

AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC.
Member of the JCA Family of Communal Organisations



NEWSLETTER

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ROSH HASHANA GREETINGS

The President and the Committee of the Australian Jewish Historical Society extends to all its readers its best wishes, *L'Shona Tova Tikatevu*, and hope it will be a good year for all Israel, and especially for members of the Australian Jewish Historical Society.

CONDOLENCES

The Society was deeply saddened to learn of the death of **June Lewis**, wife of Harry Lewis, long standing member, former Vice President and now a Patron of the Society. June who suffered poor health for many years will be remembered as a warm and gracious lady, who despite the great difficulties she endured, was always cheerful and optimistic. We offer our sincere condolences to Harry and all his family.

The Society has also lost another long-time member with the death of **Diana Encel**. Diana had been an enthusiastic supporter of the Society and for many years had been compiling the Index to the Journal, with her efforts and attention to detail being greatly appreciated. We offer our condolences to her children and all their families. Diana had retired from compiling the Journal Index shortly before her death and the Society is looking for a person to again take on this task.

Anyone interested please contact Suzanne Rutland (suzanne.rutland@sydney.edu.au).

Long-time member and supporter **Colin Marks** also passed away recently and we offer our condolences to all his family.

INAUGURAL EARLE HOFFMAN MEMORIAL LECTURE IN AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORY

Sylvia Deutsch

President, AJHS ACT

An annual lecture series in Australian Jewish history has been instituted by our Canberra Branch as a way of honouring the memory of its founding president Earle Hoffman OAM, who passed away earlier this year.

The inaugural lecture held on Wednesday 24 July 2013 was given by Anne Rees, a PhD student at the ANU who spoke on the topic '*The quality and not only the quantity of Australia's people: Ruby Rich and the Racial Hygiene Association of NSW*'. The audience was struck by the puzzle of how a Jew with strong humanitarian leanings was involved in eugenics. Anne first spoke of Ruby's life of activism and then shone the spotlight on her work with the Racial Hygiene Association.

Ruby Sophie Rich (1888-1988) was a Jewish community leader, feminist and pianist, and during the course of her long and active life involved in over 50 organisations. Her contributions were recognised with an MBE in 1967 and the United Nations Peace Medal in 1976. She was born into a wealthy family and raised in Sydney, but was prevented from going to university by her father, whose attitude towards women was not untypical at the time.

During World War I she became a volunteer with the armed forces and participated as a concert pianist. Contact with the British suffragette movement awoke her social conscience and her life-long commitment to women's issues and peace causes. She became politically active in the 1920s back in NSW, and as vice-president of the Feminist Club of NSW became well-known as a public speaker and organiser. She campaigned for Stanley and Jessie Street (Jessie was another early feminist) in their bid to enter parliament, rose to be president (and then honorary president) of the Australian Federation of Women Voters and then in 1949 founded the League of Women Voters of NSW.

In 1937 Ruby married Moise Aaron Schalit (1875-1959), a Melbourne doctor involved in the family planning movement, who was a widower and family friend. She never had children, but had earlier adopted her young nephew Charles when his father, her younger brother, died of his injuries from World War I. Ruby was active in the Jewish community, including the Friends of the Hebrew University, the Australian Federation of the Women's International Zionist Organisation (she was founding president 1937-1940) and re-formed the Australian Friends of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (1961).

She was a pacifist, but still helped to found the Council for Women in War Work during World War II. She served on the human rights committee of the United Nations Association of Australia and was a member of the Pan-Pacific and South East Asia Women's Association of Australia, which promoted the education of Indigenous women.

As Anne explained, Ruby's involvement in eugenics, through her work with the Racial Hygiene Association of NSW, would have been seen as progressive – like her other work – in her day. When she returned from Europe after World War I she was invited by Marion Piddington, Sydney-based eugenicist and sex educator, to form a society to promote sex education to young women and to prevent venereal disease. Such subjects were taboo at the

time. In 1926 she became first president of the Racial Hygiene Association of Australia, which later became the Family Planning Association. She remained an advocate of family planning all her life. At the core of the ideas of the RHA was the push to prevent breeding by lesser types of people, like the lower classes and the mentally feeble, in an effort to improve the racial stock of Australia.

To us today such ideas are repugnant – seen as elitist, redolent of the Nazis’ ideas of racial purity. That is not how their supporters saw them. These were seen as progressive views at that time. Clearly Ruby saw no contradiction between her support for eugenics and her humanitarian work; she would have seen it as all one of a piece. The talk focussed on how ideas which can seem forward-thinking in one era can be seen in quite a different light by later generations and it was somewhat disconcerting to learn of this apparently reactionary thinking in an otherwise exemplary Jewish leader.

Anne is currently examining the experiences of Australian women in the United States between 1910 and 1960 for her PhD. She is a graduate of the University of Melbourne and completed a Masters degree in History at University College London. Her article on Ruby Rich, “The quality and not only the quantity of Australia’s People”, appeared in 2012 in *Australian Feminist Studies*.

MAITLAND JEWISH CEMETERY - UPDATE

Gary Luke

A Recently Discovered Burial

On July 11, 1866 the *Cawarra*, “one of the finest steamers in the colony”, departed on a voyage from Sydney to Brisbane and Rockhampton with over 50 passengers. She carried an unusually large and expensive cargo because no boat had left for Rockhampton for some time. Later that day in a heavy storm off Newcastle she struck the Oyster Bank while attempting to head into safe harbour, broke in two and sank. There was only one survivor, a seaman who had grabbed a plank and was eventually saved by the lighthouse keeper. During the next few days some bodies washed up on shore, the remainder were lost at sea.

One of the junior stewards was Jewish, and was buried at the Maitland cemetery on July 18. He was Joseph Abrahams, aged 17 years, nephew of the licensee of the Metropolitan Hotel of Poplar in East London. Joseph had arrived in Australia in February 1866 working as the officers’ servant on the *Erl King*. Nothing more is known about him, other than a large number of the Jews of Maitland attended his funeral.

This adds another to the known burials at Maitland. Until a decade ago the known burials had been taken from a list compiled in 1930, and contained in the burial register of the Great Synagogue, and supplemented by a list published in the Society’s Journal in the 1950s. Both these lists had been compiled from readable headstones on the cemetery site, and not from a reliable burial register. No burial register or other documents of the Maitland Hebrew Congregation have been discovered. In the last decade five other burials have been discovered in the Maitland Council’s deaths and burial register. The Council’s register also lists two Jewish burials at Muswellbrook and Greta, and a burial at Rookwood for a death in the district.

Another possible burial is a nine year old boy named Abraham, who died in April 1859 while playing near the coalmine railway junction in Newcastle. The newspaper report of his death

doesn't state where he was buried or his surname. It does, however, say he was Jewish, and the son of a blacksmith who lived nearby to the site of the accident.

Conservation Work

Maitland Council has reserved funds for the first stage of restoration work specified in the recently completed Conservation Management Plan. During this financial year 28 broken and leaning headstones will be restored by *Monuments in Memoriam*, one of the few stonemason companies with experience in heritage conservation work. Other work planned for this financial year includes erection of fencing similar to the original timber slats, and the start of recommended botanical planting.

Details of the intended work are to be discussed at the meeting in early September of the Friends of the Maitland Cemetery Group with the Council's heritage and property officers. In conjunction with the contracted work the Society may be asked to assist with some of the recommendations in the Conservation Management Plan which are more suited to volunteers.

Heritage Listing

At its meeting on 7 August, the Heritage Council of NSW gave notice it intends to consider the Maitland Jewish Cemetery for heritage listing. Interested parties are invited to make written submissions regarding the proposed listing. Submissions must be received by **17 September 2013** and should be mailed to: - Heritage Council of NSW

Locked Bag 5020
Parramatta NSW 2124

or emailed to: - heritage@heritage.nsw.gov.au

AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORY ESSAY COMPETITION

The Society has decided to embark on an important new initiative in order to interest young people, particularly school students in Australian Jewish History. This will take the form of an Essay Competition which will be well publicised throughout the schools and the community. The theme of the essays is to be 'an aspect of Jewish life within Australasia'. Essays may be based on personal experience, family or research on a person, family, district, company, Synagogue or other Jewish organization.

The competition will be open to students in Year 10 and entries will be accepted by the Society up to 28 February of the following year. Whilst the competition will be aimed primarily at students in New South Wales, entries will be accepted from students in other states.

The essays will be judged by an independent panel selected by the Society and there will be a prize of \$1,000 for the essay judged the best by the panel, and a prize of \$200 for each of the next 5 runners-up. There will also be a prize of \$200 for the school that the winner attended.

BETAR SYDNEY 90TH ANNIVERSARY

Betar is celebrating 90 years of Jewish Zionist Idealism and would like to get in touch with as many former members as possible. Anyone interested in attending the Anniversary Function which will be held on October 13th can obtain full details and book on their website www.betar90.com.au. Further information is also available from Ben Geyer 0404188652 or ben.j.geyer@gmail.com

RECEIVED WITH THANKS

Review copy - *These Are the Names, 2nd Ed*, by John S Levi, The Miegunyah Press.
Received from Rod Corrie – A paper on “The Shackels of Grenfell and Cowra”.
Received from Ron Witton – Biography of Rosine Guiterman prepared for the ADB.
Received from Leon Mann – Photographs of the interior of Broken Hill Synagogue.

PUBLICATIONS FOR SALE.

The following publications, published by the Society are available for purchase.

- *A Time to Keep: the story of Temple Beth Israel: 1930-2005*
By Graff, Turnbull and Baskin..... \$25.00.
- *Blashkiana, the memoirs of Aaron Blashki JP (1860-1938)*
Published AJHS (VIC) Inc..... \$10.00.
- *Fifty Years of Caring: the history of the Australian Jewish Society 1936-1986*
By Anne Andgel..... \$20.00.
- *Historical Essays to Honour Rabbi Dr. I. Porush OBE, on his 80th birthday*
Published by AJHS Inc..... \$10.00.
- *History of the Western Suburbs Synagogue [Newtown]*
By Phillip Barg..... \$5.00.
- *Jewish Sydney – the first 100 years 1788-1888*
By Helen Bersten \$8.00.
- *Jews of the Outback – The centenary of the Broken Hill Synagogue 1910-2010*
Edited by Suzanne Rutland, Leon Mann and Margaret Price..... \$20.00.
- *My Dear Friends, the life of Rabbi Dr. Hermann Sanger*
By Rabbi John Levi..... \$25.00.
- *Rabbi Jacob Danglow*
By Rabbi John Levi..... \$15.00.
- *To be Continued: memoirs and musings*
By Rabbi Apple..... \$25.00.
- *With One Voice: A history of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies*
By Suzanne Rutland and Sophie Caplan..... \$20.00.
- *Hans Kimmel competition Essays 1979-2007.*
Edited by Russell Stern and Dr Sophie Gelski.....\$20.00.
- *The Road to the Menzies Enquiry – Suspected War Criminals in Australia,*
By Leslie Caplan.....\$25.00.
- *To My Brave Wife – Dunera Notes from an ‘enemy alien’, by Dr. Kurt Epstein*
Edited by Yoram Epstein, Konrad Kwiet, Helen Bersten, and Lee Kersten... \$25.00

Publications can be collected from the Society’s office on Tuesdays and Thursdays. If you would like them mailed contact the office at admin@ajhs.com.au or the Treasurer at rwstern@optusnet.au for postal charges.

Philip Moses. Newsletter Editor.

Contributions to the Newsletter are most welcome. They can be mailed to AJHS Newsletter Editor, 146 Darlinghurst Road, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010, or emailed to admin@ajhs.com.au.