spirit that makes the heart clench inside one's incomprehensibility of it all.

We were children of dreams and shadows, yet raised in the vast spaces of the New World... We lived on coastlines and played under open horizons... Yet there had always been undercurrents that could sweep us back to the echoes of childhood, to the sudden torrents of rage and sorrow that could, at any time, disturb the surface calm: "You cannot imagine what it was like", our elders insisted. "You were not there". Their messages were always ambiguous, tinged with menace, double edged: "You cannot understand, yet you must. You should not delve too deeply, yet you should. But even if you do, my child, you will never understand. You were not there."

And yet, this is not a book that leaves one feeling that the world is a place of darkness, filled with brutality, danger and death. On the contrary. From the soft-hued, beautifully drawn front cover depicting the Bialystock clock-tower, through the profound yet earthy philosophies of the whimsical Meier, to the author's meeting with a German Christian atoning for the sins of his father by working at the Auschwitz museum, *Jewels and Ashes* is an odyssey that ultimately allows the reader to soar. Cogently and exquisitely it articulates the eternal dilemma of being born a Jew in the diaspora, forever compelled to sift among the ashes for the jewels.

Yvonne Fein

#### REVIEW OF "BEVIS MARKS' RECORDS PART 4"

##### *The Circumcision Register of Isaac and Abraham de Paiba*

The Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation of London is the oldest Anglo-Jewish Community and its records are of unique primary importance for any serious student of the history of the Jewish people in Britain. Both the Congregation itself and the Jewish Historical Society of England have always considered it as an important duty to make the records of this most senior congregation more widely available. The first three volumes of Bevis Marks' Records are of great value in the study of Anglo-Jewish genealogy and now this latest volume is no exception. The need to publish this Circumcision Register has been recognised for many years but

the complexity of the task of rendering it both intelligible and useful has acted as a powerful deterrent. The late Dr Richard Barnett, whose scholarship and understanding of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation were combined with sufficient patience to attempt the task, made considerable headway towards publication but unfortunately he died in 1986. Barnett's successor as Honorary Archivist to the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation, Miss Miriam Rodrigues-Pereira, has succeeded in finishing the work and has added many useful details from other surviving congregational records. Her own supplements from early account books and other documents consist of about two hundred and fifty circumcisions carried out between 1679 and 1699, some thirty marriages conducted between 1679 and 1689 and some twenty-five notices of female births between 1679 and 1699. The main work, however, is the Circumcision Register compiled by the father and son, Isaac and Abraham de Paiba, between the years 1715 and 1775.

As Professor Raphael Loewe notes in a foreword to the work:

The genealogical data yielded by the Register is of much more significance than simply to the Sephardi Congregation of London. Substantial numbers of Ashkenazi circumcisions are noted, Isaac de Paiba travelled extensively to many places in England to carry out his duties, and inter-relationships between the Sephardi and Ashkenazi Communities plus 18th century Jewish exogamy into the host Community can be deduced on a demographic basis. All these considerations show the Register as a unique primary source of Anglo-Jewish and English genealogy. However, all this richness would be as daunting to the general reader as it was in the original manuscript if its treatment in this edition had not been so well managed.

About fifteen hundred circumcisions are listed in the Register and a meticulous index not only of the person circumcised but of, where known, the person's parentage and godparentage, makes using the Register an easy task. There is also an excellent introduction in which the difficulties that Dr Barnett and his successors encountered in treating the Register are explained in considerable detail. This is combined with a masterly overview of the history of the relationship between the Jews and the Inquisition and the vicissitudes of the early Resettlement Community in England. As an example of the complexity of the matter, consider the original method of indexing. This is not alphabetical by family names but by order of first names and even these follow the sequence in which they appear in the Hebrew Bible: so first come all the Abrahams, Isaacs and Jacobs, and then followed by the Moses and Aarons. These are succeeded by Davids and Solomons, then Menahem and Judah, Joseph, Samuel, the angels: Emmanuel and Raphael, the prophet, Joshua, and then minor Biblical characters! This extraordinary arrangement which was apparently fashionable in Sephardi Synagogues of the period naturally required a great deal of rearrangement for the modern reader to cope with it. It should also be noted that the degree of Judaic commitment could not always be guaranteed amongst the many new arrivals from Spain and Portugal, which meant that the English *Haham* insisted frequently on adult circumcision. Such cases in the de Paiba Registers constitute a substantial minority, although naturally most are of the traditional *Brit Milah* on the eighth day of life.

There is a magnificent account of the de Paiba family itself, sketched out over some eight or nine generations from the beginning of the 18th century to the

present times, with an excellent genealogical table to illustrate it.

Clearly the effort required to produce such a magnum opus is considerable and the price at US\$40, which includes surface postage to the USA, is exceptional in view of the beautiful quality of book production chosen to accompany such a wealth of scholarship. It is a "must" for any student of Jewish genealogy and for whom any strands of his or her ancestry lead back to 18th century England.

Anthony Joseph

## CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor,

*The Journal of the Australian Jewish Historical Society.*

Dear Professor Rubinstein,

In your introduction to the last issue of the Journal (Vol.XI.1991:Part 3) you refer to the contribution by Eliyahu Honig as "...the story of the origins in Australia of Habonim, the important Labour Zionist youth movement." I would like to point out that this description of Honig's article is quite erroneous and misleading. Honig himself does not claim that the two unrelated happenings, one in Melbourne and one in Sydney, in 1930 have anything to do with the Habonim which was established 10 years later and has become what you rightly refer to as "the important Labour Zionist youth movement."

The feeble attempts in 1930 could not by any stretch of imagination, be described as youth movements. In the one instance, in Melbourne it was the vain effort of one individual to interest young Jewish girls and boys in Zionism under the aegis of the *Kadimah* organisation, where Zionism was taboo! As Honig points out, they did not even use the name Habonim and it faded away after a few months! The other attempt, in Sydney, as related by Honig, was simply a "correspondent movement", run by "Aunt Hanna" as a feature in the Children's Page in *The Australian Jewish Chronicle*. This was called "Habonim - the League of Australian Jewish Children". But it also disappeared in less than one year. Thus neither of these efforts can be considered the origin of the Habonim in Australia.

As Honig rightly points out: "Without a functioning organisation, without educational programmes, trained leaders and meetings...there was no chance of establishing, sustaining and developing a real organisation. All this would have to wait some ten years when the initiative came from new arrivals from Europe." It is almost certain that these new arrivals who founded Habonim in Melbourne, in 1940, have never heard about the vain effort of Regina Goldman 10 years earlier. And - as one of the founders of Habonim in Sydney in 1943 - I can definitely state that we did not know about "Aunt Hanna's League of Australian Jewish Children".

Yours sincerely,

Yehuda Feher.

P.S. The forerunners of the Habonim Movement in Sydney were two organisations, both established during 1939-1941 by newcomers to Australia. One was the *Sbomrim*, started on the initiatives of H. Price and E. Heller catering for young people over the age 17-18. The other: *Habonim* -(Zionist Children's

Organisation) was started by H. Himmelweit and M. Sigalla catering for youngsters below the age 13-14. Some members of both these organisations combined in 1943/44 to form the Sydney branch of the Habonim Movement.

(It is interesting to note that E. Heller became the President of Sydney *Poalei Zion* and went on *Aliyah* in the early 1950s and M. Sigalla was for many years was the General Secretary of the Zionist Federation of Australia.)

### ADDENDA : LIONEL FREDMAN

These notes were inadvertently omitted from Dr L.E. Fredman's article, "Australian Reactions to Refugee Victims of Nazi Persecution and War: a Local Study", in our last issue, XI, 3 November 1991:

For background and current survey of the refugee debate see Hilary Rubinstein (vol.1) and W.D. Rubinstein (vol.2), *The Jews in Australia: a Thematic History, 1788-1945* and ... *1945 to the Present*, 2 vols. (Melbourne, 1991), I, 163-233; II, 51-91. A useful thesis is Joy Guyatt, *A Study of Attitudes to Jews and of the Jewish Stereotype in Eastern Australia, 1938-48*, M.A. thesis, University of Queensland, 1967.

For population see Charles Price. "Jewish Settlers in Australia", *Jo. AJHS*, V, 8 (1964), App. I, VI.

The prime source was the *Newcastle Herald*, long regarded as Australia's leading provincial daily; also used were the Annual Reports, Newcastle Hebrew Congregation (Synagogue Archives).

For the Anglican Church, see *Year Book of the Diocese of Newcastle* (Newcastle Regional Library) and A.P. Elkin, *The Diocese of Newcastle: a History*, (Sydney, 1955), 676-92.

Interviewees are identified by an initial. A splendid example of multiple interviews is Anton Gill, *The Journey Back From Hell: Conversations with Concentration Camp Survivors*, Grafton pb. (London, 1989); reviewed by L.E.F., *Newcastle Herald*, 14 April, 1990. For use of Oral History in the "hierarchy" of primary sources and in extending the evidence, see Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History*, pb., 2nd edn. (London, 1981), 136-51, and Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford, 1978). An interviewer may just offer a questionnaire or be more actively involved. Alan Davies, *Private Politics* (1966), a classic of Australian political science, is based on only five in-depth or involved interviews with political activists.

Final, author-published version of B. H. Ingram's manuscript is Bernard Hellreich Ingram, *Unfinished Symphony* (Newcastle, 1991); reviewed by L.E.F., *Newcastle Herald*, 29 June 1991. Another self-published memoir with a detailed, provincial setting is Selma Kahane, *Selma's Saga* (1982), whose fiancée, Arnold, went ahead to Australia in 1940 (born Vienna; in England 1938-40) and settled to work at Ravenshoe, a timber town near Cairns, Queensland, which she "hated to leave" in 1952 for Sydney.

For an optimistic view of Jewish diversity rather than "ill-founded anxieties about survival", see Steven Cohen and Leonard Fein, "From Integration to Survival: American Jewish Anxieties in Transition, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 480 (July, 1985), 75-88, and Lewis Browne, *The Wisdom of Israel* (London, 1948), 10-12.

## JOHN STANHOPE

The Editor,  
Australian Jewish Historical Society.

Dear Madam,

The publication of my paper on Samuel Shannon<sup>1</sup> yielded several responses which have cast further light on this early Jewish Australian.

Dr Edward Duyker kindly drew my attention to the papers of John Arthur Perkins M.L.A. Perkins states that Abraham Moses had interests in the Monaro before 1837, because his name is on a list of persons whose pasture licences were confirmed in January 1837.<sup>2</sup> He opened *The Squatters' Arms Inn* in 1838 and transferred the licence to Solomon Solomon on 25 April 1840.<sup>3</sup> He sold the property to Solomon in 1841.

Solomon transferred the licence to Shannon on 19 December 1842, but appears to have retained ownership until he sold *The Squatters' Arms* to Alexander Davidson in 1854. Perkins refers to the inn variously as Shannon's<sup>4</sup> and Solomon's<sup>5</sup> until Davidson took over.<sup>6</sup>

Shannon's standing in the Monaro community was evidenced by his being a signatory to nominations of election candidates to the Legislative Council 1851-59.<sup>7</sup> He had an interest in gold discoveries. *The Goulburn Herald* tells that "Good news - five ounces of gold brought in from Numeralla - a beautiful sample - bought by Mr. Shannon" in 1858.<sup>8</sup> The connection with Numeralla gold may explain why his daughter Rebecca was married there in 1860.

In 1859 he rebuilt the Bombala Street store, the *Illawarra Mercury* reporting on 22 September 1859 that "another building worth mentioning is Mr. Shannon's new store. It is about forty feet by twenty feet, and consists of a ground store and a large room above it of the same size. This is the only building with a storey in Cooma, and a dwelling house is about to be joined to it."<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile the Kiandra Goldfields were declining and Shannon was one of a committee who bought the Kiandra newspaper plant and used it to found the *Monaro Mercury* on 23 February 1861.<sup>10</sup>

Shannon's reputation was so respected as to be exploited, for on 30 June 1862, Michael Cully was charged with obtaining clothing and cash (one pound) from John Dougill of Colinton (40 km north of Cooma) "by pretending that Mr. Shannon of Cooma owed him five hundred pounds".<sup>11</sup>

Shannon's grave is now known to be located on land owned by Mr Robert Simms, who wrote: "The grave site is probably 1 1/2 kms from Christ Church cemetery so I imagine that is why you were unable to find it".

This land was bought by Shannon from the Wren family in 1854 and sold by his estate in 1872. Simms bought the property in 1955. In 1979 he subdivided, retaining a block of land which included the grave, and building a new house which he named "Shannon Lea" after the grave which is near the new house.<sup>12</sup> A photograph of the gravestone has been lodged at the Australian Jewish Historical Society office.

Simms' daughter, Vivian Skinner, told me that as a school girl she could not persuade friends to stay the night because there was a grave in the backyard - they

referred to "Shannon Lea" as "the haunted house".<sup>13</sup>

Yours sincerely,  
John M. Stanhope

NOTES

- 1 Stanhope, J.M., "Samuel Shannon: Cooma businessman (1802-1868)", *AJHS Journal*, Vol.XI, 1991, p.269.
- 2 Perkins, J.A., *Monaro District Items*, 9 volumes of typescript on reels A3622-A3624, Mitchell Library, Vol.I, 131.
- 3 Perkins, op.cit., I, 181.
- 4 Perkins, op.cit., I, 209, 220, 233.
- 5 Perkins, op.cit., I, 199, 255, 265; II, 317.
- 6 Perkins, op.cit., I, 195.
- 7 Perkins, op.cit., II, 387, 437, 484, 537, 564.
- 8 Perkins, op.cit., II, 548.
- 9 Perkins, op.cit., III, 577.
- 10 Perkins, op.cit., III, 673.
- 11 Perkins, op.cit., III, 740.
- 12 Simms, R., personal communication, 17th September 1991.
- 13 Skinner, V., personal communication, 6th September, 1991.

Australian Jewish Historical Society Inc.  
**PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**  
25TH NOVEMBER, 1991

It is with great pleasure that I report to members and friends that this has been a busy and productive year for our Society.

In all, six General Meetings, including this one, will have been held. We started the year with a special guest speaker, Professor W.D. Rubinstein, Editor of the Victorian issue of the Society's Journal, who spoke on Australian Jewish Left 1940-1970. It was a particularly interesting address that engendered a lot of audience discussion. In April, Harry Leslie, Honorary Secretary of Najex, provided a most illuminating address about his time as a prisoner of war. The address was accompanied by graphic photos and other memorabilia.

In June we continued our association with Moriah College in holding the annual reading of prize winning essays in the Dr Hans Kimmel Memorial Essay Competition, Contemporary Jewish History. This is a most worthwhile endeavour, and generally the essays are excellent. As a matter of interest, the 13 authors, all students of Moriah, had ancestors coming from the following countries - Morocco, Turkey, Czechoslovakia, Roumania, Australia, Austria, Poland, Russia, Libya, France, England and Iraq.

In September our Vice-President Nate Zusman, who is also Secretary of the Jewish Folk Centre, spoke on 50 years of Jewish Folk Centre. Nate dealt with the early years of the Folk Centre and in particular with the visit to Australia of Dr Steinberg.

In October we were fortunate to secure, through the good offices of our Vice-President Nate Zusman, Dr David Mossenson, President of the Western Australian Jewish Historical Society, to speak in relation to his publication "Hebrew, Israelite, Jew - The History of the Jews of Western Australia". The Perth network in Sydney moved quickly and we had a very large audience, a significant part of whom, over 30, were ex-Western Australians. Dr Mossenson's consummate address again generated a large amount of audience participation, so much so that we passed our

curfew and had to give our apologies to the Synagogue and its officers.

By way of publications our Vice-President produced her first issue of the Journal in May and we congratulate Suzanne on a sterling effort. We wait with baited breath for the bumper edition of the Journal to emanate from our Southern friends. The newsletter continued to provide to our members a constant update as to activities of the Society and general news of Jewish historical interest.

We are pleased to report as to the progress of the renovations and restoration of the former Broken Hill Synagogue, now the property of the Broken Hill Historical Society. The House of Israel sign and Hebrew lettering on the front of the building have been repainted. The attached residence has undergone renovation. The windows and brickwork and floors have all been renovated within the Synagogue building. The seating is exactly as it was 60 years ago. We have arranged for the donation of a curtain for the Ark. Unfortunately matters with the Maitland Historical Cemetery are not proceeding with such success. The Maitland City Council had indicated that it would take over the maintenance of the Cemetery. However this has stalled. I have raised the issue with the National Trust of Australia Cemeteries Committee. The National Trust has noted the significance of the site and considers that it would be appropriate for a conservation plan to be prepared as a guide for future work and maintenance. I will be taking this matter up with the Maitland City Council and the Heritage Assistance Program administered by the Heritage branch of the New South Wales Department of Planning in the new year.

Further activities of note during the year include the formation of the Australian Jewish Genealogical Society under the auspices of our Committee member Sophie Caplan. The first meeting took place on 4th November and we wish the Society well in its endeavours.

The old Maccabean Hall is being converted to the Jewish Cultural Centre. I represented the Society at a preview in October to look at the progress of construction of the museum commemorating the Holocaust and celebrating Australian Jewish history. This society is proud to be associated with the Jewish Cultural Centre and through my Committee we are offering assistance with respect to the Museum aspect of Australian Jewish history. We look forward to the opening of the Jewish Cultural Centre early in 1992.

Celebrations for next year include the 200th birthday of Isaac Nathan and we hope to have a special evening devoted to the music and works of Isaac Nathan. We also wish to participate with the 150 year celebration of the City of Sydney. In particular it is proposed to have a special meeting relating to the Jewish aldermen and Lord Mayors of the City of Sydney, the late Leo Port and Ernest Marks.

Unfortunately during the course of the year we saw the death of our Patron Rabbi Dr Israel Porush, as well as the death of other notable members, and we convey our condolences to the respective families. Rabbi Porush's work for not only the Society but for the Australian Jewish community has been enormous. We of the Society are deeply grateful for his leadership of the Society for so many years. Not only the Society but the community as a whole is indebted to the Porush family.

With the death of Rabbi Porush has come the opportunity to have a new Patron for the Society. It is with pleasure that I announce that the Honourable Sir Asher Joel has accepted. Formal investiture will take place later this evening.

I must sincerely thank my Committee for the sterling work that has been

provided to the Society these past 12 months. There is no reward for voluntary service other than the reward that comes with self-satisfaction that the job that you are doing provides service to the community. I have maintained that this Society is one of the most important societies of the community and my Committee and the volunteers that help and work for the Society deserve all the accolades that can be bestowed upon them.

History is an indispensable form of human self-knowledge. It was, I believe, the Roman poet Horace who wrote that a people without history remains locked in the mentality of an infant who knows neither whence he came nor whither he will go. To know our past is to grow up. History's mission, then, is to illuminate the human condition from the witness of memory.

I have always maintained that without the work of our Society our community and ourselves would be less the wiser, the less illuminated. I thank you for the opportunity of having served the Society and the community.

Dennis Bluth  
President

I find it necessary to comment on Paul A. Bartrop's article in the last issue of the Journal entitled, 'The Role and Record of the AJHS — How Australian Jews Remembered Their Past'. Dr Bartrop purports to give a 'professional' record of the AJHS but readers could be forgiven if they gained the impression that the writer's intention was not to record but to denigrate the AJHS and the 'amateur' historians who created such an impressive and valuable body of historical knowledge over an uninterrupted period of more than fifty years.

The suggestion by Dr Bartrop that recently the AJHS was a 'near run thing' and 'lucky to be given a second chance' is totally without foundation.

Readers seeking a faithful record of the AJHS should refer to 'The Australian Jewish Historical Society: A Jubilee' by M.Z. Forbes, in AJHS Journal, Vol X, Part 5.

Dennis Bluth  
President

## NEW MEMBERS

### NEW SOUTH WALES

ABEL, Mr James  
CESANA, Mr & Mrs J.  
GINGES, Mrs Rebeca  
ICHLICIK, Ms Rene  
KOKOT, Ms R.  
LEHRER, Prof. Gus  
MARSHALL, Mrs S.  
North Shore Synagogue Library  
RANKI, Ms Vera  
SELINGER, Mr Bob  
SINGER, Mr Reuben  
STEIN, Mrs Clara  
SUTTONBERG, Mr R.  
TEBBUTT, Mrs Berely  
TOLTZ, Ms Penelope  
ZUKERMAN, Mrs Vera

### A.C.T.

BAUMGARTEN, Ms M.  
LOURANDOS, Mrs E.  
LAURANDOS, Miss G.

### QUEENSLAND

PEISKER, Mr David

### SOUTH AUSTRALIA

LANDERS, Dr John A.G.  
PALMER, Ms G.

### WESTERN AUSTRALIA

STONE, Mr Ronald, A.M., J.P.

### TASMANIA

GRAETZER, Ms Sandy

### ISRAEL

SHEINK, Mr J. (Previously Victoria)

## GENEALOGICAL LIST

This list represents enquiries made to the AJHS since the last Journal from Sydney. If you did not initiate the enquiry but would like to add information or receive information, please write to our Genealogist, Mrs. Irene Rothenberg, at 166 Castlereagh St., Sydney, 2000.

BARNETT/COHEN marriage London 1890's. Migrated to Australia. Sisters Eva and Betty COHEN migrated to USA

COLLINS, Samuel and Hannah (nee ISAACS)

CREMMER, Joseph, of Waterloo, Sydney, Died 1929. Descendants or relatives sought.

DE KAFF/ DE KOPF, Jacob, Juliette, Dorcher

EMANUEL, Benjamin and Rachel and sons Isaac and Simeon . Seeking descendants.

GOODMAN, Thomas and Frances (U.K.)

HARRIS, Samuel Henry m. Elizabeth LEVEY

HYAM, Hyam

IMBER, William, convict arr.c.1822

ISAACS, Isaac Lewis m. 1) Hannah HERNFELD 2) Rebecca Goodman LEVY

Descendants sought.

ISRAEL, Rodney and Estelle (nee Cunningham) died 1921 and 1925 respectively

JOEL, Moss and Adelaide (nee JACOBS)

JONES, William, alias of Lewis MYERS, nephew of Abraham POLACK

KRAKOWER, Rachel

MARSDEN, Algernon Moses 1848-1921

MOSES, Mary Ann married ? to William Buchanan 1830's to 1840's

MYERS, Julian, son Daniel (U.K.)

PHILLIPS, Abraham David, veterinary surgeon

SOLOMON, Abraham, b. Germany 1813

SHAPPERE, Solomon. Descendants sought.

SOLOMON, Susan (nee LEVEY, daughter of Phillip Levey, wife of Joseph)

STEIN, Elizabeth, b. Frankfurt c.1831, m. Charles John Hennings, N.Y. 1853.

Daughter Margaret Henrietta b. Sydney 1863.

SZPETGANG family. May have come to Australia and altered name to SPETGANG,

SPET or SZPETT.

SUTTONBERG, Meyer, married to Rachel Barnett. Suttonberg relatives sought.

## CONTRIBUTORS

Rabbi Raymond Apple AM, BA, LL.B, MLitt, immediate past-president of the AJHS NSW Committee, chief minister of the Great Synagogue, Sydney, and author of a number of publications including *The Making of the Jews in Australia*.

Helen Bersten BA, DipLib, a member of the AJHS NSW Committee and its honorary archivist.

Alan Clark, has been secretary of Shoalhaven Historical Society since 1984. He has written 15 local history publications, both for that society and for community organisations.

Yvonne Fein, previously ed. of *Melbourne Chronicle*.

Dr Anthony Joseph, MBBS, corresponding member for the United Kingdom who has written a number of articles on Australian Jewish history.

Harry Leslie, former Changi prisoner, settled in Australia in 1968 and is secretary of the NSW Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and a member of the NSW Ex-Prisoner of War Association.

Dr David Mossenson, AO, PhD, MA, BEd, chairman of the Western Australian Jewish Historical Society. His major publication, apart from *Hebrew, Israelite, Jew is A History of State Education in Western Australia*.

Morris Ochert, OAM, ASTC(MechEng), MIE Aust, CP Eng., Queensland correspondent for the AJHS, researcher and author of a series of articles on Brisbane Jewry, a retired engineer and honorary life member of the Institute of Engineers of Australia.

Dr John M. Stanhope, MBBS, medical superintendent, The Langton Centre, Sydney.

Nate Zusman, Vice-President of the AJHS NSW Committee who has contributed a number of articles to the *Journal*. He had been editor of the *Maccabean* and was active as a Jewish youth leader in WA.

Dr. Suzanne Rutland D., MA (Hons), PhD, Dip Ed. Vice-President of the AJHS NSW Committee who has contributed a number of articles to the *Journal*, also a number of articles and books on Australian Jewish History including *Edge of the Diaspora – Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia*. She completed her PhD in 1990.





BENEFACTIONS IN MEMORY OF

ERNEST SAMUAL MARKS, C.B.E.

ADOLPH AND AMELIA ALEXANDER

GERALD AND ISABELLE BENJAMIN

ERNEST R. BARUCH

SIMON JOSEPH GUSS

SIR SAMUEL AND LADY COHEN

HYAM SHOLOM AND KATHLEEN HIMMELFERB

HERMAN AND RACHEL AHRONSON

WILLIAM L. AND GLADYS N. COHEN

ELIAS AND LEBBA GREEN

SIR BENJAMIN AND LADY BENJAMIN

ALFRED AND MAY PHILLIPS

FREDERICK DAVID AND ESTHER ZILLAH MICHAELIS

JACOB AND EMMA GLASS

PERCY BRIGHTON COHEN

LIONEL COHEN

PHILIP SCHNEIDEMAN

SYDNEY BENJAMIN GLASS

DAVID JAMES BENJAMIN

JUDAH AND FANNY ELLIS

RABBI LAZARUS MORRIS GOLDMAN

RALPH SYMONDS

JUDAH GREEN

PHILLIP MORRIS AND DORA ELIZABETH HART

REV. ABRAHAM TOBIAS BOAS

SAM ROSENBERG

REBECCA HAYMAN (nee Josephson)

BELIA GREEN

CELIA ROSENBERG

PERCY WOLFSON

GEORGE F. J. BERGMAN

PHOEBE DAVIS

CHARLES AARON

MANUEL, MIRIAM AND ALAN GREEN

RALPH SAMUEL, M.B.E., J.P. (by his family)

PHYLLIS BRONSTEIN (by East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation)

**CORRESPONDING MEMBER FOR GREAT BRITAIN**

Dr. ANTHONY P. JOSEPH  
25 Westbourne Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 3TX England

**CORRESPONDING MEMBER FOR U.S.A.**

Dr. ISIDORE MEYER  
90 Laurel Hill Terrace, New York, N.Y. 10033 U.S.A.

**CORRESPONDING MEMBER FOR QUEENSLAND**

MORRIS S. OCHERT, OAM, ASTC (MechEng.), MIE Aust, CP Eng.  
2/23 Lucinda Street, Taringa, Queensland 4068

**BENEFACTOR MEMBERS**

**N.S.W.**

M. Z. FORBES, B.A. LL.B.  
H. GIVELBER  
DAVID GOLDMAN  
M. H. KELLERMAN, O.B.E.  
COLIN B. MARKS  
EARLE S. HOFFMAN, OAM, B.Agr.Sc., B.Com., M.S.

**VICTORIA**

GODFREY COHEN  
HEATHER COHEN, LL.B.  
MYRA COHEN  
TREVOR S. COHEN, LL.B.  
BEVERLEY DAVIS, GradDipArts  
Dr. JOHN M. DAVIS, F.R.A.N.Z.C.P.  
Dr. HOWARD FREEMAN, B.D.Sc., L.D.S.  
LORRAINE FREEMAN, B.A., Dip. Crim.  
ISI J. LEIBLER, A.O., C.B.E., B.A. (Hons), D.Litt  
LEN LEVIN, B.Com  
JULIA POWER

**LIFE MEMBERS**

**N.S.W.**

RABBI RAYMOND APPLE, A.M., B.A., LL.B., M.Litt.  
Mrs. RONALD BRASS, B.A.  
Rev. Professor IAN BREWARD  
GERALD FALK, O.B.E.  
HAROLD H. FRANKFURTER  
Dr. ANTHONY P. JOSEPH (U.K.)  
TERRY A.S. NEWMAN, B.Ed.  
LOUISE ROSENBERG  
IRENE SCHULTZ  
SYDNEY SCOTT

**VICTORIA**

Miss FRANCES ROSENBERG

Subscriptions commence from January 1st each year. Current categories and fees may be ascertained from the Honorary Secretary.

A person donating an amount of not less than \$250 in one sum may be elected by the Committee a Benefactor Member of the Society. The category of the Life Membership is no longer available.