

ticular facial features. She uses her source material well, sometimes weaving it unobtrusively into her text, sometimes using it surprisingly, bringing the man and his era truly alive. She even uses such ephemeral objects as dinner menus and conference lapel tags in this ingenious manner, while mention of meat safes and the unfinished arches of the Sydney Harbour Bridge place scenes in their right times.

If you knew the man, it throws a floodlight on his character; if you didn't, the book is worth reading for the influence that Elkin had on contemporary events in anthropology and Aboriginal affairs over five decades.

Technically, the book is well presented. The chapters have catchy titles as they carry the reader from decade to decade, the photographs are interesting with brief notes beneath them. The sources and notes section is scholarly detailed and the index (mostly of names) is precisely listed.

My only criticism of this most readable book would be a feeling that the author's obvious sympathies for Elkin in the beginning turn sour towards the end.

Helen Bersten

VOICES OF JACOB, HANDS OF ESAU: JEWS IN AMERICAN LIFE AND THOUGHT

by Stephen J. Whitfield, Archon Books, 1984

“Composed out of a certain wonder at the paradox of so ancient and fragile a people replenishing itself in the social flux of the United States,” Stephen Whitfield has gathered and introduced a collection of his own articles and review essays published between 1979-82.

Any student of American history will warm to essays on the Jews and the South, the Trade Union movement and performing comedy. The collective attempt to reconcile Judaism and the American experience may be full of complexity and tension but has yielded mutual rewards. The United States is the ultimate paradox; her distinctive national character is a “nation of nations”. Jews have nurtured the paradox. They have shared in every wave of immigration and then adjusted their voice and customs. They are free to submerge or to interact with the larger group. Isaac Stern explained the first exchange of classical musicians: “they send us their Jews from Odessa, and we send them our Jews from Odessa”.

One gets dizzy remembering how many Jewish performers, or their parents, have changed their names. Did you know that Lauren Bacall (nee Betty Persky) is a cousin of the former Prime Minister of Israel, Shimon Peres (ne Persky)? Somehow it seems proper that Irving Berlin should compose “White Christmas” and Allen Ginsberg should describe himself as a “Buddhist Jewish pantheist”. Israel Zangwill and the chief character of his play, “The Melting Pot” (1908) were outspoken Jews with a message for all mankind.

The Jewish input may take strange and subtle transformations in “the legacy of Radicalism”. Most, as individuals, are unobservant, even ignorant. However, the dogma, Messianism and bookishness of their tradition may seek a substitute or outlet. They know Hillel’s Golden Rule and his call to serve, even if they have forgotten his name. They have absorbed the role models of priest, scholar, wanderer and guilty son. Theories of “status deprivation” are insufficient because other minorities provide such a different outcome.

So many scholars have tried to explain Humour that it is no longer funny. A rich Jewish tradition has developed it as shield and opiate, and America’s Hollywood and

vaudeville houses have provided ready employment. The Jewish comedians run from A to Z, from Allen and Benny to Youngman and Zero (Mostel). The verbal flair of Jules Feiffer and Woody Allen has a Jewish source. You don't have to be Jewish or Yiddish-speaking to appreciate the tonal subtleties of Leo Rosten's *The Joys of Yiddish*, although he enters this book in his professional capacity as a sociologist and pioneering student of the media.

Anti-Jewish prejudice has appeared in the South but Whitfield finds it unsystematic and shallow. Perhaps it has been deflected elsewhere in ways known to other countries. The region's Jews have been few and adaptable and find affinity with the true Southerner's sense of family, place and tradition. On its tree-lined way to Tulane University, New Orleans, where I took my doctorate, the St. Charles Avenue tram passed the Jewish Community Centre and two synagogues. Jews were prominent, but not too prominent, among the Orchestra Committee, the doctors and Garden District mansions. The community has produced the noted author, Lillian Hellman, and the philosopher, James Feibleman, who still taught at Tulane. It was old, well-established and never more than 10,000 people. They were visible but very much part of the South.

A flourishing community in colonial Newport, Rhode Island, erected the first synagogue in the United States in 1763 which still stands as a splendid example of the classical Georgian style. The poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, visiting the Jewish cemetery ca. 1850 wrote: "The groaning earth in travail and in pain/ Brings forth its races, but does not restore./ And the dead nations never rise again." Whitfield quotes and deems him a bad prophet, for Jewry has flourished in the United States and a new community was later formed in Newport.

But Longfellow in another stanza writes: "Gone are the living, but the dead remain./ And not neglected; for a hand unseen,/ Scattering its bounty, like a summer rain./ Still keeps their graves and their remembrance green." It is the task of the historian to explain the "hand unseen" and why Jewish communities in the Diaspora survive, adapt and are replenished.

L.E. Fredman

PHILLIP BLASHKI — A VICTORIAN PATRIARCH

by Gael Hammer, P. Blashki & Sons Pty Limited 1986

This is Gael Hammer's first published book, but her name is well known amongst A.J.H.S. members for her interest in historical and family documentation. She has had several papers published on the subject, and delivered a paper on the life of the artist Miles Evergood (Myer Blashki), the eleventh child of the Blashki family. The author is also a member of this extended family being one of the eighty-eight great-grandchildren of Hannah and Phillip Blashki.

In compiling such a book and the arduous task of rounding up the descendants of this long standing Australian family, Gael Hammer genealogically embraces a time span of 128 years and seven generations. The result is more than dry factual accounting of who-begat-who (although there is, for the general reader, perhaps more than enough). What emerges as a *raison d'être* for such detailed research is a picture of the life and character of the founding figures, set against a changing backdrop of Australian economic conditions and social mores. After all, the founding of the Blashki family almost coincided with the founding of Melbourne. Hannah and Phillip arrived (from Poland via England) in 1858, only two years after Victoria was separated from N.S.W.