

# Jewish Historical Society Int.

## NEWSLETTER



Member of the JCA Family of Communal Organisations

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### (A) From the Archives

#### (i) Donations of material have been received with thanks:

- . From Mr Samuel M. Daniel in New York: *Kol Bina*, Bulletin of Indian Jewry in the United States of America. Special bibliography issue 1994. This contains a bibliography about Indian Jewry by Professor Nathan Katz of Miami.
- . *Minorities, Cultural Diversity in Sydney* ed by S. Fitzgerald and G. Weatherspoon. It includes a chapter by Suzanne Rutland.
- . From Mrs Laura Berg. Annual reports of Newtown Synagogue, 1923, 1938, 1956-7 and photos and articles relating to the visit in 1921 of the Chief Rabbi, Dr Hertz. One of the articles identifies the dignitaries who were in the official photograph.
- . From Clare Cohen. Papers relating to Kosher Meals on Wheels.
- . *Family and local history sources in the Sydney area* compiled by Jennie Fair and Dom Meadley.
- . Belated thanks with apologies to Jack Epstein for the donation of his biography of Issy Smith, VC.
- . From Fel Prentice: (i) Photograph Album from Bankstown Synagogue - 1984 Purim Photos. (ii) Letters from Wollongong Synagogue 1965-71.
- . From Garry Luke. *Simon Sebel, a Life*.
- . From Ian Nathan. Books and newspaper clippings from the families of Alan Jack Cohen and George Neville Cohen of Tamworth.
- . From Ruth Cranston. Computer disks for safekeeping of her autobiography *While I Remember and Before I Forget*.

From Peter Hicks. *Prince of Fences - The Life and Times of Ikey Solomon* by J.J. Tobias.

From Julie Morris. "Memories of the Maccabean Hall in the Thirties" (see below), and early "Jewish Settlers in Rural Areas".

From Harvey Crayson. Letters belonging to Oskar, Margot and Marion Moss. Found in an old refrigerator, these letters date between 1939 and 1946 and cover varied experiences of finding a relative alive after the Holocaust, correspondence with family who survived the London Blitz, correspondence with a billeted American serviceman and his fiancée. The archivist, Helen Bersten, has returned the original letters from the American serviceman and his fiancée to him in Los Angeles, at the request of the donor, after making copies for the archives.

Archives of Australian Judaica: Holdings 1983-1995. This is an excellent resource list for all aspects of the Australian Jewish Community. Researchers should remember that there is valuable material available at the AAJ as well as at our own society.

From Sophie Caplan the generous donation of *A Standard for the People* ed by Dr Stephen Levine, this is a history of the Wellington (NZ) Jewish community.

## (ii) Activities

The Archivist addressed the AGM of the ACT branch in March on the subject of "Jews on the Stage". Three-quarters of branch members were in attendance.

**Clean-Up at Rookwood Cemetery - Heritage Day:** Sunday 27 August 1995. The aim of Heritage day is to weed and clean the older sections of Rookwood's Jewish section. It is also presents the opportunity for parents and grandparents to show their children where members of their family are buried. Consistent with this view, the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies has agreed to include the project as an annual event in its communal calendar.

Meet at 10.30am at Section 1. Bring own lunch and tools. Tea & coffee supplied.

**Clean-Up at Maitland Cemetery - 22 October.** Further information to come.

The convener of these activities is Garry Braude who can be contacted on 015-073018.

## (iii) With Thanks

The Society appreciates receiving comments from its membership. To this end it is pleased to acknowledge the compliments of Henry Lippmann on the work by Beverley Davis of AJHS (Vic Inc.) that went into the compilation of the Index to Volume XI 1990-93 of the Journal.

### **(B) The Sarah Larra - John Hart Wedding**

The following letter has been received from Gary Luke. It follows from Louise Rosenberg's article in the April issue of the Great Synagogue Journal on the first Jewish marriage in Australia:

Recently I began searching through records and references following the name trail of Sarah Larra, who married John Hart, the subject of Louise Rosenberg's article on the first marriage of two Jews in Australia. After a debauched tent-swapping party held by the 700 or so convicts when finally ashore after the long segregated voyage, reprimanded severely by Phillip and Rev. Johnson the next day, there followed five marriages on the 10th February, one on the 11th, and this marriage among eight on the 13th. John Hart was aged 48. He was sent to Norfolk Island on the "Supply" arriving in early March the next year, with Sarah arriving in December later that year. When he died there in January 1795 they were childless.

In J. King's "The First Fleet", a compilation of convict names from various sources, the following cross references appear-

FLORA, Lara see LARA, Flora

LARA, Flora also LARA, Sarah also Zarah

A "London Gazette" article of October 1788 about these convicts has her as Sarah Lara, but so far I have not been able to find that name nor any of her others on the shipping indents. For her marriage she was Sarah Taura, and Lora or Laura Flora appears in the census lists of 1800, 1811 and 1818. So..., so far we have Sarah/Zarah Larra/Lara, and Lora/Laura/Lara Flora, and Flora Lara, and Sarah Taura. But never Mrs Hart.

Some of these variations are easily explained by the loose spelling of the time, or a playful response to the rhythm of the name. H. Rumsey in "Pioneers of Sydney Cove" suggests she was also known as Taylor, from Kingston, and D. Chapman in "1788 - The People of the First Fleet" has her working as a fortune teller and later remarried. Perhaps her names were a type of stage name to suit her trade. The Taylor may have come from records sourced also by C.J. Smee for his "First Fleet Families" where he has a marriage between William Brown with Flora Lara, and John Hart with Sarah Taylor, a suspected mix-up of two marriages within a few days of each other during the disorganised first weeks of our colony, or Smee's attempt to make sense of the Taura name.

Her relationship with James Larra is fairly tenuous. So far I have not found any document to confirm this claim of mishpocha-hood, nor did Dr Bergman in his thoroughly researched article about James Larra in the AJHS Journal of July 1960. Incidentally, he names her as a Jewess although his later writings don't include her.

Both Louise Rosenberg and myself would appreciate any references which would substantiate a possible connection. (Responses can be made through the Hon Archivist, Helen Bersten, C/- The AJHS)

**(C) Memories of the Maccabean Hall in the Thirties (by Julie Morris)**

Having recently visited the Jewish Museum at the Maccabean Hall, I was overwhelmed with nostalgia and memories of the "Macc" as it was fondly called in those bygone years, in the thirties. It was truly a magic centre for Jewish youth, where almost all the social and many other activities took place. There were no other Jewish centres that catered for such a diverse number of activities and being depression years when few families had money to spare, it covered so many needs for a very small outlay.

My first introduction to the "Macc" was on a Girl Guide in the 4th Darlinghurst, 1st Judean Guide Company. I joined in 1930 at the age of twelve. The Company had been opened by Mrs Anne Rothfield, wife of Mr Abraham Rothfield, headmaster of the Hebrew School in Sydney, in 1927. Captain, as she was called, was assisted by two Lieutenants, Rae Whitefield (Ginsberg) and Edna Goulston. They met each Sunday afternoon at 2.30 in the Lower Hall, for 2 hours, during which they learnt the Guide Law - and hopefully carried it out - learnt morse code and sent and received messages by flags, hand-made by each guide, as part of the test. Other activities included learning various knots and when to use them (I still make use of some to this day), bush craft, recognising native birds and flowers, camp craft, pitching a tent, lighting and making a fire (only 2 matches allowed and no paper), how the Australian flag was made and the Union Jack and the correct way to fly them. There were many other interesting things, such as folk dancing and singing camp fire songs. We had hikes and some of us attended camps, usually held annually in conjunction with other Guide Companies in the District or Division.

Leaders came and went over the years, in 1932 the Captain was Leah Wolff (Blits) and her Lieutenant was Julie Harris (Levy). When they resigned to get married in 1934 I took over the Company at 17 and my Lieutenant was Joyce Goldstein, I was Julie Levy in those days - not to be confused with Julie Harris who became Mrs Reg Levy. The Guides continued to meet at the "Macc" until 1937, when the Company moved to the Bondi Junction Shule Hall.

Their younger sisters, the Brownies, aged 7-11 met on Sunday mornings, also in the Lower Maccabean Hall. The Pack opened about 1934 with Thelma Harris (King) as Brown Owl and Joyce Goldstein as Tawny Own, until she transferred to the Guides. The Lady Cubmaster was Joan Goldstein (Aaron) and her assistant and future husband was Albert Aaron. On occasions the Guides and Scouts joined forces to put on a Revue at the Maccabean Hall.

The Jewish Scouts, Cubs and Rovers met at the Great Synagogue under different Leaders, beginning with Mr A. Rothfield, Max Nathan, Edgar Kelson, David King and others. Later the Scouts met at the Central Synagogue the name changing from Sydney Judean Scouts to 2nd Bondi Junction Scouts.

The Maccabean Literacy and Dramatic Juniors (MLDJ) began in 1930 by a group of young people looking for some form of culture. A great number of them had graduated from Scouts and Guides and needed to direct their interests into new fields.

Their monthly meetings were held in the Library at the "Macc". Their first President was Alf Levy. Their motto was "Spectamur Agendo", their colours cardinal red and white. They had an official badge and put out a regular magazine called "Agenda".

Debates were organised amongst their members and with teams from members of the public, including the Senior Literary and Debating Society who also met at the "Macc". Speakers and adjudicators included many prominent people of the day such as Judge Cohen, Eric Baume (Journalist and Broadcaster), Rabbi Cohen, Flight Lieut. Sutherland, Rev. M. Einfield.

Plays and sketches were put on in the Main Hall by the members and were well attended by relatives and friends. Some were also put on at the little Tom Thumb Theatre, in King Street under the auspices of Dulcie Deamer, a well known journalist. The M.L.D.J. also had social occasions, the most important of which was the Annual Red and White Ball with Cec Morrison's Orchestra.

The M.L.D.J. filled a very important need for young people and flourished in its small way for many years. There were not many opportunities for young people to go to University then, one had to be from a wealthy family or clever enough to win a bursary or scholarship - few and far between! - to do so. The majority of young people left school after the Intermediate Examination, taken at the end of 3rd year High School (now year 9). Some continued their education at Night School - pre Tech. College - and an amazing number of M.L.D.J. members became professionals in this way.



When I joined in 1934, the greater number of original members had left, because of extra pressures which didn't allow them the time to continue. Also, the influx of younger members - often their siblings - changed the type of program that had functioned before.

The Maccabean Hall was officially opened as the N.S.W. Jewish War Memorial by Sir John Monash, in November 1923.

It soon became the headquarters for Jewish Sporting activities in Sydney. The first Jewish Interstate Cricket Contest was held in Melbourne in 1924. The following year members of the N.S.W. War Memorial Sport and Entertainment Committee held regular dances at the Maccabean Hall to raise funds to entertain a reciprocal visit from Victorians. On December 26th 1924, the Chairman of the Maccabean Sports Institute, Rupert Michaelis and Sec. Sam Block, welcomed 18 members of the visiting team at the Maccabean Hall. The team consisted of cricketers, athletes, swimmers and tennis players - all men!

The Interstate Sports Carnival, December 1928, included women for the first time in swimming events, tennis, basketball and physical culture. The Hebrew Standard reported 6-12-1929 that the Ladies' Sports Union's "Dora Hart Memorial Cup" would be completed for by Jewish girls throughout Australia, competing in the above events.

The Maccabean Hall was used for many years for the Welcome Ball for the Interstate Carnival when in Sydney. The Sydney Musical Society was formed in 1935 by Mr Joe Joseph, who was choirmaster of the Bondi Junction Synagogue for some time, and where an inaugural meeting was held. The Society first used the School of Arts Hall in Bondi Road for their rehearsals, which was not altogether satisfactory and later made their headquarters the Maccabean Hall. They rehearsed in the Dug-out, the clubroom of the Ex-Servicemen's Association.

They Society flourished with rehearsals on Sunday evenings which finished with an impromptu "dance". The first President was Philip Klineberg, brother-in-law of Joe Joseph. Joe was the Producer, he had taken part in many amateur productions in London, and played the Principal Comic part in each of the Shows put on by the S.M.S. The first Musical Director was Ralph Levy, sometime choirmaster of the Great Synagogue and graduate of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. The accompanist, Norah Lurie (Fenton) was to become a noted concert pianist.

Many young Jewish men and women played leading roles and who were later to become notable citizens. George Amsberg, who became Judge of the District Court, played the "Mikado" of Japan. Sam Cohen, Ass. Musical Director played Principal parts such as Booh Bah, became Deputy Vice-Principal of Sydney Teacher's College and first Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Macquarie University. Sydney Friedlander was Mayor of Lane Cove Municipality for many years. Phil Klineberg became Staff Inspector of Schools, in charge of

Special Education. Harris Morris and his brother Ben, became Principals of State High Schools. Harris Morris was President of the S.M.S. for many years. [For more information on the Sydney Musical Society refer to an article written by Harris Morris in Volume 10, Part 8, 1990 in the AJHS Journal.]

Apart from all these diverse activities the "Macc" had a social life of its own. Once a month there was a dance in the main hall with Minnie Rosenthal's Dance Band. The hall was crowded with young people, the girls in long evening frocks, the boys elegantly dressed. Nobody thought it was odd or dangerous to see these young women in their evening wear, walking to and from the "Macc" to the tram stop and thence home.

On Sunday nights there were often films shown, quite an attraction, as there was no TV or videos then and it cost money to go to the "pictures". Sometimes there would be a dance, not so dressy as the monthly dance but just as enjoyable.

There were several Jewish boys who were always available to play to piano or another instrument for these turnouts, they were happy to oblige and did it all without payment. Those I remember were Bernie Roth, Vic Levy, Leo Levy, Aubrey Levy and Frank Fenton (Finklestein).

The Maccabean Hall was used for wedding receptions and the first Temple Emanuel Wedding Service and Reception was held there 55 years ago in 1939, when Phyllis Bear and Lou Rose were married, before the temple was completed.

Of course the "Macc" was used on so many occasions not just for the youth, after all it was the meeting place for whom it was built, the ex-Servicemen and Women.

What happy times we had there, in spite of the Depression and the War looming. What a debt we owe to the Maccabean Hall!

#### **(D) Congratulations to:**

- To Sir Asher Joel, our co-patron, on the awarding of his papal honour.
- To our member Abe Segal, on the awarding of an OAM.

Bruce Le Bransky (Editor)

**Contributions to the Newsletter are most welcome.**