

## KEHILLAT EMANUEL, A HISTORY OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE TEMPLE EMANUEL, WOOLLAHRA, NEW SOUTH WALES, AUSTRALIA

By Lee Albert Maurice Simmons, Cirils Digital, Fyshwick, ACT,  
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**I**n researching and writing this monumental history of Temple Emanuel Woollahra, Lee Simmons undertook an immense task, which was obviously a labour of love. Indeed he states that Temple Emanuel is his and his family's spiritual home. Unfortunately some of the ways of accomplishing this work are quirky, unusual and questionable.

Firstly the very heavy tome has been divided into five books, within the one volume, each with its own pagination and separate index. Book One, 204 pages, describes the foundation of the Temple Emanuel congregation from 1938 to 1949, its quick growth, the selection of its first minister Rabbi Max Schenk of New York, and the problems in finding suitable land for building until the site at Ocean Street, Woollahra was chosen. The various details of choosing a site, of the many activities initiated, of the great work of many committee members and of Rabbi Max and Mrs Faye Schenk, are also mentioned. Almost all the information is derived from the congregational minutes, as shown by the footnotes, with an occasional footnote showing use of *The Hebrew Standard*, one of the two local Jewish weeklies of that time. That the author has made very scant use of the weekly journals is shown by his not knowing the fact that Rabbi Dr Alfred Fabian, later the spiritual leader of Orthodox congregations in Adelaide, Brisbane, and Sydney, officiated for the Temple Emanuel congregation at services held for Chanukah 1938, a matter of relevance in view of continuing differences between Liberal and Orthodox clergy in Australia, and a fact reported in the *Hebrew Standard* of December 1938. The use of the Board minutes of the congregation as almost the sole source of information also results in a totally uncritical viewpoint on everything connected with the Temple, its clergy and its membership, and a somewhat triumphalist tone.

Book Two is the largest in the volume, having 347 pages and covering the period from 1949 to 1979, the ministry of Rabbi Rudolph Brasch. It also contains, after its own index, six pages of photographs of all the rabbis of the congregations and their spouses, and of the cantors, the only illustrations in the book. Emphasis is given to Rabbi Brasch's work for the children of the congregation, in particular the establishment of a flourishing Sunday school and



also to his ceaseless public speaking activities within the Jewish community and to a great variety of outside bodies. One of Rabbi Brasch's many books — *Reminiscences of a Roving Rabbi* — is quoted from a number of times, but none of the others. The roles of lay leaders of the Temple community such as Cecil Luber, Gerald and Rose De Vahl Davis, Rose Corrick, Ted and Betty Waxman, Heinz Gerstl, are also mentioned frequently, as well as the various choir-masters over the years from Fritz Coper to George Pikler, to Werner Baer, Wolfgang Simon and Joseph Toltz. The first cantor, Gunther Hirschberg who went on to make a career in USA and the long incumbent beloved Cantor Michael Deutsch are also well described.

Book Three is about the period from 1979 to 1989 and the ministry of Rabbi Brian Fox and the arrival of Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins in August 1989. It was Rabbi Brian Fox who established The Emanuel School in Randwick on the site of a former convent school, and some mention is made of the beginnings of this school in 1983 and its early years, and the many changes of headmasters, as well as the difficulties in acquiring a proper permanent site. The Emanuel School, with King David School in Melbourne, became one of the few twelve-year day schools of Liberal Judaism in the world. The establishment of the Netzer Reform Zionist youth movement, its activities and leadership are also dealt with in the Books dealing with the Fox and the Kamins rabbinates. Rabbi Fox also made a rapprochement towards traditional Judaism by instituting two days' celebration of Rosh Hashanah. His household also kept kosher.

Book Four, from 1990 to 2000 describes Rabbi Brian Fox's last decade before Rabbi Kamins became Chief Rabbi and Rabbi Jacqueline Ninio was appointed. In that period a Conservative service paralleling the Liberal service was introduced by Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins in the Neuweg chapel and this has continued.

The descriptions are accurate though pedestrian, and the several hundred pages recording meetings, annual general meetings, accessions and ends of terms of office-bearers, religious services, changes of rabbis and of lay leadership without any anecdotes or critical insights, make for very dull reading, except perhaps to those mentioned in these pages, or their descendants. The language is correct though the use of commonly used Hebrew words is often marred by inappropriate use of plurals and gender endings. The text is easily readable, and well expressed, except on page 9 of Book Four where the word 'partition' is used twice when it should be 'petition'.

Book Five is a record of all presidents and all board members year by year, then all *B'nei Mitzvah* and all *B'not Mitzvah* plus all marriages, with the partners to each union listed. This is a geneal-

ogist's delight and will be most useful for all family history purposes. The occasionally shared surname of bride and groom seem to indicate a Jewish marriage, which took place after conversion in a couple previously married civilly. It is also interesting to note a Barmitzvah or marriage in the Temple by those who subsequently became members of an Orthodox congregation.

Much of the text of the four first books reproduces sermons and speeches of the rabbis and leading congregants, or articles written by them in congregational journals. One of the major activities of the Temple about which comparatively little is mentioned is the establishment under the guidance of Mrs Otto Lucas in 1958 of a pre-school kindergarten within the Temple building and later the Temple Emanuel grounds. Lee Simmons describes it as an interdenominational kindergarten and seems surprised that it was the first which could be described as such in Australia. Indeed when I visited it as part of a study in December 1973 it had very little of Jewish activities, except for *Kabbalat Shabbat* run by Cantor Michael Deutsch on Fridays and no Jewish artefacts, decorations or books. At the time it was described by Rabbi Brasch as a public relations exercise of the Temple towards the general community. Indeed this seemed directed at upper middle class inhabitants of Woollahra and surrounding suburbs. This state of affairs prevailed until the arrival of Rabbi Brian Fox who changed the kindergarten to become an institution serving the Jewish community.

One problematic aspect of the volume is the fact that there are separate indices for each book. In addition, the alphabetical system used for indexing is not common as rabbis are all listed under the letter R, as for instance 'Rabbi Abecassis, Rabbi Bamberger, Rabbi Brasch, Rabbi Brian Fox, Rabbi Dr Brasch, Rabbi Dr Eisendrath, Rabbi Dr Rudolph Brasch.' and so on. Similarly under the letter M there are three mentions of Ted Waxman: Mr Edward (Ted) Waxman, Mr Edward M. Waxman, OAM, and Mr Ted Waxman, as are many others. It appears that this is a result of indexing by computer, which means it forgoes all the utility of an index, and makes a strong case for manual indexing.

In conclusion, this is indeed a labour of love which has required an enormous effort, but which could do with a revision, particularly the indices. This was a first printing of only one hundred numbered volumes, sold at a cost of \$125, with all profits going to the Temple, a most generous gesture. It is to be hoped that future printings will include some changes.

Sophie Caplan