

HELENA RUBINSTEIN IN TOOWOOMBA

Angus Trumble

ABSTRACT

Helena Rubinstein's eleven-year sojourn in Australia, during the second half of which she established in Melbourne and Sydney the first iteration of her business, has created much confusion and error in the mostly American Rubinstein literature. In particular, the year she spent in Toowoomba on the Darling Downs has proven perhaps the most difficult to document until now. Being one of the episodes that Helena Rubinstein seems to have been determined to airbrush out of her own myth, that of an almost entirely self-made businesswoman, ironically the missing year in Toowoomba is today far more likely to burnish it.

KEYWORDS

Women, Toowoomba, Coleraine, Helena Rubinstein, Meltham, Astonette, Metcalfe vs. Keys, Steve Fairbairn, E.J. Metcalfe, Laurie E. Smith, Debonnaire Prudence Metcalfe, José Metcalfe, Bernhard Silberfeld, Louis Silberfeld, John Silberfeld



Helena Rubinstein, by French artist Paul Cesar Helleu, circa 1907

In May 1907, Helena Rubinstein (1872-1965) lodged with the Commonwealth Department of External Affairs in Melbourne her application for naturalisation as a British subject.¹ Those documents form an invaluable framework for her eleven-year Australian sojourn (1896-1907), during the second half of which she

successfully established the first iteration of her business, about which there has for many years been much confusion and continually compounding error in the mostly American Rubinstein literature.

According to the accompanying statutory declaration, Helena Rubinstein was born in Kraków (true) in the Austro-Hungarian province of Galicia (i.e. modern Poland, true) on 25 December (true) in 1879 (*not* true). She therefore professed to be 27 years old, but was instead 34½.² She was residing in respectable lodgings at 'Arcadia', 17 Spring Street, Melbourne, facing the Treasury Gardens. She had for more than two years conducted her business, The Valaze Institute, at 274 Collins Street, in first floor premises two doors east of The Block Arcade. She had invented the rather fetching middle name of 'Juliet', and gave as her profession 'importer'—which was not strictly speaking true either, not just yet. Although they purported to come from Russia, her wonder-products Crème Valaze and Rusmo Hair Killer were actually concocted locally with the aid of the firm of Felton Grimwade in Flinders Lane, which is presumably how Frederick Sheppard Grimwade, J.P. 'of Harleston, Caulfield,' came to stand sponsor. Helena Rubinstein also revised the date of her arrival in Victoria up one year from 1896 to 1897, although she named the right ship, the *Prinz Regent Luitpold*. She then stated that she had spent three years in Coleraine; one year in Toowoomba (which would bring her up to 1900-01, true), and then 'six five' years in Melbourne, all up 'ten nine' years resident in Australia. These corrections were neatly initialled. On the face of it, this leaves at least two years in Australia unaccounted for – only 18 months (more or less) if Helena Rubinstein were taking into account her lengthy fact-finding mission to Europe in 1905. The missing 18 months are the ones Helena Rubinstein spent in domestic service, twelve of them in Toowoomba.

The naturalisation papers effectively formed Helena Rubinstein's ticket of leave, for they opened the way to Edwardian Mayfair whither she proceeded immediately, with five years'

worth of accrued capital amounting to a little more than £12,000. However, the naturalisation documents also succeed in occluding several of the most remarkable aspects of Helena Rubinstein's Australian sojourn and therefore, I think, of her achievement as an almost entirely self-made businesswoman. If anything, the supreme irony is that the stories Helena Rubinstein managed to air-brush out of her own myth, are the very ones that most effectively burnish it today.

Helena Rubinstein stated that her purpose in sailing to Australia was to join her uncle Louis Silberfeld and his only child, her cousin Eva, who had lived for a while with the Rubinstein family in Kraków. Helena professed to have grown close to Eva, which would certainly explain why she went so far as to sail unaccompanied.³ As we shall see, Eva desperately needed help. Madame goes on to say that before too long relations in Coleraine soured between uncle and niece.⁴ This may have been true, but it is far from being the whole, or indeed accurate, story. There were in fact three Silberfeld uncles in Victoria (three of her mother's 18 siblings), but Helena Rubinstein hardly mentions two of them. She *did* mention an unnamed 'distant cousin' who proposed marriage in Australia, but this cannot have been any of her uncles' progeny so that cousin remains a mystery.⁵ The strangest part is that Cousin Eva was certainly Bernhard's daughter, not Louis's, and, even stranger, it was Bernhard's house in Whyte Street where she settled in Coleraine, not Louis's, because by that date Louis – unmarried and childless – had permanently removed himself to nearby Merino. Why did Madame make this curious substitution?⁶

Although they were certainly born in Kraków, the three Silberfeld brothers all sailed to Victoria from London or Gravesend, but separately and at long intervals: Bernhard (formerly Baruch Moyzesz, born 1839/40), the eldest, set out in 1870 aboard the *Hampshire*, when he was about 30. Louis (formerly Aryeh Leib Louis, born 1854/55) followed ten years later aboard the *True Briton*, when he was about 25 – he was 14 years younger

than Bernhard – and John (formerly Jacob Herz, born 1856/57) came six years after that, aged about 30, aboard the famous New Zealand Shipping Company's *Arawa*.

Bernhard Silberfeld apparently started his mercantile career in Melbourne in partnership with an L. Richards. Richards and Silberfeld, waterproof clothing manufacturers, occupied upstairs premises in a two-storied wooden building on the corner of La Trobe and Elizabeth Streets. The partnership appears to have dissolved after July 1884, when a fire broke out in their workroom and gutted the whole building. In early January 1885, Mr Richards reappeared as a sole trader near the corner of Franklin and Swanston Streets.⁷ Bernhard Silberfeld had presumably decided by then to make a fresh start in Coleraine, where, no sooner than 1886, Louis joined his mixed business before moving to Merino in 1887 and setting up on his own.⁸ Bernhard continued in Coleraine and evidently prospered. He was listed in the *Hamilton Spectator* among the stewards due to officiate at the New Year's Day Races in Coleraine on Thursday, 1 January 1891.⁹ His 1892 letterhead read: 'B. SILBERFELD, STOREKEEPER. Gents' Clothes made to measure at the shortest notice.' He and/or Louis appear to have doubled as part-time oculists for a while.¹⁰ There is also firm evidence that John divided his time between Melbourne and Coleraine. In 1895 he is a 'manufacturing jeweller' in Melbourne (until 1893 in East Prahran, and subsequently in Fitzroy), but in March 1897 he declared his intention of leaving the colony and sold up. According to an advertisement in the *Hamilton Spectator*, his household furniture and effects in Coleraine included a 'new piano by Steinmayer, leather suite walnut frames, handsome walnut sideboard with bevelled mirror, 6ft walnut extension table, 2 handsome overmantels with brackets, walnut dinner wagon, valuable oil paintings, half-tester nickel bedstead, etc. etc. etc.'¹¹ Later still, we find John Silberfeld shuttling between Bremen and Adelaide (1898, 1900, 1903), always aboard German vessels, whereupon he simply vanishes from Australian records.¹²

All three brothers applied for Letters of Naturalization as

British subjects in colonial Victoria. Their papers also survive in the National Archives of Australia.¹³ As with Madame's own application, these documents are full of vagueness and inconsistency, particularly with regard to dates of birth. Bernhard and Louis (both 'storekeeper') submitted their papers at around the same date in late August 1892. Bernhard's were duly issued, but Louis never paid his fee or took the oath until he finally went through the same exercise a second time in 1901, by which time he described himself as a 'grocer'. This may simply have been a matter of inconvenience. Louis lived in Merino, but took his oath in Casterton. Meanwhile, John was naturalised in 1895, at around the date when his wife Caroline gave birth to a son in Melbourne.¹⁴

Louis Silberfeld died unmarried and intestate on 23 April 1908, aged 54, and Bernhard successfully applied for administration of his estate.¹⁵ Intriguingly, some months later, in July 1908, Louis's business in Merino was sold under the name of 'Messrs. Silberfeld Brothers'. Helena Rubinstein effectively erased all of this from her own account. And what of Cousin Eva? Despite their closeness, based on the fact that Eva apparently lived well into her teens with the Rubinstein family in Kraków until she sailed to re-join her father presumably some considerable time before 1889, she too evaporates from Helena Rubinstein's account. On 19 May of that year, Eva Silberfeld 'of Whyte Street, Coleraine' married Louis Leopold Levy, 'commission agent' or 'commercial traveller', according to Jewish rites in Drummond Street, Carlton.¹⁶ The marriage was a disaster, although it produced three sons: Reg., Fred., and Theo. In 1892, Levy was insolvent, having accumulated insupportable debts as a jewellery salesman.¹⁷ For a while he appears to have worked for John Silberfeld, which is presumably how Louis Levy met and paid court to Eva. In 1896, Eva Levy successfully petitioned for a decree nisi divorce on the grounds of habitual drunkenness, violence and desertion which apparently took place in 1893.¹⁸ It seems Louis threatened to kill her on two occasions, one of them during her third pregnancy. She and the

children sought refuge under her father's roof in Whyte Street, Coleraine, and later in Robe Street, St. Kilda, where Bernhard Silberfeld died on 25 June 1923.¹⁹ He had sold the business in June 1911– still, tellingly, 'Messrs.Silberfeld Brothers'– as well as the premises and land in Coleraine.²⁰ In May 1913, Bernhard subscribed £10 to the 'Distressed Polish and Other Jews' Relief Fund'.²¹ Eva Levy died in the Mercy Hospital in East Melbourne on 6 May 1947.²² She was 80. We do not know if Helena Rubinstein kept in touch with Cousin Eva in later years but, given the unusual circumstances and to be fair, Madame's silence may well have been tactful and/or intended to be discreet. The stigma surrounding divorce in the grim era of the unreformed 1857 *Matrimonial Causes Act* (20 & 21 Vic., c. 85), to say nothing of the cloud of silence that then hung over cases of aggravated domestic violence, cannot be overstated.²³ Helena Rubinstein's decision to sail in 1896 must have been prompted by Eva's urgent need for help at the time of her divorce. However, in 1899, aged 26, Helena Rubinstein left the Silberfeld–Levy household in Whyte Street, Coleraine, and never went back.

According to a throwaway line in a lecture published in the *Victorian Historical Magazine* (May 1961), Helena Rubinstein worked for a while (ca. 1899–1900) as governess to the children of the squatter, grazier and oarsman Steve Fairbairn (1862–1938) at Meltham, his estate near Gheringhap outside Geelong.²⁴ Certainly, Steve Fairbairn himself made no mention of this remarkable fact in his hearty sportsman's memoir *Fairbairn of Jesus* [College, Cambridge]: *An Autobiography* (1931).²⁵ It is possible that he simply did not know because, if he did, it seems inconceivable that he would not have at least mentioned Helena Rubinstein. By 1931 her fame was widespread, including in Australia. To be sure, Fairbairn wrote more or less engagingly about various other domestics, including a strike-breaking ex-mattress maker. There were also the volatile Annie Tart, who on one occasion threatened suicide with a shotgun, as well as a delusional wool classer who claimed to be a son of the Shah of Persia by his favourite wife.²⁶

Elsewhere Fairbairn wrote at length and in depressingly predictable racist terms about a 'half-caste' and his wife, and a Chinese cook he engaged after his marriage to Ellen (Nellie, 1873-1942), the only daughter of Sydney Sharwood of Aramac in Queensland, at St. John's Church of England, Toorak, on 18 November 1891.²⁷ The Australian sections of the book mostly deal in a highly mythologising way about the Fairbairns' sheep and cattle interests in outback Queensland, in the neighbourhood of Longreach, 'out in the Never Never Country, past Boulia, where they say the birds fly backwards'.²⁸ The Victorian properties, however, are consistently downplayed.

Nevertheless, there were in 1899 plentiful signs of activity at Meltham. Advertisements in the *Geelong Advertiser* warned against unauthorised coursing or shooting at Meltham or the adjoining Fairbairn estate of Burnside.²⁹ Tenders were invited for brick alterations and additions to Meltham; carpenters' and joiners' work, plumbing, painters' and plasterers' work, and so on.³⁰ It seems logical to suppose that if Helena Rubinstein did indeed serve as governess to his two sons (the elder of whom cannot have been older than seven years at the end of 1899),³¹ she may have taken up residence at Meltham shortly after the improvements were finished in the third quarter of 1899. However, if she joined the Fairbairn household earlier than that, they were still apparently dividing their time between Melbourne and Burnside. The other child had been born on 14 April 1896 at 'Oma', the colossally vulgar mansion they had leased in Kooyong Road, Toorak.³²

Crucially, the Fairbairns' extensive Queensland interests open up a route to Toowoomba on the Darling Downs that is far more plausible than the elaborate old chestnut Helena Rubinstein implanted in her memoir, namely that she had worked as governess to the children of a lady she met on board the *Prinz Regent Luitpold*. That lady, she claimed, was the wife of an ADC (aide-de-camp) to the 'Governor', that is, the governor of Queensland, Lord Lamington.³³ The implication was that she had therefore worked in the vice-regal household. As with various other

strands in her own narrative, there is a minuscule grain of truth to this claim; however it does not bring Helena Rubinstein closer than a very considerable distance away from Harlaxton House, the Lamingtons' summer retreat on the outskirts of Toowoomba in the summer of 1899-1900. Instead, we now know that Helena Rubinstein was causing something of an uproar at 'Astonette', Drayton Road, the residence of Mr and Mrs Evelyn James Metcalfe. Mrs Metcalfe's brother-in-law was the husband of her youngest sister Beatrice (née Brodribb). Beatrice was, in January 1898, married to Captain (later Lieutenant-Colonel) Charles Edward Menzies Pyne of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. Captain Pyne had been aide-de-camp to Sir Henry Wylie Norman, governor of Queensland (1889-95), and was in that year promoted by his successor Lord Lamington to be His incoming Excellency's private secretary (1896-1901). Presently we shall conclude from invaluable testimony recorded in a most unexpected quarter that Helena Rubinstein must have had opportunities to come into contact with Mrs Pyne and the Metcalfe children's Pyne cousins. All were frequent visitors to Wyalla, the splendid Toowoomba home of their Brodribb grandparents, but back in 1896 there is no trace of a Miss Brodribb aboard the *Prinz Regent Luitpold*.

Mr and Mrs Metcalfe and Mr and Mrs Fairbairn moved in the same, relatively closed Queensland social circle, the Fairbairns shuttling between their huge, remote sheep and cattle stations, Brisbane, Melbourne and Geelong. Although it has not yet been possible to construe any particular friendship or close association by which Helena Rubinstein the governess might plausibly have 'changed hands' and made her move the long distance from Meltham to Astonette, both couples do crop up regularly in the same social and golfing pages through the 1890s, and with tantalizing proximity. According to *Woman's World*, for example, 'Mrs Metcalfe arrived today from Toowoomba, and is to be the guest of her sister, [Mary Frances] Mrs [Francis Cheney] Bolton ... (Indooroopilly) ... Mr and Mrs Steve Fairbairn, of Beaconsfield Station [at Ilfracombe, near Longreach], with their

little son and his nurse, have arrived in town, having come by train from Bundaberg ... Mr and Mrs Fairbairn propose to pass the greater part of the summer at Merton, their seaside residence near Geelong.³⁴ Ships passing, perhaps, and thin though this gruel undoubtedly is, nevertheless we can definitely place the Fairbairns and the Metcalfes, if not in the same pew, certainly in the same Queensland church. According to a long article in the *Darling Downs Gazette* (Saturday, 9 June 1900), however, the case of E.J. Metcalfe v. Olive Keys in the Toowoomba Police Court solves the mystery of what exactly Helena Rubinstein was doing there in 1900/01, and is here published for the first time.³⁵

The plaintiff, Mr Metcalfe, a gentleman of independent means, summoned the defendant for absconding from his hired service. She, Olive Keys, had lasted only one month as the Metcalfes' cook. On 23 May 1900, Miss Keys and two other domestics departed without prior warning. They left behind a note that read:

To Mrs Metcalfe. No doubt you will be surprised to find us gone, but we made a promise that if one went we would all go. You will find in here a pound for a week's wages for two. You will have the other. Remember this, if you want to keep girls you need never expect Britons while you keep a (Boer) bore, for Britons never shall be slaves. God Save the Queen [my italics].³⁶

Helena Rubinstein was at this time governess to Mr and Mrs Metcalfe's daughter José (1893-1977), while Mrs Metcalfe (Wynnie Prudence, née Brodribb) was expecting another child, Debonnaire Prudence, who arrived in 1901. There was also an older boy Theophilus James (Theo; 1890-1925), the only child of Mr Metcalfe's first marriage in 1889 to Isabel (née Taylor), who died eleven days after the birth.

According to the defendant, Helena Rubinstein made a habit of entering the kitchen at Astonette and issuing orders in a most imperious, peremptory and interfering manner. Who were Olive and the others to obey, Mrs Metcalfe or Miss Rubinstein? Miss

Rubinstein had also been severely critical of Olive's cakes, which Mrs Metcalfe had earlier professed to like. The cakes appear to have been the straw that broke the camel's back. According to Olive's testimony, Miss Rubinstein hotly protested that Mr Metcalfe disliked her cakes, and instructed Olive to desist from baking them. Presumably the topical reference to the 'Boer bore' arose from only the sketchiest idea of where exactly Helena Rubinstein came from—although, as a subject of the Austro-Hungarian Empire for the time being, she was technically on the side of Britain during the South African War of 1899-1902. At any rate, this settles the question—Madame was by May 1900 already honing her administrative skills as governess to the Metcalfe children at Astonette, Drayton Road, Toowoomba.

The *Toowoomba Chronicle and Darling Downs General Advertiser* took up the story on Saturday, 28 July 1900.³⁷ The police magistrate had earlier fined Olive Keys £1 for leaving her hired service as cook in the Metcalfe household without giving reasonable notice under Section 3 of the *Master and Servant Act* 1889 (52 & 53 Vic. c 24). Miss Keys boldly appealed against this penalty to the civil jurisdiction of the District Court sitting at Toowoomba on Wednesday and Thursday, 19 and 20 July 1900. His Honour Acting Judge L.E. Groom dismissed the appellant's case on the grounds that (a) Miss Keys departed Astonette, Drayton Road, with the other girls in secrecy and at night without giving any prior warning to Mrs Metcalfe; (b) that it could not be found, on the evidence, that the interference of the governess, Miss Rubinstein, was of such an intolerable nature as to justify their abrupt departure, and (c) that the mere fact that Miss Keys was told to take orders from Miss Rubinstein was not in itself enough to justify the defendant in her action – implying, incidentally, that Olive's cake defence was insufficient. Mrs Metcalfe was perfectly entitled to give orders through others she might place in charge of her household. A last point ingeniously argued by counsel for Miss Keys was that by offering to forego her wages, indeed returning them, the servant had reasonable ground for

departing. However, Judge Groom found that in itself this could not terminate the contract of service. The object of the Act was to secure the continuance of the service until it was legally terminated. If a servant could on any caprice absent herself and simply forfeit a week's wages the object of the Act would be frustrated. His Honour then referred to the case of *Neighbour v. Moore*.³⁸ So that was that.

Acting Judge Groom soon rose far above this in almost every respect obscure matter, and became Sir Littleton Ernest Groom, KCMG KC (1867-1936), the long-serving federal member of parliament for Darling Downs from 1901 to 1929. He was minister for home affairs (1905-06) and attorney-general (1906-08) in the second Deakin administration; minister for external affairs (1909-10) in the fourth Deakin administration; minister for trade and customs (1913-14) in the Cook administration and, finally, sixth speaker of the House of Representatives in the tenth and eleventh Commonwealth parliaments (1926-29), obviously the first to preside over John Smith Murdoch's newly completed provisional Parliament House in Canberra.³⁹ I wonder if, in his recollection, he ever made the connection between that interfering governess in *Metcalf v. Keys* and the *châtelaine* of Grafton Street, the Quai de Béthune and Central Park West? The really fascinating part, though, is that through later decades, exactly like the Fairbairns, the Metcalfes never seem to have grasped what Helena Rubinstein, their sometime governess, went on to achieve and on an unprecedented global scale. Given the uproar surrounding *Keys v. Metcalfe*, one might conclude that they simply preferred to forget – were it not for the vital testimony of Laurie E. Smith.

At some point between Helena Rubinstein's departure from Toowoomba in autumn 1900 and July 1904, a young woman succeeded her as governess or nanny at Astonette (actually a combination of both roles), in this case to the younger Metcalfe daughter, Debonnaire. Her name was Laurie E. Smith, and by an incredible stroke of good fortune she kept a diary. That valuable document

survives in the collection of the John Oxley Library (State Library of Queensland) in Brisbane.⁴⁰ Nannie Smith intended this charming chronicle, with its pressed flowers and a few watercolour and other illustrations, eventually to be a keepsake for Debonnaire ('baby') in after years. The diary commences on Monday, 11 July 1904, when Debonnaire was 3½ years old. It mainly deals with the various doings of baby – her health, sleep, play, diet and interactions with Daddy, Mammie, aunts and uncles, other children, family friends and relations, her dolls – to say nothing of Simpkin, 'such a great cat', whose death and interment occurred on 7 and 8 October 1904.⁴¹ The superabundant value of Laurie's diary, though, is that it creates a surprisingly granular picture of the comfortable domestic arrangements at Astonette in the aftermath of the Metcalfe v. Keys débâcle; indeed, Laurie brings home its full ramifications. When, under cover of darkness, Olive and the others walked out of Astonette in 1900, the immediate burden must have fallen heavily on Helena Rubinstein's shoulders. Being in any case heavily pregnant with Debonnaire, there is no reason to suppose that Wynn timer Metcalfe had ever so much as boiled a kettle, or knew what to do with an egg. From Laurie's account we may also identify most if not all of Mrs Metcalfe's Brodribb siblings and their children. Mr Metcalfe was born in London, and his widowed mother and three surviving sisters and two brothers all lived in England or Scotland. However, Wynn timer Metcalfe had three married sisters and a brother all close at hand: Mary Frances Bolton (1862-1947; Aunt Mollie) and Ellen May Pughe (1864-1964; Aunt Ellie) both had children who were effectively too old to put in an appearance in Laurie's diary. Mrs Metcalfe's youngest sister Beatrice (1875-1963; Auntie B.) was, as we have seen, married to Major Pyne (Uncle Charlie), and in 1904 their two daughters, Sheila (aged six) and Pamela (a newborn baby) turn up often. As well, we encounter various of the Metcalfes' friends: Muriel, Mrs. Arthur Forbes-Sempill, Mr and Mrs William Beit of Ascot, their daughters Charmian and Féo Patricia, and Mrs Kwong Sang, among others.

The staffing arrangements at Astonette included the housekeeper Mrs Cory; 'Cook'; Annie the housemaid or lady's maid; Minnie the laundry maid (who, it seems, only ever 'scrubbed'); Valentine and George the gardeners, as well as José's non-resident tutor or governess Miss Jackson and her dancing teacher Miss Marley. An unnamed dressmaker regularly visited Mrs Metcalfe. Her work was presumably beyond Laurie's capacity, although Laurie certainly ran up blouses for Mrs Metcalfe and also devoted one day per week to, at times, obviously challenging pattern-cutting, sewing and mending – mainly clothes for the children. She worked with a sewing machine, at times clearly struggling to keep up with the workload.⁴² We also encounter Granny Brodribb's domestics: Kate the housemaid and 'Fat Hannah' the cook. Laurie also oversaw dressing, undressing, bath-time, bed-time, hymns and prayers. She read aloud; gave rudimentary lessons; imposed discipline when needed; kept a watchful eye over sometimes quite high-maintenance play – including running races in the garden. She administered medicines: senna tea with sugar; castor oil (with a chocolate chaser), and mustard foot baths for colds.⁴³ From time to time Laurie delivered baby to her parents in the drawing room for an hour or two at teatime, or before bed, but apart from those formalities everything Laurie did must strike the modern reader as indistinguishable from what a mother does. However, on top of all this, as we have seen, Laurie picked up the bulk of quotidian household sewing and mending. She organised quite elaborate beach picnics (chicken sandwiches, more bread and butter, bananas and billy tea). She sang songs and supervised outings, which also doubled as responsible errands to the bank; to pay household bills, and so on. Laurie arranged flowers throughout the house. She chaperoned the children to church on Sundays. She took José to the dentist to have her 'wires' painfully removed. There were visits to the post office; to nice Mr Norris and Mr Ridgeley the chemists; to Laidlaw & Peak the grocers; to J.H. Jones the drapers; to Bain's photographic studio in Queen Street; to the Toowoomba Steam Laundry, and to T.K. Lamb & Co, the

confectioners and cake shop in Ruthven Street for a nourishing sponge. On these occasions, Valentine the gardener doubled as groom, harnessing David to the dogcart, while naturally Laurie took the reins. Valentine also chopped the firewood, milked the cow, and attended to the children's swing. As well, Laurie provided baby instruction and practice in French conversation, and took the children surprisingly often to the churchyard where they freshened up or replaced the flowers on Grandfather Brodribb's newly dug grave, as well as that of half-brother Theo's mother, the first Mrs Metcalfe.

This was the charmed little world, fearfully circumscribed but wealthy and clannish, into which Helena Rubinstein was lifted during her 'missing' year in Toowoomba in 1900, and there is no reason to suppose that her duties were materially different from Laurie E. Smith's. Over the course of six months in the second half of 1904, Laurie took only one evening off; Annie the maid held the fort in the nursery during those few precious hours. True, in 1900 José Metcalfe was six years old; she turned seven in November, so attendance upon the nursery cannot have been quite so arduous. Still, the broader framework of responsibility must have been more or less identical, and Helena Rubinstein must have known many if not all of Laurie's *dramatis personae*.⁴⁴ In this important context, Laurie's diary contains perhaps the most fascinating residue, and within the space of a single sentence. Exactly coinciding with the end of Helena Rubinstein's previously undocumented consulting stint above W.A. McGuffie & Co, the pharmaceutical chemists in Queen Street, Brisbane, a fortnight that began no later than 6 October 1904 and concluded on the 19th,⁴⁵ the following morning, Thursday, 20 October, Laurie noted: 'Debonnaire ... went to bed to rest & then she was made clean & pretty & went with Mammie & José to the station to see José's old governess "Fraulein" pass on her way to Sydney.'⁴⁶

If this is not an explicit reference to Helena Rubinstein (who had lived in Vienna for several years prior to her departure for Australia and therefore spoke German), we would need to consider

the odds against two former German-speaking governesses in the Metcalfe household travelling overland by train from Brisbane to Sydney via Toowoomba on the same day. This is certainly not proof, but I find it overwhelmingly persuasive, and it suggests that the Metcalfes retained memories of Olive Keys's 'Boer bore' that were sufficiently affectionate to bring them to greet Helena Rubinstein, however briefly, on the platform and in the bustling refreshment rooms of the Toowoomba Railway Station, more than four years afterwards. It is also remarkable that the only known reference to Helena Rubinstein in any exactly contemporary Australian manuscript source was thus noted down for the benefit of a very little girl, and by Laurie E. Smith, a domestic servant whose cheerfulness and devotion shine from every page.

In 1908, Helena Rubinstein's Melbourne business became the first public company in which she retained a controlling, indeed ballooning, interest for more than five subsequent decades. By all accounts, her management style never strayed far from the one she had exercised however briefly in the kitchen at Astonette, although within a very few years it became global in reach and infinitely more successful.

Author's note

This article is condensed from several draft chapters of my forthcoming book, *Helena Rubinstein in Australia*. I am grateful to the editors for their invitation to present here a portion of my new research, and to the following for their expert assistance. For their generous assistance, I am indebted to Gavin Bannerman, Director of Queensland Memory, State Library of Queensland in Brisbane; Louise Doyle at the National Archives of Australia in Canberra; Ken Fitzgerald of the Coleraine Local Historical Centre and Museum in Coleraine, Victoria; Emeritus Professor Maurice French, AM, of the Toowoomba Historical Society; Sir Andrew Grimwade, CBE; Rabbi Dr John S. Levi, AM, Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Beth Israel in Melbourne; Steven Miller at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney; Emeritus Professor John Poynter, formerly Ernest Scott Professor of History at the University of Melbourne, 1966-75, and Deputy Vice-Chancellor, 1975-90; and to Margaret Shaw and Libby Coates in the National Portrait Gallery Reference Library, Canberra.

Endnotes

1. National Archives of Australia, Canberra (NAA), A1, 1907/4551. The Commonwealth *Naturalisation Act* 1903 specifically provided for naturalisation as a British subject, not as an Australian citizen. In the case of *Attorney-General of the Commonwealth v. Ah Sheung* (1906) 4 CLR 949, the High Court of Australia said that 'We are not disposed to give any countenance to the novel doctrine that there is an Australian nationality as distinguished from a British nationality ... (page 951).' The concept of Australian citizenship did not come into being until the *Nationality and Citizenship Act* was given royal assent in 1948. I am indebted to the Hon. Justice Stephen Gageler, AC, of the High Court of Australia for making me aware of these facts.
2. National Archives of Australia, Canberra (NAA), A1, 1907/4551.
3. Helena Rubinstein, *My Life for Beauty*, London: The Bodley Head, 1964, p. 19.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Patrick O'Higgins, *Madame: An Intimate Biography of Helena Rubinstein*, New York: The Viking Press, 1971, pp. 41 and 47; see also Lindy Woodhead, *War Paint: Madame Helena Rubinstein and Miss Elizabeth Arden: Their Lives, Their Times, Their Rivalry*, Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003, pp. 34 and 440.
7. At L. Richards's, 126 Franklin Street, near Swanston Street – Apprentices wanted for waterproof coat making', *The Age*, 9 January 1885, p. 3.
8. *The Age*, 26 April 1887, p. 3.
9. *Hamilton Spectator*, 16 December 1890, p. 4, and 18 December 1890, p. 4.
10. John Poynter, 'Rubinstein, Helena (1870? [sic]-1965), cosmetics manufacturer', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 11, Melbourne University Press, 1988, p. 475.
11. *Hamilton Spectator*, 18 March 1897, p. 2.
12. See, for example, the *Chronicle* (Adelaide), 30 April 1898, p. 6, and *Australische Zeitung*, 14 November 1900, p. 5.
13. National Archives of Australia, Canberra (NAA) A712, 1892/T 8137 (Bernhard Silberfeld, 1839/40–1923); NAA A712, 1892/U 8184 and NAA A712, 1901/O 9992 (Louis Silberfeld, 1854/55–1908), and NAA

- A712, 1895/A 5675 (John Silberfeld, b. 1856/57).
14. *The Argus*, 16 July 1895, p. 1.
 15. *Ibid.*, 24 April 1908, p. 1, and 24 April 1908, p. 1. See also *ibid.* 14 May 1908, p. 3 (letters of administration), and 25 July 1908, p. 15, where 'MERINO – Messrs. Silberfeld Brothers have sold the store and business to Messrs. Grant and M'Ewen'.
 16. *Ibid.*, 1 June 1889, p. 1.
 17. 'New Insolvents', *ibid.*, 20 February 1892, p. 7.
 18. *The Age*, 5 August 1896, p. 3.
 19. *The Argus*, Wednesday 27 June 1923, p. 1, 'in his 87th year'.
 20. *Hamilton Spectator*, 24 June 1911, p. 4.
 21. *Jewish Herald*, 7 May 1913, p. 2.
 22. *Herald*, 8 May 1947, p. 6, and *The Argus*, 9 May 1947, p. 2.
 23. By 1871, all the Australian colonies had enacted divorce legislation closely modelled on the parent *Matrimonial Causes Act* (1857). In Victoria, a *Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act* was given royal assent in July 1861. The Act empowered Supreme Court judges to grant decree nisi divorces. This was followed by a *Divorce Act* that provided for more specific grounds – drunkenness, violence, desertion, etc. – and a consolidated *Marriage Act* (both 1890). See Henry Finlay, *To Have But Not To Hold: A History of Attitudes to Marriage and Divorce in Australia, 1858-1975*, Sydney: The Federation Press, 2005, pp. 103-27.
 24. P. L. Brown, "'Meltham' Near Geelong," *Victorian Historical Magazine*, vol. 31, no. 4, May 1961, p. 202.
 25. Published by The Bodley Head, London.
 26. Mattress maker, Fairbairn, *op. cit.*, p. 191; Annie Tart, *ibid.*, pp. 281-3; delusional wool classer, *ibid.*, pp. 191-2.
 27. *The Argus*, 1 December 1891, p. 1. 'Half-caste', Fairbairn, *op. cit.*, p. 191, and the Chinese cook, pp. 238-9.
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
 29. *Geelong Advertiser*, 13 April 1899, p. 4.
 30. *Ibid.*, 29 May 1899, p. 4, and 14 June 1899, p. 4.
 31. The elder son, Sydney George Fairbairn (1892-1943) was born at Carrick, Potts Point (Sydney) on 12 October 1892. *The Argus*, 15 October 1892, p. 1. The younger son, (Stephen) Ian Fairbairn (1896-1968), followed on 14 April 1896. *Ibid.*, 29 April 1896, p. 1.

32. Ibid., 29 April 1896, p. 1. For Oma (also known as Nareeb) see Heather Chapman and Judith Stillman, *Lost Melbourne*, London, Pavilion Books, 2015, pp. 58-9.
33. Helena Rubinstein, op. cit., pp. 24-5; *Madame*, p. 147; Woodhead, op. cit., pp. 42-5, makes a valiant effort to beat a path from Meltham into the extended vice-regal household of Lord and Lady Lamington; however she is quite right (p. 43) about the Fairbairns' social connections in Queensland.
34. 'Woman's World. Social Gossip', *Brisbane Courier*, 12 October 1895, p. 6. See also 'Golf Notes', *Brisbane Courier*, 2 September 1901, p. 7.
35. 'Toowoomba Police Court', *ibid.*, p. 7.
36. Ibid.
37. On p. 3.
38. 1892, 4 Q.L.J. 145 per Lilley CJ, for which see also Thomas Macleod, *The Queensland Criminal Reports*, Brisbane, Law Book Company, 1913, pp. 253, 255-6.
39. David Carment, 'Groom, Sir Littleton Ernest', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 9, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1983, pp. 130-3.
40. State Library of Queensland, Brisbane; John Oxley Library, Queensland Memory, Acc 27296 (Box 15647).
41. Laurie Smith, SLQ, JOL, QM, Acc 27296 (Box 15647), pp. 94-5, 160-1.
42. Ibid., pp. 1, 22, 49.
43. Ibid., p. 85 (senna); p. 105 (castor oil); pp. 63, 89 (mustard).
44. Long afterwards, José married first (7 July 1913) an Anglo-Irish peer, John Evans-Freke, tenth Baron Carbery (1892-1970). Lord and Lady Carbery had a daughter, the Hon. Fabienne José Evans-Freke (1916-2007), a somewhat unfortunate name for any child to bear. The Carberys divorced in 1919. Lady Carbery married, secondly (15 February 1922) Basil John Montford Bebb (1892-1952). A son, Simon Montford Bebb (1922-2008) arrived at the end of that year. Mrs Bebb died on 14 June 1977.
45. 'Social', *Brisbane Courier*, 18 October 1904, p. 2, is explicit: Helena Rubinstein could be consulted at McGuffie's 'up to the 19th instant'.
46. Laurie Smith, SLQ, JOL, QM, Acc 27296 (Box 15647), p. 181