

Australian Jewish Historical Society Inc.

 Member of the JCA Family of Communal Organisations



NEWSLETTER

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1. **Thank you** to those members who approved of the new style of Newsletter and especially to those who contributed to this one. The Newsletter can become an important communication between members of the Society, if it is used for articles shorter than those in the Journal, and more intimate than one would expect of an academic historical journal which is produced bi-annually. By the way, did you realise that the Australian Jewish Historical Society Inc. Journal is published once annually in June in Sydney, and once annually in Melbourne, in November? This has been so since 1988, and seems to be working well. It does account for the difference in style and content of the two, and makes it a truly national organ. This newsletter only goes to our Sydney members and to those who live in the smaller centres.
2. **What's happening in the Society.**

Last month our President Dr. Suzanne Rutland gave a brilliant talk entitled *New Perspectives on the History of Jewish Women in Australia*. It was such a pity that there was only a small audience to hear it, as Suzanne's talks are always so well prepared and interesting. It was timed to fit in with the International Conference of the Council of Jewish Women which has now just concluded. Would members prefer to have meetings at another time than Sunday afternoon? Or another venue? (though we are very comfortable at Mandelbaum House, and the facilities are excellent and there is free parking on weekends)

Our next meeting will be on **Sunday 7th July 2002** at 2 p.m. when Diane Armstrong will speak about her latest book, which tells the story of the voyage to Australia of the *s.s. Derna* and the lives of its passengers in Australia. Many of the people who arrived on the *Derna* are well known in the Jewish community today, in many parts of Australia and New Zealand, including Diane herself, and it is fascinating to hear of their journey and their consequent settling into life here. It is a wonderful story and is reviewed in the June Journal. It is not often that we have the possibility to hear how a book came about, from its author, so **DROP EVERYTHING AND COME.**

The Annual **Hans Kimmel Awards** will be heard in July also, on Monday 29th. For over 25 years, our Vice President Sophie Caplan has been judging and awarding these results of individual research done by Year 10 students at Moriah College, as a memorial to the late Dr. Hans Kimmel, one time editor of the *Sydney Jewish News* and an international journalist of great standing. Sophie, herself a former history teacher, reads the best 25% of scripts produced by the students each year, keeping a wary eye for errors or plagiarism, (specially using the work of older siblings or friends). The students interview and write up the interview of a relative or acquaintance in essay form, telling the biography of their subject. When the Award Night comes around, the winning students present excerpts of their work, reading to the audience of you, our members, and their own families. The function is held at Moriah College, with supper provided by the Parents Association. All the prizes are donated by Sophie herself, amounting to nearly \$700 per annum, an excellent way of encouraging young people to be interested in both oral and written history. To be held on **Monday July 29th**. Please make an effort to come. You will be very pleasantly surprised at the quality of their work.

3. NOT QUITE WITHIN THE SOCIETY...but connected to our interests.

The Great Synagogue has embarked on a program of recording the memories of the members of its Congregation, about being Jewish in Sydney.

About a dozen people have been trained by Rosemary Block, the Head of Oral History at the State Library of NSW, in how to interview and record the history of others, both for their own families and for the Synagogue's archives. Special equipment is being purchased for this process, and the interviews will soon begin to take place. The interviewers and tapes of those interviewed will be available for genuine researchers.

4. THE VALUE OF MEMORIES by Judy Shapira.

When I was a very small child, my favourite stories told to me by my father were about "when he was little boy". The seventh child of a family of nine, he was born in 1881 and grew up in Melbourne, a very different Melbourne from the one we know today. He had been a champion athlete in his day, a long distance runner as well as cricketer and tennis player, I don't know whether they had athletic coaches in those days, but he used to train by running alongside a horse and buggy driven by one of his older brothers. It obviously worked as a training method, as I have inherited a large silver cup won in a ten mile race in 1901. Perhaps modern athletics coaches might like to try this method ... but I doubt modern traffic conditions would allow it! (Can't you imagine the road rage?)

Obviously times change, and there seems to be little time to reflect on the old ways, let alone to discuss them. But this type of recollection is History ...not only dates, and wars, and the invention of the motor car. This is Social History...the story of how

people lived, and worked and used their leisure, and interacted with their family and friends. Everyone has recollections of the past, not necessarily of world shattering events, but of everyday life, or holidays or family events. Can you remember the Friday night late shopping night of pre-W.W.II Sydney, and the effect this had on Jewish family life? How all the Jewish shops were closed on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur? Of Sabbath classes in the synagogues after the Shabbat service? Or the Sunday morning rush to get to Sunday school...most unwillingly? Or the early youth groups ... Judean Girl Guides, Boy Scouts, Great Synagogue Youth, Temple Teens and so on? The Maccabean Hall Dances?

These events and stories make up the fabric of Social History, how we as a Jewish community lived and preserved our Yiddishkeit for the next generation, as well as for our own. The recording of Social History is as important as the recording of major events in the life of the community, but ever so much harder to collect and put in order, but unless a start is made it will be too late.

You, our members, are invited to send in small anecdotes of your own memories and recollections, and we would like to publish them in this Newsletter. Don't be afraid that you may not be a great writer...few of us are!

But it is important that we make an effort to record the way we lived and worked in our own day, and not leave it to the "experts".

Next time someone says to you that the Australian Jewish Historical Society is too highbrow for them, or has little relevance to ordinary people, you can tell them that, as a Social Historian, you are a valued member, as are you all.

Judy Shapira.

5. PROFILE

Our profile this month is of **JEANNETTE TSOULOS**.

Jeannette is our Correspondence Secretary and also comes in one day a week to answer the genealogical requests we receive. She enjoys genealogy, being Secretary of the Australian Jewish Genealogical Society

Also, she feels at home with Australian 19th century Jewish history as all her Australian ancestors had arrived by 1909, marrying into various families in the community.

Jeannette is the eldest of four daughters of Julie and the late Harris Morris. She grew up in Grafton and Wagga Wagga, returning to Sydney in time to complete her education at Hornsby Girls High School, then study pharmacy at Sydney University.

She worked for twenty years as a pharmacist, before turning to piano teaching. She is part of a group of three performers who give recitals in retirement homes. She is also archivist for the National Council of Jewish Women, and a committee member of a local residents' action group, Friends of Kuring-gai Environment. Her other great

passion is languages, which led her to complete a BA Hons recently in Modern Languages.

She married Con in 1966, and they have three children – Peter, Diana and Philip.

6. AN ADDITIONAL TRIBUTE ... by Neville Milston

In the last newsletter, a tribute to Scoutmaster Edgar J. Kelson mentioned the 1st (Judean) Scout group attached to the Great Synagogue when Abe Rothfield was its Scoutmaster. It is regrettable that the late highly respected and admired Mr. Abraham Rothfield MC and Bar, BA, was referred to without his World War I decorations. Probably one of the most highly decorated British Jews during World War I, a Bachelor of Arts and a skilled and much loved teacher employed by the NSW Board of Jewish Education from the early 1920's. For many years, the late Mr. Rothfield was prominent in the Jewish Scout Movement in Sydney, from the early 1920's to the 1930's. I appreciate the tribute was to Scoutmaster Edgar Kelson, but the reference to Mr Rothfield was so sparse, that very likely many people today would be unaware of his MC and Bar, a very high honour.

7. ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

Received with thanks from:

- Sylvia Rosenblum: tape of recorded interview with Diane Armstrong, October 2001
- Nate Zusman: books and journals
- Rabbi Apple; Journals and ephemera
- Sophie Caplan: papers and ephemera
- Morris Ochert OAM: copies of death certificates for Rabbi Abraham Phillip Phillips and his wife Rachel (nee Aarons)
- Morris Forbes OAM: papers and journals
- Doreen Scully and Colin Choat (Mt. Colah): family trees of the Simonstein, Phillips and Lipman families, and biography of Lewis Lipman.

Purchased:

- *Australian Genesis* by Rabbi John Levi, second edition, 2002
- *Eshkalot*, Essays in memory of Rabbi Ronald Lubofsky, 2002
- *Australia and Israel*, an ambiguous relationship by Chanan Reich, 2002
- *The Montefiore Homes*, 150 years of care by Judith Raphael Buckrich, 1998
- *Theodore Fink, a talent for ubiquity*, by Don Garden, 1998

8. FOR GENEALOGISTS.

- The London Jewish Chronicle database of births, marriages and deaths is now available from Miriam Pollak, who will be happy to receive enquiries. Her email is miriam_pollak@hotmail.com
- **Your convict ancestors at the Hyde Park Barracks.**

The Hyde Park Barracks will be mounting an exhibition in February 2003 on convicts in the Barracks, which will include a number of Jewish convicts. The supervising Curator, John Peterson, is keen to hear from anyone with convict ancestry who has mementoes brought out by these ancestors, such as candlesticks, mezuzzot, talletim, kippot, siddurim or bibles.

9. CORRECTION.

In Vol.13 Part 4 page 609 it was incorrectly stated Bernie Press was President of the Broken Hill Hebrew Congregation from 1946 – 1949. In fact this office was held by his father Louis.

10. AJHS Phone numbers (members only)

If you have trouble phoning the Society's main number because it is busy, you may use the following number, which also has voice mail: 9692 5260. This is actually our internal line but it can accept external calls. **Please try our main number first.**

11. PRESERVATION OR DESECRATION – The story of the Adelaide *Shule* ... by Helen Bersten.

I have been fascinated by the Adelaide *shule* for some time. After the trend in Egyptian-style buildings found expression in the old York Street Synagogue in Sydney in 1844 as well as in Hobart in 1845 and Launceston in 1846, it also was employed in Adelaide in 1850 in the original synagogue. (See article by Robert Merrilees in AJHS Journal volume 14, part 2, 1998 for an explanation of the fascination with such a design.)

In the case of Adelaide, instead of moving to a larger building in another location when the population grew, as the Sydney congregation had done, they simply built a bigger *shule* next door, using the old *shule* as vestry and vestibule. The two buildings were in Rundle Street right in the city and old photographs show them side by side with a large open area in front before the fence encloses the land.

What intrigued me was not just that the old *shule* today no longer faces Rundle Street or that it is in Rundle Place, virtually a dingy side street, but that it is now a disco! I knew from newspaper articles that the building had been deconsecrated and it had been sold to interests who had turned it into a nightclub. I also knew that the garish blue neon *Magen David* above the door and the name SYNAGOGUE in the advertising brochure for the nightclub had outraged many in the Adelaide Jewish community. Finally community outrage prevailed and the name was changed to CHURCH!

All this I knew, but the actual sight of the building on my recent visit to Adelaide shook me. It was Sunday morning when we strolled along to Rundle Place. The *Magen David* was still in place above the word "Church" and the doors were open as the cleaners were tidying up from the Saturday night disco. We asked if we could enter to have a look at the old building and take some pictures. It was dark inside but I could make out the strobe light and the streamer decorations, the music area and the bar area. What I was not prepared for as my eyes became accustomed to the light was that the old *shule* was in fact intact inside. Under a white cloth and balloons and streamers was the old *bima*, with the Ark behind half hidden by a projection screen. The ladies gallery with its ancient metal supporting columns held music and amplification equipment and the bar was downstairs where some of the men's seating would have been. After taking a number of flash photographs I staggered out to the sunlit street in shock.

On returning to Sydney, I showed the photographs around and expressed my horror at the awful transformation of an historic building. A colleague pointed out that in fact the building had been preserved intact, despite its desecration and if, in the future, it was to be sold on for other purposes, it might be treated more sensitively. I looked again at my photographs and realised she was right. There, beneath the grime and garish decorations was the *bima* and the Ark, the ladies gallery and also, I was to learn, the original façade of the building beneath its 1939 makeover.

I spoke to Rodney Goultman, editor of the Melbourne Journal, formerly from Sydney via Adelaide, and consulted old issues of the AJHS Journal as well as Hirsch Munz's famous booklet, *Jews in South Australia 1836-1936*. Thus I learnt more about the story of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation which was established in September, 1848 and about the original Egyptian-style building on Rundle Street opened on August 9, 1850. The second *shule* was opened in 1871. In the mid 1890s shops were built on the large area of land in front of the two buildings in Rundle Street and the rent from these shops helped the community survive. After this the second *shule* was enlarged and its entrance moved to Rundle Place with an elegant stone fence topped by iron railings separating the building from the street. Alas, the fence has gone today.

Emanuel Solomon from Sydney and his nephew Judah Moss were the instigators of the September 1848 meeting which established the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation, meeting in Solomon's Temple Tavern. Plans to build a permanent synagogue were discussed at following meetings that year. Funds were raised and the land was purchased in December of the same year. Shares were sold and a loan raised to help with finances and by 1854 the mortgage was discharged.

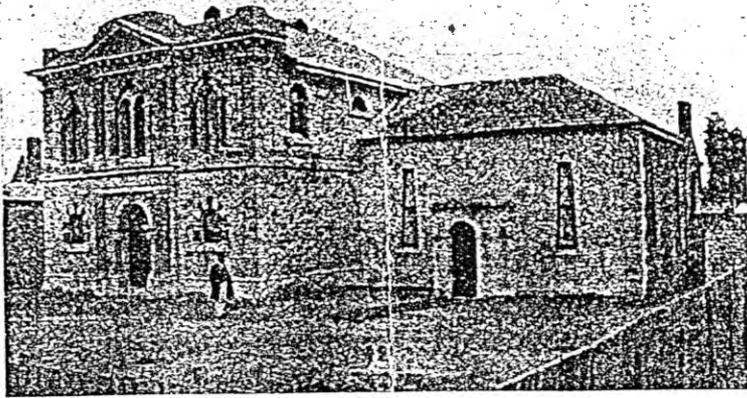
The community had numbered 48 in 1846 but by 1860 it had grown to 360 so a larger place of worship was required. The new synagogue next door was consecrated in 1871. The lower floor seated 250 and the gallery 120. A Private Act of Parliament was passed in 1881 known as the Synagogue Act whereby all lands belonging to the synagogue were vested in the Trustees, who at that time were I. Simmons, I. Solomon, M.J. Solomon and S. Saunders. Mr. Levi Isaacs proposed the building of the shops in 1894. The altered and reoriented *shule* was opened in September 1896. By 1940 it had offices for the minister and secretary as well as the Memorial Hall dedicated to the fallen of World War I.

So today, the old building lies in wait behind its Rundle Street shops and its Synagogue place façade, waiting for the fairy godmother who will change this ugly duckling back into the beautiful princess she once was. Let us hope that one day the heritage-listed old Adelaide *shule* will be restored and looked after by a more sympathetic owner as the Maitland *shule* building was by the Maitland Credit Union and the Auckland *shule* building by the National Bank, that desecration will be no more and preservation will be the order of the day.

The following page of pictures illustrates the history of the buildings.

Judith Shapira, Newsletter Editor

Contributions to the Newsletter are most welcome. They should be sent to the Newsletter Editor, AJHS, Mandelbaum House, 385 Abercrombie Street, Darlington, NSW, 2008.

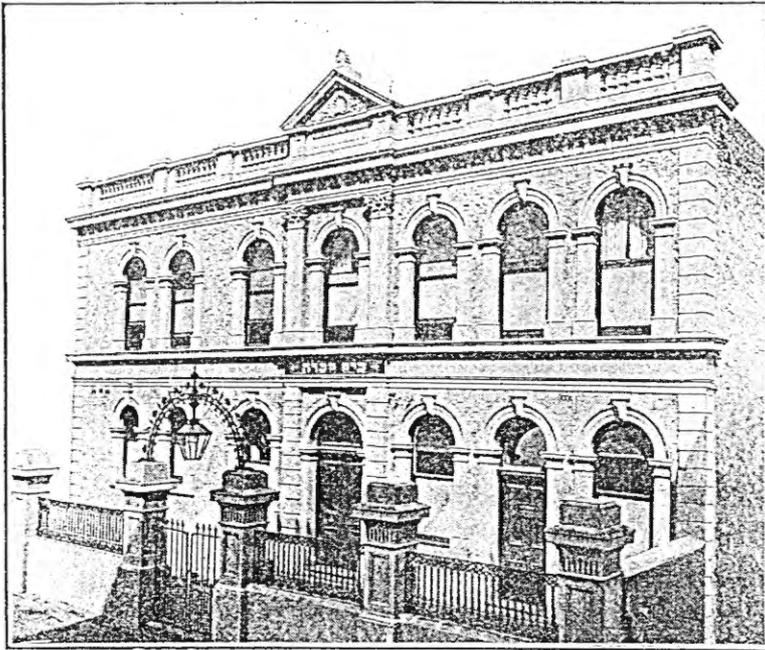


1871 shule

1848 shule



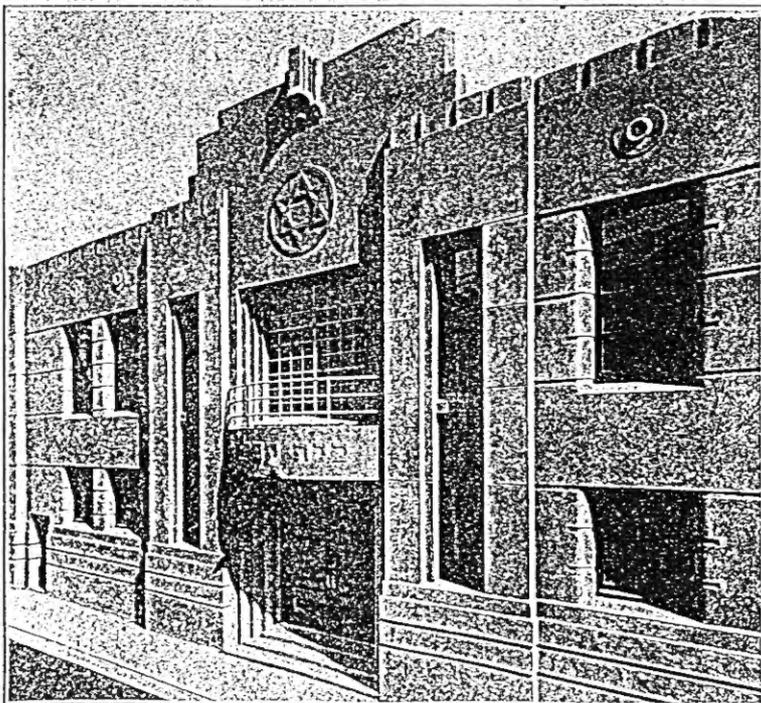
1998



The Synagogue, showing Entrance from Synagogue Place.
1896



2002



1939