

AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.

Member of the JCA Family of Communal Organisations



NEWSLETTER

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1. HOW THE AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY WORKS.

Most Society members are aware of our Journal and public meetings, but not all are aware of our archival holdings and library, which were started by our late historian Dr. George Bergman in 1959-60 and have been run by Helen Bersten, our honorary archivist, since George's death in 1979. In recent years, she has also taken on the role of Office Manager, which involves writing meeting notices and emailing of notices and newsletters. Like most societies which are run by unpaid people, even though they may be or have been professional in other areas, the AJHS has an elected committee which meets monthly (usually on the first Tuesday of the month) in the Society's rooms in Mandelbaum House, a Jewish residential college of Sydney University. The meetings are presided over by the President, there are two vice-presidents, a secretary, treasurer, and several committee members. Nothing unusual about that.

Helen is in the office every Tuesday and Thursday, ostensibly to handle the archives and to assist people who make enquiries about their genealogy or general historical research. She is assisted by a small group of volunteers. Stella Marshall comes every Thursday to sort through the archive boxes for photographs needing special envelopes, newspaper articles needing copying and metal clips needing to be replaced. Yvonne Myers and Zelda Goldstein also sort these boxes for newspaper clippings and photographs to be catalogued. Sandra Rosen files and catalogues negatives from the collection of George Denes, who was an Australian Jewish News photographer for many years. Les Belinfante has been coming in for years to catalogue the serial publications and sort the back issues of the *Journal*. Lisa Marx catalogues our library books.

Our Secretary, Jeannette Tsoulos comes in every Tuesday to attend to the mail and to the enquiries about genealogy and prepares the correspondence reports for our monthly committee meetings.

And then there is Joe Ben Mayor, a whiz at computers, who keeps the membership records up to date, and records the photographic list. With the help of Phillip Moses and Gary Luke, we are about to produce a computer program for putting all our index cards into a system where we will be able to record and search for information without worrying about lack of space and difficult –to –read handwriting. Joe also is Mr. Fixit when our computers play up. He tells us how to use the computer to do things which only experts know. More about Joe later.

As the archivist's work now also includes the duties of Office Manager, which leaves very little time for the actual cataloguing of archival papers and newspaper clippings which continue to grow every week, we would appreciate the help of a library or archive trained volunteer who could help clear the backlog of uncatalogued material. We will also accept offers of help from people with secretarial and filing experience. We have begun a program of identifying items needing urgent repair and conservation and will probably again microfilm some newspapers to make more space available for our growing collection.

Volunteering is very rewarding work and the work is reasonably easy and pleasant, and the company enjoyable. You even get a special lunch once a year. Can you spare one day per week? Or fortnight? Or month? Either a Tuesday or a Thursday, we **NEED HELP NOW**.

2. PROFILE OF JOSEPH BEN MAYOR (JOE).

Joe was born in Alexandria in Egypt in 1937, into a diverse and interesting Sephardic Ladino-speaking family. His maternal grandmother was from Sofia (Bulgaria), from whence they migrated to Egypt around 1915. His paternal grandfather was from Smyrna, Turkey and his grandmother from Tripoli, Libya. They married in Alexandria, Egypt, where Joe's father was born. His mother was born in Sofia, and married in Alexandria in 1934. The only grandparent Joe has known was his father's mother, Luna, who died in 1946.

About two years after Joe was born, the family moved to Heliopolis, an outer suburb of Cairo, where they stayed during World War II and Israel's War of Independence (1948). In Heliopolis he was introduced to Zionism and with his cousins and friends enjoyed the Hakoah Club. (Sydney is not unique).

During the 1948 War they quickly learnt the meaning of Zionism and anti-Semitism, and from the day Joe left Egypt in 1954, to join family in Italy and to avoid conscription into the Egyptian army, he never spoke Arabic again. He went to the ORT school in Milan and graduated as a Radio and Television technician in 1957. That year he joined his parents who were living in Elizabethville, Belgian Congo.

In 1959 after receiving a landing permit to Australia, he migrated to Melbourne. He met his wife-to-be, Eliane in Sydney, while on holiday and they were married in the Great Synagogue, by Rabbi Porush in 1962. The next year, together with Eliane and their daughter Sharon, they went back to Elizabethville for five years, before returning to Sydney where their second daughter Michele and son Maurice were born. For the next thirty years Joe had a furniture factory and was engaged in the food industry, before semi-retirement in 1996. About five years ago Joe volunteered to help at the AJHS and became a committee member, setting up our data processing and being invaluable in general computer work. So you see how much we depend on volunteers in the work of our Society and most others.

3. SPONSORING A NEWSLETTER.

At a recent meeting, it was decided that in order to augment our diminishing funds, members be given the opportunity to sponsor an issue of the Newsletter. As you can see from the last page, the first person to avail herself of this honour is Helen Bersten, our Honorary Archivist. As there are four Newsletters per year, (February, May, August/September, and October/November) you might like to consider this for your next simcha.

Russell Stern, the Treasurer, would be delighted to inform you of the cost of this idea, and you would become a Sponsor of the Newsletter. Other donations are directed to the Library Fund, which does not allow payment for publications.

4. AUSTRALIA'S NEWEST JEWISH MIGRANTS.

What interesting talks have been given to us, over the last two months, the first by Vladimir Dubossarsky on *Jewish Immigration from the Former Soviet Union*. In the opinion of the speaker, there was no such group as Soviet Jewry, as, in the opinion of the Soviet Union, Judaism was only a religion and its adherents were simply Soviet citizens. Since 1917 there has been no Jewish education, no participation in Jewish life, and no Jewish life in the former Soviet Union, with the result that the practice of Judaism has died out. When some people arrived in Australia saying that they were Jews, they had no background of Jewish life, customs or values, so could not participate in the local Jewish scene, nor did they want to. This assertion led to some fascinating discussion among the people present, some of whom had tried hard to involve the Russian Jews in the local community.

The second talk in this series was the talk given by Ami Levartovsky on *Jewish Immigration to Australia from Israel*. This talk was more academic than the previous one, outlining the ties between the immigrants and their close family, the nuclear family, the relationship between friends, the Jewish community and lastly the Australian community in general. There is no roof body for the former Israelis, who simply meet as friends or acquaintances. This talk was not a personal discussion, as was Vladimir Dubossarsky's talk, which was his personal opinion, as he stated. We have since been told that in fact there are two separate kehillot (shules), one meeting at the Adass Israel building in Old South Head Road and the other connected to the Yeshivah in Flood Street, but neither is connected to its "landlord" congregation. It was noted that there are about 350 former Israelis living in the Byron Bay area of New South Wales, including some 30 – 40 with dreadlocks. The next newsletter will contain a summary of his talk.

The next talk, on *Jewish Immigration from South Africa* will be given on **Sunday 1st August at 3 pm at the new COA (Centre of the Ageing) building, at 25 Rowe Street, Bondi Junction.** The speaker will be Mr. Brian Levitan, who has become a well-known figure in the local Jewish community as one of the leaders of the Zionist movement in Sydney. **Please note the change of venue**, and invite your South African friends to come along and discuss their own experiences. You will receive the usual flyer closer to the day. Parking is available in the Council car park under Syd Einfield Drive and then an easy walk to Rowe Street.

5. JEWISH LIFE IN SYDNEY IN THE FORGOTTEN ERA - 1920s,30s, –40s.

Several members have been stirred to recall their childhood in Sydney, and I would like to publish some of them in the Newsletter. Here is the first one, from Betty Neumann who now lives in Bowral, in the Southern Highlands of NSW.

GROWING UP IN SYDNEY BETWEEN 1920 and 1940

My memories of growing up in Sydney may be slightly distorted by time, and must of necessity be bites of time, but to me those I have are still vivid. I was born in 1922 in a private hospital at Summer Hill, near where my grandparents lived in 13 Sloane Street. My grandfather, Joel Goldberg, arrived in Sydney 1885 from Shilell, Russia. (The borders changed each week, so it could have been Lithuania) Joel married Dinah Cohen in February 1890 at the Great Synagogue. She was the daughter of Elias and Phoebe Cohen, a granddaughter of John Isaacs, a prominent figure in the Jewish Community of Sydney since 1847, when he arrived from England.

Joel was one of the founders and an active member of the Newtown Hebrew Congregation, and collected large sums of money towards the building of the Synagogue, was its President, lent his considerable ability and knowledge of the Hebrew language and literature to furthering education. In 1922, Joel became a member of the Great Synagogue and attended regularly until his death in 1927.

So there was an active Jewish community in Sydney even before 1920. Dinah was a founding member of the Help-in-Need Society, a nondenominational charity, with the accent on helping Jewish people, and her daughter, Phoebe, my mother, carried on the tradition, becoming Treasurer, a position she held until shortly before her death in 1986. Ruth Goldberg, (Solomon), the youngest daughter later, after the birth of her children, tramped the eastern suburbs, collecting threepence a week from members of the Society. This was during the depression.

My father, Leslie Schulman (later he changed his name to Sulman, believing that the German name would make my brother's life difficult after forthcoming war, when David would be looking for work). Those refugees fortunate enough to enter Australia, were quickly anglicising their names

After our return from a journey to England for Dad to see his parents for the first time since he left home in about 1908 en route to South Africa, and in about 1918 to Australia, the depression had hit hard. His career in insurance had deteriorated to being just an agent, and he also walked the eastern suburbs collecting a shilling a week from those people still able to carry on with their policies. In spite of a low income (whose wasn't in those days?) we rented a water-front flat on New South Head Road, Rose Bay, and my brother, then aged 5, and I, at 7, walked to Rose Bay Public School in Wilberforce Avenue each day.

Yes, I do remember going out of class when the Christian ministers visited the school each week, but we had Miss Ethel Wolinski to take our scripture class - and that was no hardship at all. Miss Wolinski was, in my memory, a short lady with a pouter pigeon bosom, a cuddly, lovely, kind lady. We all loved her.

Rabbi Cohen was our chief minister, and we kids loved him too - he always had a pocketful of lollies for us - his white beard and kindly face probably made us think of Santa! Who knows? His rabbinate has been denigrated by people lately because of his politics, but from what I remember, he was generally liked by the congregation - it's always in hindsight that people "know" what should have been. He was man in a country that was part of the British Empire and of his times.

Every Shabbat, my mother, father, brother and I, all dressed in our best clothes and went to Shule. My grandmother and aunts were always there, and I still have the seat in Q row, near the

"last post" where they sat. After Shule, David and I went to the choir gallery where our beloved Miss Wolinski held her class. It was she who influenced us to ask my mother to keep "kosher" - up to then she kept everything separate, milchik and fleischik, but didn't buy kosher meat - it was far too expensive. However, my father, whose parents in England were extremely "froom" said it was right that we should do so. So, the kosher butcher boy used to deliver the meat to our back door and at about 9 or 10 years of age, I had an enormous crush on him. I used to race to the door to take the parcel from him - never spoke to him, mind! Too shy, believe it or not.

On Sunday mornings, David and I used to walk up to Dover Road tramstop to meet Mr. H. I. Wolff - a gentleman who never became "Wolffy" to us - he was far too dignified. He was then, I think, secretary of the Shule, and he took us on the tram to the schoolrooms at the back of the Shule. There, Mr. Rothfield took over - now *he was Rothie*. The one lesson I distinctly remember was the Ten Commandments. Rothie was explaining them to us, and when he came to the seventh, he hesitated, then said "we'll skip that for now", when David piped up and said "I know what it means, Mr. Rothfield." Rothie held his breath and said "Well, David, we'll talk about it later." "No," said David "my Dad told me what it means." "Fine, David, we'll talk after the class." "My Dad said it means mixing water into the milk." At the age of about 11, I also believed that, but what Rothie was going through at the time, now boggles the mind. At that time, milk was generally delivered by a milkman with a horse and cart from the nearest dairy (ours was at Vacluse) and he ladled the milk from the large can into a billy-can or, if you were posh, a jug, and there was a great scandal about milk being extended by water, called adulteration.

In June 1935, at Shevuot, I was "confirmed" by Rabbi Falk, along with a number of other girls, Emmie Roseberg (Miriam Solomon's late sister) was one of them. We all dressed in white with veils; the Shule was decorated with flowers and greenery, and it was altogether a delightful occasion.

Rothie also conducted the children's choir (all male) on a Friday night. In about 1937, Rabbi Levy came to the Great Synagogue. I became friendly with his daughter Naomi, and she and I used to go to Shule to wait for our fathers. There never were many women there, so she and I used to hang around the room behind the choir gallery, and one evening, we stood at the door of the gallery and asked if we could come in and sing. Rothie said no - it wasn't done. So we just stood outside and sang!

There was nothing he could do to shut us up, so finally he let us in, and then with other girls, we sang in the choir. For that, we were rewarded with a half-pint bottle of the most ghastly milk. A crate had been left outside the back door of the Shule until someone in the office remembered to pick it up (often, it seems, when they left work) so you can imagine what it was like, especially in summer. I don't know what they did with the left-overs (probably about 90% of it) on Monday morning!

Later on, Ralph Levy took over the children's choir and at about aged 15, I asked if I could join the adult choir. He asked me to sing as an audition - I stood there with my mouth open, and nothing came out - not even a squeak! So he said, "go ahead and I'll listen and if you don't come up to scratch, out you go." I was still there until I left in 1959, when I went to New Guinea to live.

In 1938, I joined the Sydney Musical Society - It had been formed as a Jewish musical society, playing Gilbert and Sullivan operas, but when they didn't have enough Jewish volunteers, they took in non-Jewish people. Joe Joseph was the director and Ivan Rixon the musical director. Most of the young people in the choir were members of the SMS, and great times were had by all, many of the boys and girls partnering up and marrying. Neville Myers was the leading bass in the Shule choir and was the mainstay of the SMS male chorus, often taking small leading parts in the first-class productions at the Conservatorium of Music.

I am sorry about the immigrants who managed to escape from Europe before the War who didn't meet my father. He joined the Australian Jewish Welfare Society and was able to help many new arrivals during his time there. My mother never knew who would be coming for dinner - another potato in the pot and another cup of water in the soup, and the rest of the meal would be shared with newcomers. He helped many people to get jobs and accommodation and one particular couple named their first son Leslie, in Dad's honour! They remained close friends with the family long after my father's death in 1946, as did a number of others.

There are more than "a few words" here - but I hope this story brings back memories to those who also lived at that time.

Betty N. Neumann 2/27 Ascot Road, Bowral 2576

6. FAMOUS JEWISH NAMES ... THE VAN PRAAGHS

by Morris Ochert O.A.M. of Brisbane

Dame Peggy Van Praagh O.B.E

I sought the origin of this surname from a local Professor of Central European Languages, who is also well versed in the culture, history, demography and genealogy of that region. He advised that many people from Prague and the surrounding area migrated westward about two hundred years ago. A popular destination for these emigrants was Flanders, and the Professor suggests that the surnames we are studying indicate that it was in the part of Flanders which lies in Holland that these families settled. At that time in much of Europe many families had not yet acquired a surname. This is set out in my manuscript on "The Brief but Eventful Life of Lewis Flegeltaub" which was published in the *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal*. Vol.15 Part 2 June 2000. I wrote that, on arrival at their destination, it was usual for the authorities to "allocate" a surname to each family, and one obvious choice was to name them after the place from whence they had emigrated. Thus we encounter "van Praagh" and "van Praag" ("of" or "from" Prague). It would have been purely coincidental that families with either name later settled in Sydney.

Dame Peggy (Margaret) Van Praagh O.B.E. is said to have contributed more to ballet in Australia than any other woman. Her paternal grandfather, William Van Praagh was a leading exponent of the German method of teaching deaf children to communicate. He was the Director of the Jewish Deaf and Dumb House and its school, both in London. His son Harold was a successful medical practitioner, and he and his wife had three children. Peggy Margaret was born in 1910. She first danced publicly when four years of age and already showed potential in her art. Though still an infant she danced at concerts for wounded servicemen of World War I.

As a girl and young woman, Peggy rapidly rose to prominence as a dancer in the U.K. and in much of Europe. She became a teacher, choreographer and writer on ballet. After the death of Edouard Borovansky in 1959 she became the Director of the Borovansky Ballet. She was the first Artistic Director of the Australian Ballet. Peggy received the Order of the British Empire in 1966 and was made a Dame of the British Empire in 1970. At various times in her career she was a senior member of the Ballet Rambert and the Sadlers Wells Ballet, and for two years she was the Principal of the London Ballet. She received an Honorary Doctorate in Literature from the University of New England. After a busy lifetime, steeped in the arts and disciplines of dance, Peggy van Praagh passed away in 1990.

7. FOR THE ARCHIVES ...

Received with thanks from:

- Neville Milston: photo of the grave of Amelia Levy, the only Jewish burial in Harden, NSW.
- Margaret Fischer: papers from her grandparents' and parents' lives in Vienna and Shanghai.
- Rabbi John Levi: papers of the late Dr. George Bergman used in writing *Australian Genesis*.
- Stella Marshall: Family tree of Samuel Davis and Fanny Barnett.
- Richard Davis: family photographs of Davis and Freeman families.
- The late Millie Levenson via Lee Simmons: 'Mo' memorabilia. Harry Van der Sluys {Roy Rene, Mo McCackie) was her uncle.
- Stella Marshall: family tree of Mark and Phoebe Davis.
- Louis Platus: Papers from his late father Max Platus, relating to Bankstown Synagogue.
- Gary Luke and Nigel Meinrath: papers from the National Archives concerning Dr. Fanny Reading and her father Nathan Jacob Rubinovich.
- Naomi Goldrei: her book *The Champions of My Childhood*.
- Rose Bersten: Prize books presented to her mother, Julia Goldstein (later Philip) in 1905.

- Ian Beissel and the Hay Historical Society Inc.: articles on Alfred and Dinah Tartakover and Morris, Joseph and Augustus Cohen. COPYRIGHT.

Judith Shapira, Newsletter Editor

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

This issue (no.64) of the AJHS Newsletter is proudly sponsored by Helen Bersten in honour of her parents' wedding Anniversary on 18th May. Sydney and Millicent (nee Bass) Levine have been married for 65 years. Mazaltov and Kol Hakavod, from us all, especially from HELEN AND IAN.