

BOOK REVIEWS

THE JEWS IN AUSTRALIA

by *W.D. Rubinstein, AE Press, Melb., 1986*

This book is part of the Australian Ethnic Heritage Series which covers ethnic groups in Australia from Afghans to Spaniards. The series is aimed at middle year secondary students and multicultural classes. As such, it is a necessarily simplistic coverage of the history of Jews in Australia.

As Dr. Rubinstein is not himself a native born Australian, he acknowledges the benefits to him of his "extensive contacts within the Jewish community over the past ten years" and his wife's "endless . . . historical knowledge . . . about a subject on which she is now one of Australia's most authoritative experts". He acknowledges the help of the Deakin University for reproducing photographs. However, the Australian Jewish Historical Society also supplied photographs.

I found a strong Melbourne emphasis in the book which is natural as the author lives there and his experience is there. I felt that as a study of Jews in Australia, this emphasis was perhaps a bit too strong. Of his modern Jewish achievers who were singled out for individual biographies, only one was from Sydney, five from Melbourne. The Jewish activities and organisations section also has a heavy Melbourne accent as he is more familiar with these and the Melbourne organisations have very strong community support. However, no mention is made of the Sydney Montefiore Home or the early philanthropical institutions in Sydney last century, especially the Help-in-Need Society which existed continuously for over 100 years. There is no mention of the Maccabean Hall or The Emanuel School even though the book was published in 1986.

Perhaps a non-Jew might find too strong an emphasis on anti-semitism. It certainly does affect Australian Jews, and perhaps more so in Melbourne; the anti-semitic tone of *The Bulletin* and other publications is important historically. But anti-semitism has the second largest number of references in the index. A further look at the index also shows many references to Zionism, schools, synagogues, communities, newspapers. It is necessarily a small index as the book only contains 127 pages. It is well arranged in chapters, making it fairly easy to locate a particular item.

Dr. Rubinstein has chosen to divide his material into ten chapters dealing with identity, migration, convicts and settlers, spread of settlement 1830-1933, eminent early Twentieth Century Jews, Anglo-Saxon Jewry and Australian society, 1830-1933, Eastern European Jewish community 1940 to the present, social structure and experience of the new community, modern achievers and activities and organisations.

A few textual errors slipped past the proof-readers "Sephardims", "censuses", "Woolahra". There's also a reference to Ku-ring-gai as a suburb when it is a municipality and a particularly long and complicated sentence at the end of the first paragraph on page 111 which I fear must have bypassed the proof reader altogether. I also found jarring the use of the American term "downtown" when referring to the central district of a city. There is an odd reference on page 22 to the First Fleet Jews being a "British" minority.

Perhaps Dr. Rubinstein meant non-Anglo-Saxon. The convicts, who were sentenced by the British legal system to transportation were definitely British and the later free settlers were almost more British than those in the home country.

Read by an interested party, this book would be an excellent potted history which explains Jewish customs, practices and activities. It encourages further reading through the very good 36 item bibliography at the back which is referred to often in the text.

Helen Bersten

COMMUNITY OF FATE: MEMOIRS OF GERMAN JEWS IN MELBOURNE

John Foster (ed), Sydney, London, Boston, Allen & Unwin, 1986. pp.xvii + 174.

This is a collection of 14 stories of German Jews who arrived in Australia, in most cases in the late 1930s, as refugees from Nazi persecution and made Melbourne their permanent home. Of the 14 memoirs, 13 are presented as oral history and the last as an essay written by Susie Ehrmann.

This collection forms a representative sample of the variety of approaches to German-Jewish identity, including orthodox and liberal, Zionist and non-Zionist, and religious and secular or assimilationist. These stories also reflect the different routes of escape taken by the refugees, including the Shanghai and *Dunera* experiences and those who arrived after the war, in some cases via Palestine.

The title of the book refers to the concept which developed in German Jewry of *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* — a community of fate — which sought to define Jewish identity not merely in religious terms, but of the Jews as a people, without conceding the Zionist concept of the need for Jewish statehood. In each case the experiences of loss of German citizenship, migration and creating a new life in Australia have forced those interviewed to re-evaluate their German-Jewish identity. Through these personal recollections the book seeks to gain a deeper insight into the concept of 'community of fate'.

After an excellent introduction, the book tends to be a little uneven in quality, depending on the depth of thought behind each oral testimony. Some of the oral histories are fascinating, providing intimate detail which can only be highlighted through oral history. For example, K.S Moore's account of the boycott of 1 April 1933 or Ephraim Ehrmann's story of the *Badenstalt*. In other cases the stories only give a brief overview and the reader feels that a little more detail would have added to the value of the oral testimony.

In general, the trauma of the experiences under Nazi rule appears to have been blunted in many of the accounts. One reason for this could be the process of repression, where people tend to forget or minimise unpleasant experiences of the past. It may have been valuable to balance such problems of repression and blurring of events associated with oral testimony by the inclusion of some contemporary documentary material from letters, diaries and newspaper articles.

Some of the recollections could have been improved by the inclusion of specific names of parents, siblings and other relatives, particularly where they played a key role in Australia. This issue is particularly noticeable with Marlis Cohen whose parents — Drs Fred and Alice Benfey — played such an important role in the Association of

Jewish Refugees in Melbourne and also in the Zionist movement. Within the framework of this book some analysis of this Association's activities in dealing with 'enemy alien' classification and internment would have been helpful. Recollections of the widow of the Association's President, Rabbi Dr H.M. Sanger, could have added to the historical value of this collection.

Overall, *Community of Fate* makes interesting and enjoyable reading for those concerned with issues of German-Jewish identity, with the Nazi era and with the background to non-British European migration to Australia. These German-Jewish refugees, although they have not come to be regarded as a separate ethnic group, were one of the first groups to introduce continental culture to postwar Australia, thereby contributing to the shift from Anglo-Saxon conformity to multiculturalism in Australia. The value of the book should also be seen in this light.

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RELIGIOUS BODIES IN AUSTRALIA

by R. Humphreys and R. Ward,
Melbourne, 1986

Although the 1981 Census showed "no religion" as the fourth most common response to the question about religious affiliation (the three most common answers being Anglican, Catholic and no reply), most Australians are still prepared to acknowledge at least a nominal religious attachment. In writing this book, the authors' aim is to provide a comprehensive summary of the religious beliefs and practices now occurring within Australia and present it in a manner which is both theologically literate and comprehensive. In so doing they fill a void within Australian literature and one which was increasingly acute as beliefs and practices have proliferated with immigration and divisions within existing groupings. In many cases, particularly with Hinduism and Buddhism, the splintering of religious practice reflects differences in language, forms of worship, and nationality; political concerns have been an additional factor in the case of Eastern Orthodox religions.

Whilst less than 2% of Australians acknowledge identification with religions other than Christianity, nearly one-third of the book is devoted to those other religions because "of the unfamiliarity of their concepts . . . and the importance of understanding them." Despite this unfamiliarity the authors remind us that many of these religions have long played a part in Australia's development. Sikhs arrived here from the Punjab in the late 19th century to work as indentured labourers on the sugar canefields of the Northern Rivers of NSW, and whilst Buddhism was introduced by Chinese immigrants in the mid 19th century, in 1882 there also settled in the Mackay areas of Queensland several hundred mainly Buddhist Sri Lankans. By 1881 nearly 5000 Muslims lived in Australia with Afghan camel drivers having played an active

role in opening up the inland for trade and communications during the 1850s. The presence of Jews on the First Fleet is mentioned and a chronology is provided about the establishment of synagogues and Jewish communities throughout Australia.

Generally, each chapter of the book covers religious bodies with common theological concepts. Each chapter usually presents the brief history of the religion, the principles and beliefs underlying it, the current organizational structure/s and divisions together with a short history of the religion's arrival and progress within Australia. Amongst numerous points, the chapter on Judaism distinguishes between the Ashkenazi and Sephardi traditions and mentions a number of the differences between the Orthodox and Liberal approaches. The observance and meaning of the High Holydays, important festivals and the Sabbath are described; the importance of the *Shema* is referred to, as well as the Bar Mitzvah, Talith and the dietary laws. There is also a discussion about the place of women in Judaism and attitudes towards the admission of converts.

The book provides a detailed table of contents and an excellent series of indexes for principal persons, e.g., Abraham and Moses; principal publications of each grouping (*Australian Jewish News* and *Australian Jewish Times*), beliefs and practices (Bar Mitzvah, Circumcision, Kosher) and an index of sects or groupings not listed in the table of contents (Chassidic Judaism and Conservative Judaism).

I found this book to be very readable and an interesting introduction into the varied religious institutions which now occur within Australia. The authors are to be congratulated for their initiative and on a task well done by them.

Bruce Le Bransky.

E. PHILLIPS FOX AND HIS FAMILY

by Len Fox, Potts Point, N.S.W., 1985, pp.148

The publication by private citizens of family histories has become a phenomenon of recent years. These idiosyncratic efforts have proletarianised history, an arena of cultural concern traditionally dominated by the academics. 'E. Phillips Fox and his Family' by Len Fox is an example of this trend. Fox tells the story of his uncle, E. Phillips Fox, a Jewish painter of national prominence, who worked both in Australia and France. He was associated with Australia's famous Heidelberg School and other movements in Great Britain and Europe. The painter's life is traced from his formative years to his death in 1915.

The author does not attempt to provide an aesthetic appreciation of the artist's work. Comment on this score is vicariously accomplished by reference to numerous learned authorities. There are photographs of family members and small black and white reproductions of the artist's work currently hung in major galleries throughout Australia. Further biographical information is provided from previously unpublished letters and the remembered words of the author's mother.

Len Fox attempts to decant the many influences, both artistic and economic, that impinged upon the painter's professional career. However, as might be expected from a longtime socialist, his ideological preferences shine brightly throughout. The family is shown as a self-supporting community in which reciprocal and carthy affection dominates. "Uncle Mannie's" humanism, his concern for the human condition, is

manifest both through his art and concern for his fellow artist. The painter's career is bound up with the inherent worthiness of his labours.

The text is at its best when it illuminates the life and times of E. Phillips Fox. He recounts the fact that many of "Uncle Mannie's" family forbears, contemporaries and later members gained social prominence in Australia and England. Yet even here the author's ideological brush is busy emphasising their fervent support for democratic principles. The book is at its least convincing when the author attempts to illustrate the characteristics of Fox's life that accord with a personal view of Jewishness. He insists that Jews are traditionally known for having two features — a love of learning and intense care for the family unit. E. Phillips Fox displayed these characteristics in ample measure. Thus, claims the author, his uncle should be seen as Jewish painter in the full sense of the word despite his estrangement from the Jewish religion and the lack of overt Jewish content in his art. Nevertheless, Len Fox has provided us with a labour of love which stimulates the reader to pursue a deeper interest in this Australian painter of great national rank.

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PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS FROM THE AUSTRALIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

Monograph No. 2. Archive of Australian Judaica, Sydney

The General Editors of this Bibliography are the directors of the Archive of Australian Judaica, Jennifer Alison, Alan Crown, and Neil Radford. It has been compiled by Marianne Dacy, with an Introduction by Alan Crown and M. Dacy. There have been listed the holdings of some 300 Australian Jewish periodicals and 100 annual reports and year books in 29 libraries, and Jewish resource centres throughout Australia. The task of compilation, as the Editors say, must have been an arduous and complicated one. The end result, even though the listings are not, and cannot be, complete, justifies such a publication. In the past, and even today, too many of these items have been lost, their relevance and significance unappreciated. The varied material of which this Monograph is a catalogue, is indeed a kaleidoscope of the organizations of the Jewish community, of its culture, its history, and its strivings, whether in the field of the media, religion, education, Zionism, welfare and youth work and communal politics. A great number of these publications are in the Archive of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, and in some instances the Society is one of the very few bodies holding a particular item, e.g., *The Voice of Jacob*, *The Westralian Judean*, *The Australian Israelite*.

In Supplementary Notes it is stated at page vii that "The Great Synagogue and its archives, records and staff frequently provide assistance towards the publications projects of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, which has its own offices and archive at the Synagogue." This statement is, however, misleading if it intends to suggest that the Synagogue staff are in any way involved in the Society's publications. The Society has its own personnel and it is of course completely autonomous of the Synagogue. The historic archives of both organizations are separately kept and

maintained. The Great Synagogue is the Mother Congregation of Australian Jewry, and at one time, in New South Wales, it was the hub and centre of Jewish life. It is not therefore surprising that leaders and prominent members of the Synagogue were active in the formation of the Historical Society. The Synagogue as well as the Society however, control and manage their own historical and other archives. The Synagogue itself has a collection of Registers, Minute Books, letters and other records and items of special interest to historians, including those concerned with genealogical inquiries. The Historical Society holds microfilm of the Registers of Births, Deaths and Marriages which can be inspected without resort to the original Registers. The Society is most fortunate in being located within the Synagogue precincts, conveniently and centrally located in the City. As regards the Society's Journal it has been published, without interruption, for almost 50 years, containing original Papers of great value to historians of the Jewish community. The Journal is held by practically all leading libraries in Australia as well as overseas.

The Monograph includes a brief conspectus of the history of Australian Jewry contributed by Alan Crown to *The Jewish Spectator*, New York. It also features a Paper by Percy J. Marks on "The Jewish Press of Australia", read by its author in 1913 before the Jewish Literary and Debating Society. This article was printed, shortly after Marks' death in Vol. I of the Historical Society's *Journal*. The Editors of the Monograph, in their Supplementary Notes, have contributed an historical survey of the Jewish Press in Australia, which brings Marks' account up to date. They have made reference to writings by Solomon Stedman and by Suzanne Rutland relating to that subject, all of them in the Society's publications.

"Periodical Publications From The Australian Jewish Community" is of course of primary value to writers, librarians, researchers and students wishing to consult source material but it also serves as an indication that Australian Jewry is by no means the cultural and spiritual desert of which uninformed critics have sometimes spoken. Many of the publications in this bibliography are held in Sydney. It might be added that the Victorian Branch of the Historical Society has valuable archives and a reference library. The Secretary, Mrs Beverley Davis, of 3 Alma Road Camberwell, receives and answers inquiries.

M.Z.F.

SIR MATTHEW NATHAN

by Anthony P. Haydon, University of Queensland Press, 1976.

This Society has recently been presented with Dr. Anthony Haydon's biography of Sir Matthew Nathan, British colonial Governor and Civil Servant. This volume of 280 pages, the subject of which has been fully researched and documented, is of special interest to students of British colonial administration, particularly during its consolidation period in the earlier years of the present century. The book, however, also contains penetrating insights into the Jewish background of its subject. It is also of special value to Australian readers with an interest in Nathan's last Governorship in Queensland. Several chapters of this work originated as a doctoral dissertation at Yale University where the author did his post graduate studies, obtaining financial assistance from Yale and later grants from the Myer Foundation and La Trobe

University. He was particularly indebted to the Bodleian and Rhodes House Libraries of Oxford University where the extensive collection of Nathan's Papers is housed.

Matthew Nathan was born in London in 1862, his parents being Jonah and Miriam Nathan. The father, a middle class merchant, was the great-grandson of an 18th century German migrant, a quill maker. The mother, much younger than her husband, was an educated woman who was most ambitious for her children. In this, incidentally, she resembled, to some extent, the mothers of Sir John Monash and Sir Isaac Isaacs, both of whom exerted a dominating influence on the future careers of their famous sons. Miriam Nathan appears to have steered her children away from the confines of the Jewish community, seeking military and civil service vocations for them. At that time Judaism was still not recognized as a creed for entry on a soldier's official file. The Rev. F.L. Cohen — in passing — was then most keen to encourage Jewish recruits into the Imperial Defence Forces and was to become the first Jewish Chaplain.

Mrs Nathan, we are told, played down the Jewish extraction of her children. "Papa wishes everyone home", she wrote, "who can be for the fast. I shall be very glad when that day is over, I cannot say that I ever feel very devotional." Her expectations materialised when Matthew Nathan proved himself to be outstanding among the students of the Military Academy, joining the Royal Engineers and serving at a very early age in West Africa and Egypt. Not long afterwards Matthew secured a posting to India where he was already a "self-possessed careerist", and marriage and romance had little place in his plans. On his return to England Nathan became a member of the New West End Synagogue, leaving it to his mother to select a seat, remarking, "if one did wish to use it, it is more pleasant to sit where we did than among the stuffy old gentlemen with exuberant shirt frills who sit behind the desk." As the author notes, Nathan remained a nominal Jew, pursuing his career but always avoiding all controversy, mindful of his own future, and aided by official patronage. At the relatively young age of 36 he was an acting Governor of Sierre Leone, probably the first professing Jew to occupy such a position. He was apparently regarded by the Colonial Office as a golden boy, dutiful to carry out instructions and maintaining the status quo. "Never ask, never refuse", was the personal motto by which Nathan was motivated.

Although Nathan took the oath of office, as the author mentions, "with his helmet on his head and his hand on the Old Testament", the new Governor seems to have avoided the handful of local Jews. Shortly afterwards he was appointed Governor of the Gold Coast. His administration was marked by freedom from direct taxation, which was maintained in the Colony for about 40 years. Three years later came the Governorship of Hong Kong, seen by Nathan as a "first-class" one. Here also he remained aloof from the Jewish community. His administration was very successful, a halcyon time for Nathan. His next post took him to Natal for two years where he tried to segregate the races but had to impose martial law on the Zulus. He was virtually a supernumary as a military Governor. He looked askance at moves to unify Natal with South Africa, concerned that the Afrikaners might cut the painter with Britain. The writer tells us that Nathan took a Durban synagogue seat but used it rarely.

Between 1910 and 1916 Nathan secured positions in London as Secretary of the Post Office and also as head of the Board of Inland Revenue. He was associated with Herbert Samuel, the Postmaster General. Nathan began to move and be seen in Downing Street politico-social circles and in 1916 was sent to Ireland as Under Secretary. In that post he shared the blame for failing to forestall the Easter rising, content to reassure the authorities that all was well. He preferred, it was said, a single

mindful attachment to his desk, leading an obituarist to later remark that Nathan had never married because "he had no time."

Finding himself unemployed, the Colonial Office yielded to Nathan's claims on its patronage when he was offered in 1920 the Governorship of Queensland which was suddenly vacant. It was thought that he would act as a brake on Premier Theodore, though the latter may have believed that the Governor would be sympathetic to a Labour Government. Indeed, Nathan raised no opposition to the legislation to abolish the Legislative Council. Nathan sensed that the Government would press for a local Governor but he agreed to a short extension of his term. He again, managed to avoid contentious issues. In his retirement he acted as Vice President of the Royal Geographical Society, chaired a Committee doing research on the Great Barrier Reef, served on a Royal Commission on the Ceylon Constitution, and held office as High Sheriff of Somerset. The author says that he was associated with the Friends of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and describes this as Nathan's "sole concession in later life to the cause of preserving a culture which he had long since deserted in favour of his land of birth." Nathan died in 1939.

Matthew Nathan, as Anthony Haydon concludes, was dedicated to the consolidation of the British Empire, his striking quality being a "caretaker mentality", albeit a narrow conception of Imperialism. The author has obviously sifted through numerous archives and source material from which he has assembled all the basic data relating to Nathan's career, with the result that this book is most readable and instructive. At all times Nathan's personality emerges. Jewish readers, in particular, are presented with many insights which indicate that the author achieved a complete understanding of the character of his subject. The book contains a lengthy and valuable Bibliography.

M.Z.F.

THE CHOSEN A HISTORY OF AUSTRALIAN JEWRY

by Dr. Hilary Rubinstein

The history of Australian Jewry is inextricably woven into the fabric of a wider Australian context. However distinguishable it might be through religion, language and community structure, its meanderings in a benign and "lucky" environment have been *sui generis*.

Despite a proliferation of monographs and dissertations, no-one until now has attempted to write a comprehensive history. Hilary Rubinstein, having recently wetted a foot in describing the Victorian Jewish community, now has taken the complete plunge in tackling the continental saga. One would have hoped that this pathfinder would have been a comprehensive and authoritative volume, but it falls a long way short of this expectation.

The book suffers some restraints which cannot be laid at the author's threshold. It is not big enough physically to cover all the main issues of Jewish life and survival. The author must have agonised over the components that simply could not be included. These sins of omission wherever the *culpa* is to be laid, are nevertheless considerable.

This reviewer had just read Robert Hughes *The Fatal Shore* when requested to review the Australian Jewish History. A state of euphoria prevailed after reading a history so excitingly and imaginatively penned that it was deliberately read slowly. Each page a

woc and pain, a masterpiece of reconstruction. It was read slowly to make it last.

Comparisons are not odious but instructive. Dr. Rubinstein lacks the panache of the Broad conceptual historian. It may be that had she allowed the characters to do some of the talking, one might have felt a contemporary empathy with the *dramatis personae*. We rarely hear them speak, and even a favourite character like Blaubaum (well done for restoring him at long last to his rightful position), who spent much time editorialising, does not spring to life. Thus the history remains two, and not three dimensional.

The author is much more at home in a post World War II environment. The narrative moves faster here, and carries the reader along. One hesitates to criticise the proportions and dimensions attributed to the leaders of Australian Jewry, but one detects a little sycophancy here, and a Freudian omission there. Why have full page portraits, when space is clearly at a premium.

Powerfully describing the traumatic post World War II immigration and the development of the ethnic community, she does not distinguish between Jewish ethnicity and the Italian or Greek variety. The majority of the newcomers from Poland never manifested any love of their fatherland, quite the contrary, nor did they demonstrate any love for the Polish language, or attempt to transmit it to their children. Jewish values yes, Polish no. One wonders whether the term Ethnic should be applied at all, seeing that it usually means something quite different from the Australian Jewish experience.

The glossary is usefully set at the beginning of the book, but contains errors. These clearly betray the author's lack of expertise in the Hebrew language, and in Synagogue custom. Similarly, in the volume itself there are some mistakes, e.g. that Rabbi Gurewicz of Carlton was from Poland, when in fact he was from Vilna. This is not a mere detail, but in fact distorts the image of a *Talmid Hacham* who was a Litvak through and through.

As the volume is a text book of sorts, presumably, for non Jewish as well as Jewish readers, a brief outline of the Jewish religion would have served well as a *mise en scene*.

Nature has ignored the vacuum in Australian Jewish Historiography for a long while. That vacuum no longer exists, but there is still room for an encyclopaedic, three dimensional, well illustrated history. The first step has been taken and the accolade for attempting this daunting task must be awarded to Dr. Rubinstein.

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