

# AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL



VOL. XXI 2012



PART 1

# AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL

The Australian Jewish Historical Society was founded in Sydney in August 1938. The Victorian section of the Society was founded in October 1949. A branch exists in Canberra, and Western Australia has its own Jewish Historical Society.

The Journal of the Australian Jewish Historical Society has been published since 1939. From 1988, production of the Journal has been shared by Victoria (November edition) and New South Wales (June edition).

Members of the Editorial Committees are:

## **Victoria**

Dr Howard A. Freeman, OAM, BDSc, LDS (**Editor**)

Dr Hilary L. Rubinstein BA(Hons), MS, PhD, FR Hist. S (**Associate Editor**)

## **New South Wales**

Assoc. Prof. Suzanne D. Rutland, BA(Hons), MA(Hons), PhD, DipEd (**Editor**)

Mrs Helen Bersten, OAM, BA, DipLib (**Honorary Archivist**)

Mrs Judy Shapira, BA, DipEd (**Newsletter Editor**)

A complete list of the Society's office-bearers is printed on the back cover. Information about membership in the Society and its other activities and resources may be obtained from the Honorary Secretaries in Melbourne or Sydney.

The Editors welcome suggestions for articles and manuscripts dealing with any aspect of the Australian Jewish experience. The Journal is national in coverage and deals with the whole sweep of Australian Jewish history from 1788 to the contemporary period.

Material submitted for consideration for publication in the Journal should be presented by email as a Microsoft Word attachment. References should be in the form of endnotes rather than footnotes. No payment can be offered for any contribution. No handwritten submissions will be accepted.

The editors have formulated a Writers Guide and a Style Guide for authors – please check the Journal page of the Society's website for details: [www.journal.ajhs.info](http://www.journal.ajhs.info)

Communications regarding publication should be sent to the Editors of the respective Journals: Victoria – Dr Howard A. Freeman, Apartment 815, 250 St Kilda Road, Southbank 3006 (email: [howfree40@gmail.com](mailto:howfree40@gmail.com));

New South Wales – Dr Suzanne D. Rutland, Mandelbaum House, 385 Abercrombie Street, Darlington, NSW 2008 (email: [suzanne.rutland@arts.usyd.edu.au](mailto:suzanne.rutland@arts.usyd.edu.au)).

## **AJHS Website: [www.ajhs.info](http://www.ajhs.info)**

*Copyright in the essays published in the AJHS Journal is owned by the authors. Copyright in the published edition of the AJHS Journal is owned by the AJHS Vic. Inc. and AJHS Inc. No reproduction of any materials published in the AJHS Journal should be made without permission (save for any fair dealing uses permitted by the Copyright Act 1968).*

*If required by authors, articles can be subjected to peer review and an attestation provided by qualified referees.*

## **Front cover**

Sir Zelman and Lady Cowen; Government House, Canberra, April 1978. Photograph courtesy of Lady Cowen

**Publisher of Victorian Journal: Hybrid Publishers**

ISSN 0819-0615

# AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL

November 2012

Vol. XXI

Part 1

<i>Editors' Introduction</i>	3
<i>Sir Zelman Cowen Memorial Service Oxford</i>	
Lady Anna Cowen .....	5
<i>Zelman, My Father</i>	
Kate Cowen .....	8
<i>A Different Silence: The Survival of More Than 200,000 Polish Jews in the Soviet Union During World War II as a Case Study in Cultural Amnesia</i>	
John Goldlust .....	13
<i>'The General Awakening of Jewish Consciousness': The Development of the Jewish Students' Study Group in Melbourne</i>	
Daniel C. Tabor .....	61
<i>A Fata Morgana on the Edge of a Desert: Impressions of a Visit in 1962</i>	
Mendel Mann .....	86
<i>A First Home in a Free Country</i>	
Helen Light .....	93
<i>Life Outside the Frame: A Case Study in Misrepresentation</i>	
Ann M. Mitchell .....	97
<i>Australia's Role in the Establishment of Israel</i>	
Chanan Reich .....	107
<i>100 Years Ago: Victoria 1912</i>	
Compiled By Lorraine Freeman .....	114
<b>Book reviews</b>	
<i>The Bibliography of Australasian Judaica: 1788–2008 (3rd Edition)</i>	
By Serge Liberman .....	116
<i>A Shtetl In Ek Velt [A Shtetl at the End of the World]: 54 Stories of Growing up in Jewish Carlton 1925–1945</i>	
Compiled and edited by Julie Meadows .....	117

Report to Members	121
Members Joined AJHS Victoria Inc since November 2011	123
Contributors	124

*Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect an official position of the Society.*

## EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

In common with all Australians, the members of this Society were saddened to learn of the passing of Sir Zelman Cowen in December 2011. Sir Zelman was a great Australian, a healing Governor-General, an excellent historian, and a wise, warm and generous patron of this Society. We are honoured that Lady Cowen has consented to become our patron in Sir Zelman's place, and that she has given permission for us to publish her address to the Oxford Memorial Service in April this year.

Sir Zelman's daughter Kate has contributed a delightful insight into her father as both a family man and head of a household.

The Jewish Students' Study Group had its origins in wartime Melbourne under the influence of the British physicist Dr David Tabor. The students who were members later became leaders of the Jewish community. The story has never before been told. The only existing archival records of this short-lived group were retained by the late Dr Ephraim Ehrmann, and it is the generosity of his widow Mrs Susie Ehrmann that has enabled Dr Daniel Tabor to write about his father, and describe his father's role in helping 'the general awakening of Jewish consciousness' among a remarkable group of thinkers.

Mendel Mann, a Yiddish writer and artist who lived in Israel and France, gives an interesting view of the Melbourne Jewish community of 50 years ago in a republished essay. Mann visited Melbourne on a lecture tour in 1962, and his original article in the *Australische-Yiddische Almanac* has been translated for us by Serge Liberman. Serge's own vast and authoritative third edition of *The Bibliography of Australasian Judaica 1788-2008* was published to great acclaim late last year, and is reviewed here by Dr Rodney Gouttman.

Julie Meadows' compilation of stories of growing up in Carlton between the twenties and the forties was published last year as *A Shtetl in Ek Velt*. This has been reviewed for us by Pam Maclean, who has herself co-authored a major work on the history of Carlton with Dr Malcolm Turnbull, our former editor. Dr Helen Light, in 'A First Home in a Free Country', gives another view of growing up in Melbourne. In this case the story is set in Middle Park, but in the post-war years, and centres within what is now Helen's own home.

In a major case study of survival and arrival, John Goldlust has written about the Polish Jews who survived the war in the Soviet Union, many of whom were able to make new lives in Australia after the Holocaust.

Dr Ann Mitchell, through her careful records-searching, has dispelled many misconceptions regarding the intensely personal relationship between Sir John Monash and his wife's close friend Miss Lizzie Bentwich in her essay 'Life Outside the Frame: A Case Study in Misrepresentation'. This remarkable piece of research follows Ann's series on Monash published in previous Journals.

The remarkable article by Chanan Reich on Australia's role in the establishment of the State of Israel gives us new insights into the personality of Dr Herbert Vere Evatt, and is based on the lecture given to the Society during the year.

Dr Howard A. Freeman (Editor)

Dr Hilary L. Rubinstein (Associate Editor)

## **SIR ZELMAN COWEN MEMORIAL SERVICE OXFORD**

**22 April 2012**

*Lady Anna Cowen*

I am very pleased that Zelman is being remembered in Oxford, and in Oriel, today. It would have made him very happy. I stand before you to speak as the family representative. We are Australians and have lived essentially Australian lives, culminating in the greatest honour that could be bestowed, that of serving his country as Governor-General. And yet we lived thirteen marvellous years in Oxford. Five immediately after the war, when he was able to take up his Rhodes Scholarship and be elected subsequently to a Fellowship at Oriel, and eight as Provost when we came back 30 years later. The early period coincided with severe post-war austerity. It was a shared hardship, borne cheerfully by a generation of ex-servicemen anxious to get on with their lives. War service had conferred maturity, and age had conferred marriage on many of them. So I came to Oxford with Zelman as the Rhodes Trustees temporarily relaxed their rules on celibacy. Married men could not live in college, and so we lived in digs and our social lives at first tended to centre on Rhodes House. Here the redoubtable Dorothy Allen created a welcoming social and supportive environment which fostered friendships. Zelman threw himself into his work for the graduate degree of BCL.

War pressures had put strain on Oxford's Dons, and when the Law Don at Brasenose was recalled for national duty Zelman's tutor suggested to him that Zelman, already a graduate in law, might be able to tutor his students at BNC. This he did, and encouraged by the experience Zelman applied for and was appointed to a law lectureship advertised at Oriel. He continued to tutor then, alongside his second year of course-work for the BC. He was immensely delighted when Provost David Ross told him, before he sat his finals, that the College proposed to offer him a Fellowship. This was a generous vote of confidence, which he appreciated greatly. That year Oriel did well in the BCL. Two Vinerian Scholarships were to be awarded to accommodate the post-war swell in numbers. Zelman came in alongside a South African Rhodes Scholar, Rex Welsh, also at Oriel.

There followed three very good and productive years. Tutoring in Oriel, with some travel; a stint with the British Control Commission in Berlin in the summer of 1947, a summer course at the University of Chicago in 1949, with writing, editing, and many good relationships with colleagues. Had we left Oxford after he took his degree, he would not have had an optimal Oxford experience. Which

is to say, living in College as a member of a Common Room. Also in that time he was working very hard, probably too hard, carrying a teaching load alongside his own studies. Enabled, however, to enjoy Oxford as a member of a Senior Commonroom he certainly did have an optimal Oxford experience. 'Enjoy' is a good word to apply to Zelman. He was always a great enjoyer.

We returned to Australia in 1951 where he spent sixteen years developing and shaping the Melbourne University Law School. These were very good and exhilarating years for him, while I gave birth to four children and took responsibility for the home fires. These years were at the end stages of a culture in which men tended their careers and wives supported them, and made sure the claims of children did not intrude unduly. With today's perspectives I have to say that I would do it differently now. I think the fathers and the children would have benefited from closer involvement with each other. And I don't think that fathers' careers would necessarily collapse in a heap.

Zelman went on to Vice Chancery at two universities. In his time he had the 'troubles' of the late sixties and early seventies, followed by the chronic financial difficulties which continue to bedevil universities. The Governor Generalship, however, was an entirely unique experience and it could not have been anticipated. It came as a surprise, and a very great honour. We cannot know what prompted Prime Minister Fraser to nominate him for the Office of the Queen's representative in the workings of the Australian Constitution. There is speculation that his handling of student troubles at the University of Queensland may have recommended him, and that his political neutrality helped in the aftermath of a constitutional crisis which had deeply divided the nation. On leaving office in 1982, he wondered if he had succeeded in bringing a 'touch of healing' to a wounded country. Thirty years later, on his death, the overwhelming public verdict was that he had, and done so resoundingly.

Zelman was in many ways a quintessentially public man. He loved his public life, and this is how he titled his memoirs. He had been blessed with a positive disposition and an outgoing sociability. At the same time he was a deeply private man, reserving some part of his heart and soul to himself alone. I once found myself describing him as a gregarious isolate. His thoughts on the subject of privacy were formulated in the Boyer Lectures in 1969 – the Australian version of the Reith Lectures. It was the dawn of the electronic age, a time in which I believe no one could have foreseen the astonishing developments which now exist and promise to continue exponentially. He feared for the intrusions this age would make into the individual's basic need for privacy and dignity, and more broadly into the armoury of a totalitarian state. He anguished that attempts to safeguard privacy by law had so far proved too difficult and too complex to reconcile with the freedom of expression required by democracy.

In this place today, what am I to say about his eight-year tenure as Provost of Oriel? Some here today may remember it, many who were contemporaries have



passed on. I have to say this: that he loved it. And if anyone is interested, so did I. In this period, so fresh in my memory, his personal qualities seem to have been well applied. Some sections of the Australian media since his death have made much of his 'humility'. I think they had the wrong word, and I am not sure what the right word is. Zelman was not humble. He had a comfortable self-confidence. But he had a common touch, he was accessible and approachable. He liked people, and he enjoyed helping if and when he could; he listened to people; he could see both sides of an issue, and he sought to reconcile diverse views. He was a consensus man. I think this showed in the Governor-Generalship, in the Provostship, in the Chairmanship of the Press Council and all through his career.

Our daughter Kate was asked to write a family perspective of him. She says that three of his children have chosen the paths he would not have expected or hoped for, but that he accepted their choices. He always cared about them and offered whatever help he could if called upon. He loved them just as later he came to love and care about a crop of maturing grandchildren, who responded warmly to him. Speaking of Zelman as a family man, it has to be said that his career and the many relocations involved – from Melbourne to Armidale in northern New South Wales, to Brisbane in Queensland, to Canberra and then to Oxford – were all hard, if not traumatic, for our children. I lamented that the children did not leave the nest. The nest left the children.

We are gathered today in the Oriel Chapel. In his time as Provost, I believe Zelman was the most regular attender at Evensong on Sunday evenings. His Jewishness was central to him, but he loved the serenity and the spirituality of Evensong in this place. It is not inappropriate to remember him here.

## ZELMAN, MY FATHER

*Kate Cowen*

Being Zelman Cowen's daughter has not always been easy. Although I suffered less from the inevitable comparisons and burdensome expectations than did my three brothers (sexist attitudes working, for once, to my benefit), there was no dodging my father's shadow. Once in my twenties when I was going to a gathering of people I didn't know, I said to the friend who'd invited me, 'Introduce me as Kate Smith.' He did, and the first person I met responded, without skipping a beat, 'Aren't you the daughter of the famous Sir Zelman Smith?' In life he loomed large and death hasn't shrunk him.

As I write this it has been eight months since my father died, yet literally not a day goes by that he doesn't figure in some way – from thoughts, conversations and events to the myriad ways he has been memorialised. Two days ago the Burnett Institute launched the Sir Zelman Cowen Foundation for Medical Research and Public Health – an initiative to fund six young Australian scientists and help staunch the 'brain drain'. My younger brother Ben gave the speech to a packed event at Crown's Palladium – in his own words 'channelling Zelman' who was always committed to helping and always conscious of his own good fortune and the responsibility that went with it. Ben described Dad as 'good and great, in that order'. It was so utterly true, and expressed so well and with a succinctness Dad would have loved. I was livid that I hadn't thought of it first.

In the days after his death there was an avalanche of tributes peppered with anecdotes of how he had quietly reached out to help. On talkback radio one person recalled hitch-hiking to the University of Queensland and being gob-smacked when the car that stopped was driven by the Vice Chancellor. Another recalled Dad, having been harangued by his anxious mother, being called into the VC's office and asked to 'please please call home'. Samuel Pizar, a Holocaust survivor whose stellar career as an international lawyer has garnered a host of honours, credited my father with 'making him' when Dad helped find funding for his postgraduate studies in Harvard after completing law at the University of Melbourne where Dad was Dean.

The house was full of friends and family seeking to comfort us. One person recalled how as a new school leaver, my father had helped her gain a secretarial position at the University of Melbourne which subsequently led to her becoming personal assistant to the Dean of the Arts Faculty, a job she loved. And, she said, when her parents kyboshed her planned trip to Europe, Dad persuaded her parents

to let her go. My uncle, David Wittner, chimed in that Dad had done the same for him the following year. A third person in the room talked about how indebted her whole family was to him. They had migrated to Australia from South Africa in the early sixties and her father, a barrister, had little prospect of being able to practise in Australia. My father suggested he apply for a teaching position at the University of Melbourne, and befriended him; our family forged a relationship with that family that continues today.

These anecdotes – and the dozens of such similar stories we heard over the next several weeks – were revelations to me. He had never mentioned these incidents to us or many of the other myriad acts of help and kindness he had performed. My father's habit was to do such things as a matter of course. It was his pattern: to 'get on with it', 'to contribute', 'to do the decent thing'. These were his mantras.

Steven Skala said there was no separation between the public and the private man, and that was true. Ever rational and principled, he would listen to our views and mount his argument in a slow, methodical formula that drove me, at least, quietly mad. He loved the intellectual exercise of testing our propositions through lengthy Socratic interrogation – 'why, why, and what follows from that' – and would interrupt to commend us if our reasoning was strong. He believed fiercely in the right to privacy – ours and his – and would knock before entering our rooms and allowed us to volunteer information rather than compelling us to disclose it. When push came to shove and Dad had to say 'no', he would couch it in a principle – 'your right to swing your arm ends when it hits my face'. At times it was exasperating to have such an unfailingly reasonable parent.

His capacity to link and help others was not always so successful for us, his children. I remember when travelling in my late teens and early twenties, Dad provided a list of contacts – the President of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the Australian High Commissioner in Bombay, the Whitlams at the OECD residence in Paris – the last people an adolescent in search of a place to crash or do a load of laundry would contemplate. I recall during my misspent years before going to university, winding up, after one of Dad's helpful introductions, in the office of Sir Peter Abeles who had just purchased Ansett Airlines with Rupert Murdoch. I cursed Dad as I floundered through that awkward meeting and cursed him more when I spent the next year in purgatory as a reservations clerk at Ansett. But he was always well intentioned and his mistakes were quite innocent and sometimes borne of disconnect from practical aspects of ordinary life. There was a time in Oxford when my younger brother and I were visiting my parents in Oxford, and we all went to the movies. The box office sign stated 'Children accompanied by parents – free' so he only asked for two adult tickets explaining he was with his two children. What followed was a bizarre exchange as the puzzled ticket vendor repeatedly asked, 'Where are the children?' with Dad pointing behind him. He was not being perverse, the fact that Ben was seventeen and I was 24 did not make us any less 'his children'.

It was however, tremendously valuable to have a father with such an encyclopaedic volume of knowledge. At twelve I was planning to feign illness to avoid a compulsory essay competition at Sunday school (*cheder*). But when my 'stomach pain' ploy failed I broke down and told Dad I hadn't prepared as he drove me to *cheder*. He told me the story of Chaim Weitzman's career and repeated it three times driving around the block. I duly poured it out and won first prize.

It would not be fair, as my mother frequently says, to 'gild the lily'. Dad's career came at a cost to the family. He was often absent and preoccupied, and his choices meant significant upheaval for the family when we moved from Melbourne to Armidale (NSW), to Brisbane, Canberra, Oxford and finally back to Melbourne with lengthy sabbaticals abroad interspersed. My parents often wryly commented that the Cowen children didn't leave the nest – the nest left them. In the family folklore there was one occasion when my father returned from two days interstate and asked my oldest brother if he wanted to know about the trip. My brother replied that he hadn't realised my father was away.

It is also true to say that, like many men of his generation, he was not a hands-on father. Mine is not a life peppered with memories of a father in the front row of school events or integrally involved in the minutia of my day-to-day life, but it is one of a child who had her parents' unconditional love, support and forbearance. There were countless happy family holidays at our simple fibro cottage at Caloundra with Dad waking us at 6.30 a.m. for the 'best swim of the day' and umpteen lively debates around our family table where my mother could magically extend the meal to accommodate any number of last-minute guests.

My father loved these occasions – he loved our company as he did most people. He was, as my mother described him, 'a gregarious isolate'. He was quite self-contained, but he also loved being among people and communicating – and he was a superb communicator. He was natural and approachable, he was not aloof, he did not posture and he was genuinely interested. Because of this, in their tributes many people described him as 'humble', a word that did not resonate with us. He was comfortable in his own skin, aware of his capacities, but not at all ego-driven.

His relationships traversed an extraordinary range of people from his counterparts in academic and public life to the people who sustained him in his daily life – his Commonwealth driver Steve, whom he introduced to classical music and whom he encouraged to return to study, his personal assistants and the gentle and wonderfully kind carers and various therapists who looked after him in the last years of his life and whom he described as 'golden'.

Ironically, and possibly in response to his extraordinary achievements, three of his four children departed from the courses he anticipated, me among them. We made choices that must have bewildered him but ones he accepted and accommodated without ever withdrawing support. We posed a formidable challenge. Two of his sons rejected secular academia and his worldly values in favour of an orthodox Judaism he had never contemplated and I, his only daughter, rejected

academia until my late twenties, when I finally went to university only to enrol in a course against his advice. Throughout there were differences of opinion, but never a schism. With the exception of one brother who has lived in Israel since 1979, we all came to live in Melbourne and, for the most part, have gathered around my parents' table most weeks. When my oldest brother's orthodoxy meant family Shabbat dinners were not possible, my mother improvised a kosher Sunday night bagel tea – an institution that endures to this day and which most of his grandchildren preserve – even as adults. They loved their grandfather and stepped up their visits to him over the last years and months, especially as his ability to speak and move diminished. He loved and marvelled at them, describing them and his time with them as 'tremendous'.

My little girls – only five and eight when their grandfather died – have wonderful memories of him. There was a period of two months when I came with my daughters, only two and five at the time, to live with my parents. For nearly two months we overran their orderly life and two-bedroom home; it was mayhem. For that period my father had no access to his study and often wore the same clothes rather than dislodge us from his dressing room. If we drove him crazy, we were never made to feel it and he bore the invasion with the same calm and equanimity he bore his illness: accepting, tolerant and without complaint. Most significantly, during that time my girls developed a relationship with their grandparents, I had never anticipated considering my parents' advanced age and Dad's growing incapacity. My oldest daughter, Ella, was devoted to him and I remember her bursting into tears when his beloved St Kilda lost a grand final, raging at the television 'that it wasn't fair to Papa'. To comfort him, she made a cardboard sculpture of Dad in a St Kilda vest, arms raised, with the caption 'Papa the Champion'. It speaks volumes that in the last weeks of his life, when he was so terribly physically diminished, my daughters would ask to sleepover at Papa's where they would perform concerts, draw pictures and run in to hold his hand.

During that last period the house thronged with people who loved him and made time amid crammed schedules for frequent visits. Josh Frydenberg stood out in this respect, calling and visiting umpteen times a week and twice on the last day of Dad's life. Dad relished their company. Indeed one Sunday after the nineteenth visitor had departed and my mother and I were dropping with fatigue, Dad, who spoke rarely by this stage, asked 'Who is coming next?'

My mother – the gentle steady force that enabled Dad's extraordinary career, who provided the emotional ballast to sustain our family throughout and who has enriched us all – is resilient and marvellous as always. Having replied to hundreds of letters and attended a wonderful occasion in Canberra when Parliament moved a condolence motion, she has dealt with decades of papers and various artifacts in Dad's office at 4 Treasury Place. Since his death scholarships, lectures, a forest in Israel and a meeting room at ABL have been named for him. My mother gave a tremendous speech at a memorial service in Oxford in April [see page 5]. The newly

refurbished Australian Jewish History Gallery that bears his name has opened. His legacy is everywhere. And the mantle seems to have passed to my mother who was bewildered recently to hear herself described as ‘a national living treasure’.

Two of his grandsons will graduate in Law this year. His seventh and eighth great-grandchildren were born in early 2012, two beautiful little girls he would have wondered at; two more ‘greats’ are due by the end of this same year. We still gather around the same round table each week and evidence of Dad is everywhere. He is loved and sorely missed.

# **A DIFFERENT SILENCE: THE SURVIVAL OF MORE THAN 200,000 POLISH JEWS IN THE SOVIET UNION DURING WORLD WAR II AS A CASE STUDY IN CULTURAL AMNESIA**

*John Goldlust*

Some of it was truly bizarre. They were on this train which arrives out in the middle of central Asia where Stalin had earlier sent a whole bunch of Jews and these Jews who'd settled there before all came out to the station and asked them to get off and settle there too.

(From interview with 'Abe' cited in Ruth Wajnryb, *The Silence*<sup>1</sup>)

In her book, *The Silence*, Ruth Wajnryb explores the multi-layered and sometimes fraught, intergenerational dynamics experienced by many who grew up in Australia as children of Jewish immigrants from Europe whose lives had been 'dislocated or traumatised during the twelve-year period of the Third Reich.'<sup>2</sup> The little vignette above told by Abe – one of the 27 adult children of Holocaust survivors she interviewed in the course of her research – is presented in her book to illustrate Wajnryb's point that we might best characterise the way in which some children hear their parents' experiences of 'The War' as a kind of 'leaking out'. By this she means that over many years, during their childhood and even beyond, they tend to catch onto, but only partially absorb, numerous unanchored events that come to them in the form of disparate, hazy and disjointed bits of information. It is not surprising, then, that when they later try to recall or retell one of these stories, even though they may have heard versions of it many times before, as with Abe, they are still a little 'baffled by their own lack of knowledge of their parents' background' and are acutely aware that the 'bits don't compute in your head; they roll around and are unconnected to anything else in your world'.<sup>3</sup>

But, this is only one of the reasons I chose to begin with this brief and garbled version of what, for Abe who grew up in mid-twentieth century Sydney, was understandably a 'truly bizarre' parental wartime story, exotic and distant both in locale and time. Also, it was his somewhat bemused presentation of the incident – one that placed his parents during the war deep inside the 'Asiatic' portion of the Soviet Union – that fortuitously provides a number of useful entry points into the historical events I wish to explore in this article.

For one thing, there is Abe's throwaway reference to this 'whole bunch of

Jews' whom his parents, while on their train journey, suddenly encounter at some unnamed railway station in 'the middle of central Asia'. Who were these Jews? Where did they come from? When and why had Stalin 'sent' them there, and why did they want to entice Abe's parents to join them? In all probability the event took place at the trans-Siberian railway station in the 'Jewish Autonomous Region' of Birobidzhan, the tiny, remote area located deep in the far eastern region of Siberia where, in 1934, the Soviets had tried to establish their own version of a 'national homeland' for the Russian Jews, with Yiddish as its official 'national language'.

But travelling in other parts of Soviet Central Asia, in particular Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the early 1940s, one would be just as likely to come across a much larger population of mostly Yiddish-speaking Polish Jews who also found themselves in these places as a result of political decisions made by Stalin. While the ultimately unsuccessful Soviet experiment of 'Jewish' Birobidzhan remains an almost forgotten historical curiosity, of greater interest here is why seventy years later, for many of us, the probably more significant experiences of this other 'bunch' of Polish Jews continues to remain vague, confused and incompletely documented, to the extent that they have been somewhat reluctantly – and I would contend only marginally – incorporated into the broader historical narrative of Jewish wartime experiences.

A subtler, but equally important, consideration is that while Wajnryb's sample of Australian interviewees included 27 'second generation' adult children, Abe's are the only 'survivor' parents whose flight to evade the Nazis led into the Soviet Union, and even here they were literally only 'passing through'.<sup>4</sup> Yet, for quite some time it has been widely known, certainly by historians and researchers of the period, that: first, a considerable majority – some even suggest as many as 80 per cent<sup>5</sup> – of the 300,000–350,000 Polish Jews who remained alive when Germany surrendered to the Allies in May 1945 spent most, if not all, of the war years in territory controlled by the Soviet Union;<sup>6</sup> and second, that around half of the European Jewish immigrants who settled in Australia in the late 1940s and early 1950s were Polish Jews. Therefore statistically – unless this was a very unusual cohort – we would expect that the immigrants who settled in Australia in the immediate postwar years included, at the very least, 4000–5000 Polish Jews who had 'survived' the war inside the Soviet Union. Yet none of 'these' Polish Jews, or their Australian-raised children, made it into Wajnryb's sample of 'survivor families' – Abe's parents were only travelling through the USSR on their way to their eventual destination, Shanghai. One could reasonably ask: does this suggest there is a broad consensus in place that the term 'Holocaust survivor' should be applied only to those Jews who were liberated from the Nazi concentration and labour camps, or who remained in hiding, somewhere in Nazi-occupied Europe, or who found shelter with some anti-Nazi resistance or partisan group?

This thought receives added support when we look more closely at an earlier study of Holocaust survivors carried out in Melbourne, the city in Australia where



by far the greatest number of postwar Polish Jews chose to settle.<sup>7</sup> For her book *From Darkness to Light*, Naomi Rosh White undertook extensive interviews in the 1980s with eleven Holocaust survivors – five women and six men – all Polish Jews who were in Nazi-occupied Europe between 1939 and 1945. Among the eleven she selected for her study, and whose stories make up the bulk of the narrative of her book, she included only one male survivor who spent any period of the war years inside the Soviet Union.<sup>8</sup>

In this article I shall endeavour to provide a broader political and sociological context for why and how the geographical trajectories, personal experiences and stories of survival of the large number of Polish Jews whose escape from probable extermination came only because they chose to flee ‘eastwards’, have for a variety of confluent reasons remained a largely under-examined and shadowy presence within the larger Holocaust narrative. One might suggest further that, as a consequence, in the absence of a contextualised and more coherent understanding of these events, the particular family histories of many thousands of children and later descendants of these Polish Jews, now resident in Australia, will remain at best impoverished, and at worst in danger of being relegated to a rapidly vanishing trace within Jewish cultural memory and collective history.

### Sources of information and data

My aim is to contextualise the private, often fragmentary and skeletal, family stories of refuge and exile of Polish Jews inside the Soviet Union, and thereby to locate them within a broader political and sociological narrative. In doing this, I also draw attention to a number of loosely connected but also clearly differentiated geographical and situational trajectories taken by different ‘sub-groups’ among Polish Jews who, by choice or circumstance, spent much of the war in the Soviet Union. I will draw on two different but complementary sources of information and data:

#### *1. Published academic articles and books*

There is no suggestion that the ‘story’ has remained completely untold, but rather that, for a variety of reasons I will discuss more fully below, it has gradually receded further into the background and, therefore, much of the complexity and detail surrounding these experiences is no longer widely known or coherently understood. A brief literature review of available material shows that there has been a small but steady stream of academic articles, from the earliest overview in 1953 right up to the present day; as chapters in edited books that deal more generally with aspects of the Second World War, the Holocaust or Eastern Europe; and also in a wide range of academic journals. These include History and Jewish Studies journals, but also others with specialist academic interests such as Slavic Studies, International Relations, Genocide Studies and even Military History.<sup>9</sup> There is also one edited volume, published in 1991, on the general theme of Polish

Jews under Soviet authority during the Second World War that collects together fourteen academic articles by different specialist authors.<sup>10</sup>

## *2. Published memoirs*

Autobiographical memoirs by Polish Jews who had spent the war years inside the Soviet Union were already appearing by the late 1940s, although most of the early ones were in Yiddish, and many still remain untranslated.<sup>11</sup> By the 1970s a few more, in English and other languages, slowly started to trickle out, but there has been a noticeable increase in the number of published personal memoirs over the past two decades, as the growing impetus for Holocaust survivors to 'tell their stories', together with their advancing age, encouraged many Jews of this generation and background (including some who had spent the war inside the Soviet Union) to write autobiographical works.

Some of these publications are quite modest in scope, taking the form of a straightforward, chronological retelling of significant biographical events, often put down at the urging of children or grandchildren, and therefore including personal stories and details that are of most relevance and interest to family and friends. However, for this generation of Polish Jews, within their autobiographical narrative, the fact of growing up in Poland in the first decades of the twentieth century, followed by what happened to them in the years before and during the Second World War, invariably carries a significantly heavy weight and emphasis. A few of these memoirs are a little more ambitious; a number were written by 'professional' writers and therefore exhibit considerable literary skills, particularly in terms of well-developed descriptive qualities and a fluid and engaging prose style.

From my reading of more than a dozen of these published autobiographies, the majority by Polish Jews who later settled in Australia, each one (even from authors with little previous writing experience) invariably includes at least a few fascinating and often insightful anecdotes, observations, descriptions and details.<sup>12</sup> These provide the historical narrative with a qualitative richness and ethnographic texture we tend to associate more with a unique lived experience. Drawing on such material therefore both complements and, I would argue, greatly enhances our understanding of the sometimes 'drier', more generalised academic accounts of the events that took place in these particular times and locations.

## **The decision to move eastward (1939–40)**

The invasion of Poland<sup>13</sup> by Nazi Germany on 1 September 1939 was preceded a few days earlier by the signing of a Non-Aggression Treaty between Germany and the Soviet Union. This agreement included a secret protocol that specified the projected borders of the soon-to-be divided Poland. The German Army overcame most of the Polish military resistance within the first few weeks, while Soviet forces moved into Poland from the east on 17 September 1939 to take up positions on the newly defined border (see map – Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. The German/Soviet Division of Poland, 1939–41

[This map was accessed at the following web address:

[http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media\\_nm.php?MediaId=2372](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/media_nm.php?MediaId=2372)]

It is difficult, more than seventy years later, to recapture the widespread confusion, chaos, apprehension and fear that would have confronted the more than three million Polish Jews in the weeks that followed the German Army crossing the Polish frontier in those first days of September 1939. The legal and physical persecution of Jews already instituted by the Nazi regime, first in Germany in 1933 and, by the late 1930s, across the expanding areas of central Europe over which they had gained political control, was already widely known. But events were moving so quickly that it seemed impossible that the Jews in Poland could now find a way to evade any ‘special treatment’ that might await them as a visible and vulnerable minority within a Polish nation whose military resistance had been overwhelmed in the space of only a few weeks.

However, the entry of the Soviets into the picture, and their very rapid movement into administrative control of Eastern Poland, introduced one of the few available alternative scenarios – but also posed some imponderable questions. Was it possible for Polish Jews to rationally determine if it was preferable for them to stay where they were or, for those now under German authority, to seek

towards the border without any exit papers when they were actually stopped by a German patrol in an area of 'no man's land', but allowed to continue: 'It seemed that the German authorities were only too happy to be rid of as many Jews as possible.'<sup>25</sup>

However, in other places, the Germans were neither quite so cordial nor particularly concerned with formalities. Zev Katz, who was in his mid-teens in 1939, was living with his family in Yaroslav, a small town in the south-east of Poland, halfway between Cracow and Lwow, which was occupied by German forces. One day, someone from the local Gestapo gave his family an abrupt ultimatum: either leave town within five hours or be shot. He records in his memoir: 'In an instant we turned from a well-to-do family with a thriving grocery shop and export business into hapless refugees.'<sup>26</sup> Anna Bruell, then aged nineteen, was already on the move towards the southern section of the Soviet zone when she and her brother found themselves in a town occupied by the German Army and with a presence there of the SS. She recalls that a few days after her arrival there the *Sondercommandos* ordered Jews to leave within 24 hours, telling them just to 'go east'.<sup>27</sup>

A few of the memoirs point to a relative ease, at least in the early months, with which it was possible to move in both directions across the border between the two zones. At the outbreak of the war, Arthur Spindler is 23 years old and living in Tarnow in Galicia, which is quickly occupied by the Germans. At his father's recommendation, Arthur and four friends begin their journey towards Lwow in the Soviet-occupied Ukraine, taking about a week to arrive at the border. They cross by night and manage to arrive in Lwow, but not long after, at the request of his family, he re-crosses the border in the other direction and returns to Tarnow where, as a qualified electrician, he is regularly employed over the next few years by the German military.<sup>28</sup> Among Naomi Rosh White's eleven interviewees, four mentioned that, at least once, they had moved in both directions across the German-Soviet Polish border. One informant, Wladek, even reported that as an adolescent: 'I used to cross the border between east and west Poland once a week', moving back and forth between his mother's home in the German-occupied zone and his girlfriend who lived in the Soviet-controlled area.<sup>29</sup>

The movement into the Soviet-occupied zone slowed down dramatically in the first few months of 1940 when stricter border controls were put in place by both sides.<sup>30</sup> However, refugees from German-occupied Poland, albeit in much smaller numbers, continued to find ways of slipping into Eastern Poland right up to June 1941 when the area was invaded by the German Army. There was no particular refugee profile, but the external circumstances tended to favour older adolescents, young married couples, and small groups of peers or similar aged kin travelling into the Soviet zone together. In the early months there was also a pattern of husbands first making the trip into Eastern Poland and later calling for their wives to join them. There were small extended family groups as well, not usually larger than five or six persons, who made the journey together. However,

all who became refugees had to make what for many was a wrenchingly difficult decision: to separate themselves from families left at home – from siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins – many of whom, as it turned out, they were never to see again.

### Life under the Soviets (1939–40)

So far we have focused on Jews who actively moved into the Soviet zone; but for a much larger number already resident in these areas, it was the Soviets who came to them, as, for example, in Moshe Ajzenbud's autobiographical novel, where the young protagonist is living in a town in Belorussia occupied by 'the Russians' on 17 September 1939: 'The young folk watching felt distinct relief: they had at last been freed from the anti-Semitic Poles and if the Russians were here, the Germans would not come. They greeted the Russian soldiers joyfully ...'<sup>31</sup> In her memoir, Anna Bruell, who was able to cross the border into a town in southern Ukraine, writes of a similar response there to the entry of Russian troops: 'They were an unforgettable sight. This was a regiment of Cossacks all on beautiful horses, dressed in long fur-lined capes and tall fur hats. They rode slowly through the streets and were greeted with cheers and flowers, mostly by Jewish people.'<sup>32</sup> Bernard Weinryb, writing in the early 1950s, quotes from an oral testimony gathered very soon after the end of the war: '"It is easy to imagine with what great delight the Jews of Lvov met the Red Army which saved them ... from the Germans almost at the last moment."<sup>33</sup>

These brief passages highlight one widely cited reason for the heightened tension between the Jews and their 'ethnic' Polish neighbours. The relationship between the two groups had already become increasingly volatile in the late 1930s, further sharpened by the growth in electoral support for anti-Semitic political parties in Poland. Another contributing factor was a prominent Jewish presence within the Polish communist party.<sup>34</sup> And now, for many nationalistic Poles, the Soviet Union was a hated partner with Germany in the joint destruction of the Polish state. So, observing Jews who, for a variety of perfectly understandable reasons, now appeared to welcome the Russian occupiers, convinced many Poles that Jews as a group had little identification with or loyalty to the Polish nation.<sup>35</sup>

But political and social differentiation within the Jewish population was an important determinant in how the Soviets responded to the Polish Jews and vice versa. As the Soviet troops took control of Eastern Poland, their political and administrative authorities were intent on quickly identifying and neutralising perceived 'class enemies' amongst the local population. High on their lists were persons active in local political parties, members of the intelligentsia, religious authorities and the group they called the *kulaki*, which included major landowners and leading businessmen and merchants. Jews were to be found in all of these groups. David Kay was only a young boy in 1939 when the Soviets occupied his hometown of Slonim in western Belorussia. As his father was a prominent

local property owner and merchant, he was immediately identified as a *kulaki*, arrested by the NKVD and never seen again.<sup>36</sup> The rest of the family, consisting of David, his mother and one of his two older brothers were exiled soon after to a small town in Siberia.<sup>37</sup>

This was consistent with the general pattern followed by the Soviets, whereby the head of a 'class enemy' family was usually arrested and sent to a prison in one of the Soviet gulags, while the rest of the family was relocated to one of the more isolated 'places of exile' deep within the USSR.<sup>38</sup> In a historical time and place, where the particular intersection of external forces and individual circumstances often yielded the most unpredictable of outcomes, it is perhaps one of the blackest of ironies that most of the more than one million Jews permanently resident in Eastern Poland in 1939 were to meet their deaths soon after the German armies invaded these territories in June 1941, as victims of the ghoulish Nazi extermination policies; while, on the other hand, many of the Jews living there but arrested by the Soviets as 'class enemies', who along with other members of their immediate families were incarcerated or deported inside the USSR, were destined to survive.

In this regard, the latter were joined by many among the larger group of Jewish refugees from German-occupied Poland who, by 1940, were increasingly becoming a 'political, administrative and economic problem' for the Soviets in Eastern Poland.<sup>39</sup> Finding work was difficult, particularly in the larger cities to which the refugees gravitated.

One attempt to solve this problem was to offer the refugees jobs inside the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup> Zev Katz reports that among those who took jobs offered by the Soviets, skilled workers such as tailors or shoemakers 'who could produce goods in the "Western style"' often managed to settle quite well.<sup>41</sup> Leo Cooper who registered himself for work in his trade as a turner was provided with free transport to travel to his assigned location inside the USSR, and later given a form of Soviet 'passport' that listed his status as 'resettled' person as distinct from 'refugee'.<sup>42</sup> Zyga Elton formally accepted Soviet citizenship, moved to a small town in the Soviet Ukraine and later was able to take up a scholarship at a teachers' college there. He completed one year of his course but his studies were then interrupted by the German invasion of the Soviet Union.<sup>43</sup> Toby Flam first took up a job that was offered to her in Soviet Belorussia, later found other work there as a dressmaker and, in the summer of 1940, was accepted as a student in a technical training school in Minsk.<sup>44</sup> All four write of this early period of their stay in the USSR in a tone that is generally appreciative of the opportunities for training that opened up for them and the positive stimulation associated with the experience of learning a new language and adapting to the Russian people and Soviet culture.

Interestingly, in the main the Polish refugees made few connections with the Russian-speaking Jews, of whom there were many living within the Soviet Union. As Leo Cooper explains: 'The Jews of Minsk, or for that matter of any

other city in the Soviet Union, did not constitute a separate entity. The Jews were in the process of being assimilated and did not, therefore, make any attempt to identify themselves with the newcomers. It was probably fear of entertaining relations with foreigners ... rather than lack of feeling towards a fellow Jew that kept them apart from us.<sup>45</sup>

However, a number of the memoirs tell of the author, or someone they know, taking up the offer of a job inside the USSR and very quickly becoming disillusioned with the working and living conditions they encounter. According to Moshe Ajzenbud's novelistic account, some locals from his town enlisted for work being offered in a number of different locations, including coal mines, iron works and building projects, but many soon returned complaining that the conditions specified in the contract were 'one big lie'.<sup>46</sup> Larry Wenig tells a similar story about labourers recruited for the Donbas coal mines. The young men who went 'soon found that they had been duped. They sent back letters telling of miserable working conditions.'<sup>47</sup>

One quite spectacular exception emerges in the autobiographical memoir by Ruth Turkow Kaminska.<sup>48</sup> As a third-generation actress in one of the most illustrious Jewish theatrical families of Eastern Europe and, while still only in her late teens already an established 'star' of stage and screen, Ruth's introduction to life and work under the Soviets is characterised more by ease and luxury, rather than misery and deprivation. Soon after the Germans invade, following the familiar path taken by the Polish refugees, Ruth together with other members of her family – her mother Ida Kaminska, one of the most celebrated stars of Yiddish theatre, her stepfather, and her flamboyant, German-Jewish, jazz trumpet-playing husband, Adi Rosner – hastily decide to depart Warsaw and make their way to Bialystok in Soviet-occupied Eastern Poland. Once there, both Ruth and her husband are quick to take up the offer of Soviet citizenship, and within a few weeks, under the 'auspices of the Belorussian People's Commissar', Adi is offered the leadership of a local jazz orchestra with Ruth to be employed as one of the band's vocalists. They sign a contract for a substantial sum of money that includes extra provision for costumes, sets and other necessary expenses, with the understanding, at the request of local Party functionaries, that they will organise an extensive USSR-wide tour for the band, performing mostly western-style jazz. They then embark on an extremely affluent life style, staying in the best hotels and, with the money being earned, are able to purchase food, clothing and other provisions available only to the Soviet elite. This extends to Adi buying Ruth a luxurious mink and a sable coat as well as expensive jewellery. Their tour opens to great acclaim, first playing dates in Belorussia and then, in late 1939 and early 1940, moving on to extended seasons in both Leningrad and Moscow, before travelling to some of the more remote areas of the USSR.<sup>49</sup>

But the easy acceptance of Soviet citizenship, which presented little problem

to Ruth Kaminska and her husband Adi, was not a choice favoured by the majority of the Jewish refugees now in Eastern Poland. Also, an important condition attached to Soviet citizenship was the requirement for the refugees to then move to smaller urban centres, which most were loathe to do.<sup>50</sup> The citizenship status of the Polish refugees soon became of major concern to Soviet authorities. In November of 1939 the Soviet Citizenship Law had been extended to the occupied areas of Eastern Poland making all permanent residents *de facto* Soviet citizens. In the early months of 1940 it was decided to extend this further, and offer a Soviet 'passport' (the terminology used in the USSR for the required document of identity that confirmed one's formal status) to the refugees from 'western' Poland. However, given the growing general dissatisfaction within the refugee community, highlighted by the widespread disdain that many who had taken work in the USSR had shown by leaving their jobs and returning to the large cities, the Soviets were becoming wary and suspicious of exactly where their ultimate 'loyalties' might lie.

So, by March of 1940, the authorities came up with what they thought would prove to be an effective but (as we shall see below, in its level of deviousness and deception) also an exceptionally cruel strategy to test if the refugees' 'true' commitment and 'loyalties' were to Soviet rather than German interests.<sup>51</sup> While this may now appear an extremely paranoid response, given the well-known Nazi views towards Jews, not to mention their past policies and action, some of the memoir writers confirm the ambivalence expressed by many Jews around precisely this dilemma. When Toby Flam is about to flee from Warsaw to Eastern Poland, her friend tries to dissuade her by telling her: 'You will see, the Germans are not so bad.'<sup>52</sup> Chaim Künstlich's mother, still living in German-occupied Cracow, wrote to him (he was already in the USSR) suggesting he return, as she thought it 'better to live with the Germans than to stay in Russia.'<sup>53</sup> Late in 1939, in Minsk in the Ukraine, Leo Cooper observed 'a crowd of refugees who ... were trying to return to Nazi-occupied Poland.'<sup>54</sup> In various parts of Eastern Poland some Jews even tried, unsuccessfully, to register with German Commissions (set up there as sort of diplomatic 'consulates') for 'repatriation' back to their homes in German-controlled areas of Poland.<sup>55</sup> In fact, as Leo Cooper writes: 'Many managed to cross the demarcation line and re-enter Nazi-occupied Poland, even as many others were still fleeing the Nazi occupation into the Russian zone.' He retells the widely circulated story of two trains going in opposite directions meeting at the border. Jews from the one travelling into the Russian zone shout: "'Where are you going? You must be mad,'" but are met by those in the other train shouting back at them: "'You must be insane! Where are you going?'"<sup>56</sup>

So, in March 1940, the Soviets began to require Polish refugees to register themselves with the NKVD, the Soviet internal security agency, and to nominate one of two alternatives: 'either to become Soviet citizens or to declare that they were ready to return to their former homes, now under Nazi occupation'. But,



faced with this choice, most were wary of opting for Soviet citizenship, fearing that such a step would mean they would never be able to return to their former homes and families.<sup>57</sup>

As a consequence, the Soviet authorities chose to initiate a dramatic and somewhat draconian course of action: the Soviets considered the refugees to be a security risk since they showed a particular interest in developments in the German area, had family connections across the border, had made repeated attempts to sneak through the frontier to visit relatives, and had often expressed the desire to emigrate overseas. This increased Soviet distrust and the refugees were considered as likely candidates for espionage. The refusal of most to accept Soviet citizenship, coupled with their overt declaration to return to German-occupied Poland, drove the Soviet authorities to a radical resolution of the problem – massive deportation of the refugees.<sup>58</sup>

### **Deportation and 'Hard Labour' (1940–41)**

The operation to 'clear' the Polish refugees from Soviet-occupied territories of western Ukraine and western Belorussia began slowly but reached its peak in June of 1940. Not only Jews were targeted, as a considerably larger number of ethnic Poles had moved from German into Soviet-controlled areas after September 1939. The arrests and deportations reached their peak on the 'night of June 29 when hundreds of thousands of people were taken from their homes, and sometimes straight off the street, most of whom were Jewish and the rest ethnic Poles.'<sup>59</sup> Even some of the refugees who had taken up Soviet-sponsored jobs, and some who had accepted Soviet citizenship, were caught up in the swift and efficient round-up operations and summarily deported on the trains with the rest.

The suddenness of their arrest by Soviet authorities and the rapid events that followed – being herded into overcrowded carriages for a lengthy train journey eastwards, often lasting weeks and into parts unknown – is described in detail and sometimes at considerable length in many of the memoirs. Fela Steinbock tells of being arrested while pregnant and, together with her husband (who was not even one of the 'refugees' but a permanent resident of Soviet-occupied Poland) being deported by train to a remote barracks camp in the general vicinity of Krasnoyarsk in central Siberia.<sup>60</sup>

All the first-hand reports are consistent in mentioning the severe discomforts experienced during the journey, in particular the extreme overcrowding in the locked, 'cattle-car' carriages, the appalling sanitary conditions and the minimal food and water available. All travelled for lengthy periods, but Anna Bruell's journey of five weeks on the train before arriving at Tinda, located a few hundred kilometres west of Vladivostok in the far east of the USSR, seems especially gruelling.<sup>61</sup>

Zev Katz and his family were arrested and deported in late June 1940. He

writes that the guards on the train informed the deportees that they were being 'resettled' in big cities inside the USSR where they 'would be able to live quite comfortably'.<sup>62</sup> He captures very evocatively how, on the long journey eastward, after some time on the train, the atmosphere between guards and deportees becomes more relaxed and the overall mood improves considerably:

By then we knew each of our guards quite well and on occasion engaged them in long talks. Some of them were very curious to hear about life in Poland and Europe before the war. Some of our 'passengers' had travelled widely, even to America. As Soviet people, isolated from the outside world, the guards were fascinated to hear from people who had seen it with their own eyes. The weather was summery, not too hot, and as we travelled through the huge stretches of Russia, the Ural mountains with their breathtaking views and then through the vast lands of Siberia, we could not help being deeply impressed. It was like a holiday in the middle of a nightmare journey ... The train journey was to most of us something of an adventure, since we had not previously travelled beyond our immediate surrounding. Also, travelling on this train was like being in an eerie, suspended time-capsule: we could do nothing but live from day to day and wait to see what would happen.<sup>63</sup>

Within the existing Soviet system of incarceration there were three distinct types of penal custody to which detainees could be assigned.<sup>64</sup> The most severe and tightly controlled was the 'regular' type of prison where all inmates – this usually included both criminal and political – were confined by walls, fences and guards, kept in cells or primitive huts, 'rarely worked and were often kept in strict isolation'.<sup>65</sup> At the second level were the 'labour camps' and 'labour colonies', invariably in remote and desolate locations where there was some form of control over movement of inmates, and they were assigned to labour duties, but where, due to the isolated locations, walls and fences were unnecessary as escape was virtually impossible. At the lowest level of external control were the 'places of exile' to which those who were 'banished' were sent and expected to find work to sustain themselves; persons sent to such locations were deemed to be under some form of geographic confinement and subject to other forms of monitoring and restrictions but free to live their own lives in these places for as long as determined by the authorities. This latter category might also include specified remote urban settlements, *kolkhozes* (collective farms) and *sovkhozes* (state-owned agricultural settlements).<sup>66</sup> It was the second level 'labour camps' and 'labour colonies' that were the destinations to which most the Polish deportees were first assigned. Many were located in central and eastern Siberia and northern Kazakhstan, but there were also some in the northern sub-Arctic regions of Russia.

So, for example, Larry Wenig and his family were taken from their home at



with the number incarcerated in each ranging from a few hundred to several thousand. The inmates often included both Jews and ethnic Poles. Anna Bruell writes that she experienced little anti-Semitism in these circumstances, which she attributes to the fact that 'we were all, so to speak, in the same boat.'<sup>72</sup>

In writing about the Siberian camps, most authors list the numerous hardships: the long hours of labour in forests, mines and farms; the high work quotas expected and the minimal food rations earned even when these were achieved; the extremes of climate faced, particularly the brutal Russian winter; the serious epidemics, particularly typhoid and malaria that swept through the camp population; and, almost everyone mentioned the extreme infestations of bedbugs and lice that they endured. With reference to the latter, the following brief anecdote from *Kuba*, the only interviewee in Naomi Rosh White's study who spent time in a Soviet labour camp, manages to be both richly evocative of the experience, as well as blackly humorous in tone:

One very important feature of our life was to reduce the lice population on our bodies and clothing. We had to do it every night. If we didn't, we were finished. The first indication of a person who had given up was that he no longer did it ... Lice in Russia have been a perennial problem. Lenin said once that either the revolution will kill the lice, or the lice will kill the revolution. From what I saw, the half-time score was one-one.<sup>73</sup>

Significantly contributing to the anxiety and despair experienced by many of the deportees was the uncertainty around their future: how long would they remain in this place, under these conditions?<sup>74</sup> This was not helped when they were repeatedly told by their guards or by Soviet officials that they must accept as reality that they would never be leaving the camp, much less the USSR.<sup>75</sup>

The conditions were certainly harsh and some died of hunger and disease – one recent estimate suggests that 10 per cent of the Jewish refugees did not survive the experience.<sup>76</sup> And while the age of the refugees was biased towards young adults, the camp populations also included some adolescents and even young children. Anna Bruell recalls: 'Few babies survived in our camp in Siberia. I can only remember a few young children, undernourished and mostly kept indoors because of the freezing weather and lack of warm clothes.'<sup>77</sup>

Chaim Künstlich remembers there were children old enough to work in the camp he was in, with the youngest around twelve years of age. He recalls that one child died but overall – unlike some – he remembers the camp experience in relatively benign terms, adding, 'but nobody died from hard work'. In the same vein he continues: 'No one froze to death in their bunks, like in some gulags. We had heaters in our rooms and there was the whole forest to burn for fuel.'<sup>78</sup> Similarly, Anna Bruell who, despite her long exposition on the many difficult conditions

faced in the camp, concludes: 'Yet despite these hard conditions few people got sick in the winter – there was no flu or other contagious diseases. The worst we got was frostbite, sometimes very serious ...'<sup>79</sup> Some reported that they were even able to communicate from the camps by mail to contact family and friends back in Poland, and to receive assistance packages of goods and food sent to them.<sup>80</sup>

The Soviets were not renowned for their tolerance towards expressions of religion and there is certainly a divergence in the memoirs with regard to how the authorities in the labour camps responded to Jews who wished to observe religious rituals. So, for example, it was difficult for Jews to keep the Sabbath as they were not exempted from work on this day and, according to some, they had to be extremely circumspect about observing religious festivals or holy days.<sup>81</sup> Larry Wenig whose family was 'traditionally religious' notes that the officials were 'opposed to religious observances of any kind' and 'prohibited religious displays and church attendance, and, in fact tried vigorously to eradicate belief in God.'<sup>82</sup> However, a very different picture is painted by Chaim Künstlich who recalls, in his Siberian place of deportation, no restriction on religious practice. On the contrary, for the Jews 'there was one *Torah* in the camp and some *bar mitzvahs* were held.' He remembers that there was even a camp *shochet* to supply the necessary kosher meat.<sup>83</sup>

A few deportees were school-age adolescents, and even while in a labour camp, were given the opportunity to continue their education. So Larry Wenig, aged sixteen, began attending school at the commencement of the academic year in September; although he does also note that extensive 'communist indoctrination' accompanied the lessons and that 'dissent' was not well tolerated.<sup>84</sup>

Zev Katz, of a similar age to Larry Wenig, already has had a taste of the Soviet education curriculum attending school in Western Ukraine, having fled there with his family in 1939. Following their subsequent deportation to a Siberian labour camp, Zev is keen to continue his studies, but there is no school in their camp. So, remembering a phrase he had learned earlier from the Soviet constitution, 'All citizens of the USSR have the right to an education', he comes up with the audacious idea of writing a personal letter to Stalin, appealing to him to 'direct the local officials to make it possible for me to go to school for which I shall be very grateful to you'. Amazingly, months later, after sending off a second letter, he finally receives a reply from an official in the Kremlin directing those responsible to try to find a school for him. However, in true Soviet style, at the same time he receives another letter from a local official regretfully informing him that there is no suitable school close enough to the camp that he can attend.<sup>85</sup>

Most of the Polish deportees spent more than a year as involuntary inmates under the strictly controlled regime of these remote labour camps, but their lives took another twist after 22 June 1941 when Germany turned on their former 'ally' and mounted a massive military attack on the Soviet Union.

### **Surviving the war under the Soviets (1941–45)**

In the previous section the focus was on the Jews originally from German-occupied Poland who, in 1940, were deported from Soviet-controlled Poland and assigned to carry out hard labour in remote camps scattered throughout the Soviet Union. But there were now two other groups of Polish Jews whose circumstances and locations, in the previous two years, had diverged considerably from those experienced by the deportees. These included Polish Jews who had chosen to take the offer of work inside the USSR, some of whom had also accepted Soviet citizenship; and also some among the permanent residents of Eastern Poland who, as 'class enemies', had been imprisoned and deported very soon after the Soviets took control of these areas in 1939.

But when Germany attacked the USSR, the survival options available to all of these groups still inside Soviet-controlled territory began to merge together again.<sup>86</sup> The reasons for this had a lot to do with broader geo-political events that ensued as a consequence of the Soviets joining the anti-German coalition and therefore seeking strategic and military assistance from, and coordination with, the western governments who were now their new allies.

Of particular significance was the signing of a Polish-Soviet agreement on 30 July 1941 with the Polish side represented by the London-based, Polish Government-in-exile, led by General Sikorski. At the discussions, there was considerable disagreement between the two parties on a number of issues, particularly as to the exact location of a future – meaning post-war – Polish-Soviet frontier. However, with the British applying considerable pressure on the parties to come to some agreement on this and on other points in dispute, including the freeing the Polish prisoners and detainees in the USSR, a series of acceptable, if deliberately ambiguous, compromises was finally reached.<sup>87</sup>

So shortly afterward, on 12 August 1941, the Soviet Government officially declared a general 'amnesty' for Polish citizens in the USSR. Those detained in prisons and labour camps were to be freed and permitted to re-settle in other parts of the Soviet Union, with the exception of the large cities in the west. As these were in the 'European' portion of the USSR already under fierce attack from the German military, they were unlikely in any case to be the most desirable locations for those seeking a safe haven from the hostilities. Not surprisingly then, the general path followed by most of the refugees was to travel in the direction of the Soviet Republics of Central Asia (in particular Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan)<sup>88</sup> where the climate was much more temperate and where there was supposedly work available. A further incentive was the Soviet defence strategy that included moving many vital industries into these regions to provide them greater protection from enemy attack. For the Jews, another attraction included the geographic vicinity of these areas to the Soviet frontiers with India and Iran. Some were hopeful that it would be possible to escape from the USSR across

what they assumed, somewhat naively, would be more permeable border areas.

But of critical importance to the refugees who had been deported was a re-instatement of their Polish citizenship, a status to which they had desperately sought to cling and the major reason for the Soviet decision to deport them to the labour camps. Representatives of the Polish Government-in-Exile were permitted to set up 'embassies' throughout the Soviet Union to assist with the process.

Zev Katz describes how, soon after the German invasion of the USSR, the inmates of their labour camp in the Altai mountains of Siberia are assembled and informed that they are now 'Polish citizens and allies'. After some weeks they are finally provided with a tangible recognition of their Polish identity, 'a precious piece of paper'. Representatives of the Polish Government arrive at the camp and inform them that a special train will soon be arriving at a nearby station 'to take us to the warm lands in Central Asia.'<sup>89</sup> At the station they receive a certificate from the Internal Affairs Ministry stating they are 'under the auspices of the Embassy of Poland' and 'have the right to travel, reside, work, rations etc. much like any other citizen'. Zev and his family choose to settle in Kazakhstan in the 'first major city out of Siberia', where the climate is attractive and although geographically still in 'Asia', a 'predominantly Russian city'.<sup>90</sup>

When the amnesty is announced Larry Wenig's family are in a 'gulag style' camp in Russia's far north. They are told by camp officials that they will soon 'receive special documents enabling us to leave the camp as free people. We were to select a place where we wanted to settle. They would make travel arrangements.' The family chooses the far eastern port of Vladivostok with the hope of finding a way to the USA from there. When this destination is rejected they settle on Uzbekistan, both for the warmer climate and the possible chance of escaping across the border and eventually reaching Palestine or America.<sup>91</sup>

In her Siberian camp, on receiving the news that they are free to leave, Anna Bruell and most of her fellow 'prisoners' look to go somewhere in 'Soviet South Asia', even though 'most of us knew nothing about South Asia, just that it was sunny and warm, far from Europe, from the war and from the Germans.'<sup>92</sup> After a three-week-long train ride, Anna settles in a small town in South Kazakhstan populated by Kazakhs and Russians, where she remains for the next five years.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Fela Steinbok and Chaim Künstlich leave their Siberian labour camps and are each able to find a home in different small towns in Kazakhstan.<sup>94</sup>

Escaping from areas of the Soviet Union threatened by the rapid German advance and into the relative safety of Soviet Central Asia was also a path taken by the few Polish Jews able to do so. A small number, like Moshe Ajzenbud's alter ego, 'Michael', are among those few able to escape the systematic round-up by the Gestapo and the SS of almost the entire Jewish population of Eastern Poland, very soon after the German military quickly gain control of these areas. Michael manages to flee eastwards across the old Poland-Soviet border into Russia, first on a bicycle and then continuing his journey by train until he reaches his final

destination, a small town near Samarkand in Uzbekistan.<sup>95</sup>

Moshe Grossman initially flees into Eastern Poland in 1939, but because of his reputation as a Yiddish writer and 'intellectual', is soon arrested and imprisoned by the Soviets in Archangel in Russia's far north. In June 1941 he also benefits from the 'amnesty' and sets out by train towards Central Asia. He writes: 'In the train there were also Poles who had been released from the camps. They had just been liberated from prisons and camps together with the Polish Jews, but they had not been able to get rid of the habit of flinging "cursed Jew" in the faces of their comrades in fate.'<sup>96</sup>

After a journey lasting seventeen days, he arrived in Samarkand 'in the land of sun, grapes and frontiers'. There was an official Polish office nearby 'which issued Polish Passports to all former Polish citizens who had been in Soviet territory since 1939 and had not adopted Soviet citizenship. This meant all those who had been in prison, camps and exile.'<sup>97</sup> Grossman notes how important it was for all the Polish Jews there to be in possession of their official documents (release certificates). When they were stolen (as often happened) 'people became absolutely desperate'. However, forged papers could be bought at the Samarkand bazaar – in someone else's name and often without a photograph.<sup>98</sup> With his literary eye he also wryly observes that even among refugees in such impoverished and desperate circumstances, an inevitable status hierarchy quickly emerged:

The Russian Jews grabbed the big courtyard ... They would not admit any Polish Jews there. First because we were dirty, second because according to them we were all thieves. And third, we were not evacuees after all but released prisoners! ... The Lithuanian Jews also regarded themselves as a higher class in the lineup. They didn't like the Poles either. Even the Bessarabian Jews did not hold with us, while among the Polish Jews themselves there was a struggle between the Galicians and the Congress Poles. What was more, there was quite a special dispute between those who talked Polish and those who talked Yiddish.<sup>99</sup>

Another important initiative that came out of the 1941 agreement between the Soviets and the Polish Government-in-Exile was the formation of a separate Polish Army made up of Polish citizens now inside the USSR, and placed under the leadership of General Władysław Anders (himself only recently released from a Soviet prison). One of the major recruiting centres was to be in Buzuluk, near the city of Kuybyshev (now known as Samara), deep inside Russian territory and near the northern border of Kazakhstan. The imminent existence of such a force quickly attracted the attention of some of the Polish Jewish refugees, particularly as it soon also become widely known that, once formed, this army was to be moved out of the USSR and then through Iran, to join up with the Allied forces in the Middle East under British command. As Yisrael Gutman has written: 'From the



very beginning of the recruiting, thousands of released Jewish prisoners and exiles flocked to the collection points', most acting on their own initiative.<sup>100</sup>

Some Jews who volunteered were accepted. However, there is considerable evidence to suggest that there was an ingrained bias against taking Jewish recruits shared by leading officials of the Polish Government-in-Exile, and also among the Polish military command, from General Anders down; this was aided further by some cunning political strategies employed by the Soviet leadership, designed to discredit General Sikorski's 'anti-Semitic' policies in the eyes of their western allies, resulting in Jewish recruitment into the army coming to almost a complete halt after the first few months.<sup>101</sup> There is certainly considerable support for this in personal experiences around these events reported in the autobiographical memoirs.

Zyga Elton, who accepted Soviet citizenship in 1939, had his studies at a teachers' college in Western Ukraine rudely interrupted by the German attack on the Soviet Union. After being slightly wounded while volunteering and being assigned to an auxiliary role supporting the Soviet military in their somewhat ineffective attempts to defend against the Germans, Elton hears about the recruitment for the Anders Army in Buzuluk. He makes his way there with the hope that by successfully volunteering he will also be able to regain his Polish citizenship. However, when he arrives after a long train journey he is told he cannot join because he is carrying a Soviet passport. But he is sure that the 'real reason for the refusal was that we were Jews, and the acceptance of Jews into the Polish Army was limited to a very small number, mostly former officers.'<sup>102</sup> Larry Wenig tried twice to join the Anders Army without success.<sup>103</sup>

Moshe Grossman writes: 'Everybody wanted to go and volunteer for the Polish Army... But Jews were not accepted.' Only a tiny number was able to enter and it was widely believed that the only way in was either through bribery or a certificate of conversion.<sup>104</sup> Leo Cooper lends support to this with a personal anecdote. As a Polish Jew who accepted Soviet citizenship and found work in Soviet Belorussia, when the German military starts to advance, he begins to move further east and, by November 1941, is on a train towards Uzbekistan. When stopped at the city of Buzuluk, he discovers, by chance, that this is to be the headquarters for the Polish Army being formed by General Anders. While still at the railway station he meets a fellow Polish Jew, also now a Soviet citizen, who suggests they join up as a way out of the Soviet Union. However, Cooper soon discovers that recruiters are rejecting those who admit to being Jewish. His new friend learns that one can easily get around this by just going back again and this time presenting oneself as a Catholic, but Cooper is reticent to employ this strategy.<sup>105</sup> He comments: 'Apparently the number of Jews wanting to join the Polish Army was quite substantial and there was apprehension among the Polish general staff that, should a large percentage of Jews enlist, the Polish Army might be deprived of its purely Polish character. Jews had not been considered as being Polish.'<sup>106</sup>

Eventually, more than 70,000 military personnel recruited into the Anders unit together with another 50,000 family members, including children, were able to leave the Soviet Union by the summer of 1942. This included around 6000 Jews – 3500 soldiers and 2500 civilians – many of whom, in another strange twist, found themselves suddenly under British military control and stationed in Palestine in the summer of 1943. Once there, and with the encouragement and assistance of local Jewish settlers, keen to recruit well-trained soldiers, many of the Jews who left the USSR with Anders Army deserted and quickly disappeared into Jewish towns and *kibbutzim*. So, for the small number able to take advantage of the circumstances, the alliance between the Soviets and the Polish Government-in-Exile, and the formation of the Anders Army, provided them with both an escape route from the USSR and an opportunity to bypass the British Mandate restrictions designed to severely limit further Jewish immigration into Palestine.<sup>107</sup>

The movement of Polish Jews into Soviet Central Asia added only a tiny fraction to the overall number of people moving into these areas in the months following the German attack on the USSR. Almost immediately, the Soviet Government put into effect a gigantic evacuation plan so that by December of 1941, at least 10 million Soviet citizens had been moved from 'European' into 'Asian' areas of the USSR.<sup>108</sup> This, together with the movement of troops and military support towards the front, meant that the major roads and railways across the USSR were filled with the constant flow of people heading in both directions.

In this context, it is not surprising that there were numerous opportunities for chance encounters between different groups of Jewish refugees whose paths happened to cross. For example, Zyga Elton was not deported to a labour camp in 1940, but in the summer of 1941 he had just been rejected as a potential recruit into General Anders' Polish Army, and was on a train to Uzbekistan:

In Kyzl Orda on the way to Tashkent we met a large convoy of cattle wagons full of people, left on a railway siding ... Most were poorly dressed and some were in tattered clothes, their bare feet covered in cloth. They were Polish citizens freed from concentration camps and settlements in accordance with the term of an agreement between the Polish Government-in-Exile and the Soviet Union. They were escaping the severe cold of the snow-covered Siberian expanse. Their only chance of survival was to reach the mild climate of Central Asia and last out till the end of the war. These people were hungry and had not eaten in days. Some were sick, and without medical help. They hoped to travel as far as Aschabad, and from there to the Persian border. These hopes were the product of delirious minds, as the borders were strongly guarded against any trespass ... We returned to our train, grateful to have escaped their fate.<sup>109</sup>

But despite their currently impoverished state, as noted in the book by Moshe

Ajzenbud, the former Jewish deportees had one reason to feel optimistic about the future: they were carrying their 'Release Certificate' affirming that they were Polish citizens. 'They assumed that the others, the Soviet citizens, could expect very little to change – they would have to remain always in Russia. For us, they thought, it is different: we are Polish citizens, and we will have to be allowed to go home after the war.'<sup>110</sup>

Certainly, as many of the memoirs suggest, day-to-day survival for the refugees in the Central Asian Republics was sometimes quite stressful and difficult. Writing about life in a small town in Kazakhstan, Anna Bruell mentions serious illnesses such as typhoid, dysentery and the ever-present bedbugs and lice. And, while a wide range of work was available, the pay was often insufficient to meet basic nutritional needs, more so if some members of the family or group brought in no income.<sup>111</sup> Many found jobs in a local *kolkhoz* that required them to take on unfamiliar, physically demanding agricultural work and were paid in accordance with the rules of the particular collective. Moshe Grossman describes working, together with hundreds of other refugees, in the cotton plantation of an Uzbek *kolkhoz* in 'primitive' living conditions and receiving 'meagre food'.<sup>112</sup> Some moved on from these locations to take up other jobs in the local towns, in offices and factories, or even, on occasion, as small-scale merchants.

A number mention that they resorted to illegal activities in order to enable them to supplement their impoverished diets. Anna Bruell comments: 'Everybody stole from each other. There was bribery and cheating on the small and grand scales.'<sup>113</sup> A widely shared observation, often based on personal participation in the practice, is that the 'black market' trading of goods usually acquired through stealing and reselling materials from one's workplace was endemic throughout the Soviet Union. As Zyga Elton observes:

A whole culture developed which rationalised the lifting from factories and government enterprise, as these were common property, and partly owned by the perpetrator. This would be distinguished, in people's minds, from lifting privately owned property which was considered morally wrong ... Being in charge of goods for which there was a great consumer demand would further enhance one's well being.<sup>114</sup>

David Kay was a young boy when, in 1939, he was transported with his mother to a small Siberian town where he became involved with a gang of young thieves and petty criminals. He holds the view expressed by many others that theft was 'endemic' to Russian life. His mother also soon began to participate in illegal activities and shrewdly established 'business' relationships with powerful men in the town with whom she could make mutually beneficial 'deals'. Kay writes: 'She was imprisoned many times for her black marketeering, but her bribes and contacts saw her released fairly quickly.' He also contends that 'thieves did not receive severe treatment from police and magistrates' because their offences

were not as bad as 'capitalist' crimes such as speculation. In particular, from the Soviet ideological perspective, 'distributors', that is, merchants, were perceived as 'nothing more than speculators'. The producer should sell directly to the consumer and thereby eliminate the 'parasitical' middle-man.<sup>115</sup>

Inevitably the Jews had some contacts with the distinctive 'ethnic' groups that made up the various components of the local populations. In the memoirs, few deal in much detail with these 'indigenous' groups such as the Uzbeks, Kazakhs and Tajiks, not to mention the 'Bukharan' Jews. When these groups do appear in the narratives, it is often in terms of their Muslim or, more frequently, their Asiatic 'exoticism'.<sup>116</sup> Fela Steinbock observed that the 'local' (meaning Bukharan) Jews 'seemed almost unaware that there were Jews in other parts of the world. They lived with the local people, spoke their language, dressed like them'.<sup>117</sup> Moshe Ajzenbud found it intriguing that in the small town near Samarkand where he lived these 'Bukhara Jews' dressed in European clothes (unlike the local Uzbeks) and 'had biblical names like Moses or Jacob'.<sup>118</sup>

Anna Bruell found the Kazakhs a 'very hospitable and generous people with whom we got on very well. They had nothing against Jews or Poles but hated Russians passionately.' However she also notes their widespread poverty, 'superstitions' and 'quaint' child-caring practices; and felt less comfortable with their 'low hygiene standards'. With regard to these she pointedly mentions that, although they were invited to eat with their Kazakh landlords, 'no matter how hungry we were, we could never bring ourselves to share the meal'.<sup>119</sup> Chaim Künstlich also found the Kazakhs 'welcoming and very good to the Polish people'.<sup>120</sup>

Some of the memoirs include quite lengthy 'ethnographic' descriptions of the local living conditions, dress and customs. Zyga Elton, who had come to Bukhara in Uzbekistan, observed that 'most living quarters were built of clay, patched together with small windows, low ceilings and doors. One had to bend to enter.' Not surprisingly, it was the local *Chaikhanas* or teahouses that operated as hubs for most social and community interaction, although restricted to males. He also observed that the visually impressive and ancient tiled mosque was 'now abandoned and the front a major market site.' As for the people: 'The inhabitants of these parts, the Uzbeks, were dressed in long quilted kaftans, worn in winter on top of other kaftans and in summer, on bare bodies. The headgear called "*tyubiteika*", had the shape of a squared dome and was richly embroidered with local motifs'.<sup>121</sup>

The Uzbek language, 'a Turkish derivate', was incomprehensible to the newcomers, and overall, Elton found the locals 'not particularly welcoming to the Polish refugees, or for that matter, the Russian evacuees'.<sup>122</sup> Larry Wenig agrees, noting that the social distance between the two groups was such that 'the Uzbeks on our street did not talk to or look at us'.<sup>123</sup> Moshe Grossman, in Samarkand, at first presents a similar view, noting considerable hostility between the local Uzbeks and the refugees, even down to the children, who are continually throwing stones at the Jewish children: 'The little Uzbeks hated the Polish children because they

were better dressed and received clothes and food from America.<sup>124</sup> However, he soon tempers this by observing that, over time, the relationship between the two groups began to warm:

It took a long time for the Uzbeks and the Jews to get to know one another better. Once we were accepted as guests at their festivities, both people saw that you must not judge in a hurry or superficially by the people you meet by chance in the street or the bazaar. Among them, as among ourselves, there were decent, modest, fine folk of high morality and culture.<sup>125</sup>

Overall, relations between the Jews and 'ordinary' Russians, with the general exception of those in authority positions and NKVD officers, tended to be mostly cordial and friendly. Anna Bruell observed that most of the Russians in these areas were also often quite impoverished, and except for those 'in charge' not much better off than the local Kazakhs.<sup>126</sup> David Kay was only a young boy when he and his mother were transported from their home in Eastern Poland to their place of exile in the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk, where they remained for almost six years. David found it easy to make friends there with boys his own age and experienced little overt discrimination against Jews. The locals were generally hospitable, even prepared to share what meagre supplies of food they might have, leaving him with the impression that 'individually, Russians are remarkably good people.'<sup>127</sup>

Zev Katz had already shown his determination to take advantage of what the nominally egalitarian Soviet system had to offer with his letters to Stalin requesting access to education while still an inmate of a Siberian labour camp. He pursued these ambitions further when he and his family were 'amnestied' and moved on to Semipalatinsk in Kazakhstan. By September 1942 Zev gained entry as a student in a teachers' training college linked to the University of Kazakhstan, from where he was able to graduate with his degree four years later. During this period, life for him and his family regained some sense of 'normality'. There were cultural institutions operating – the National Theatre of Kiev was resettled and performed in the town, cinemas regularly showed movies, including even some from America. But he also remained conscious of the enormous contradictions inherent in Soviet society: the difficult working conditions and immense poverty and hunger of most workers and 'peasants' that were in sharp contrast with the material advantages open to the privileged classes (the *Nomenklatura*), who were able to enter closed shops to purchase goods that were unavailable to the rest.<sup>128</sup>

Despite their parallel experiences during their time in the USSR, the relationship between Polish Jews and ethnic Poles continued to follow the mostly separate, mutually distrustful and often openly hostile pattern frequently remarked upon already in a number of the autobiographical memoirs cited. But there are also some who present a different image. After the 1941 amnesty for Polish refugees, Felix Rosenbloom, unable to get to Central Asia, instead relocated to Bijsk in central

Siberia, where he remained for several years. There were also other refugees in the town, including non-Jewish Poles, with some of whom he developed warm and lasting friendships: 'I could not vouch how they felt about Jews in general, but I believed that their friendship to me was genuine. We remained good friends until I left Bijsk.'<sup>129</sup>

Obviously, both Jews and Poles came into the wartime situation with long-established, strongly held views about, and personal experiences with, members of the other group that inevitably contributed to how comfortable and open they were likely to feel now. So, Chaim Künstlich might be seen as somewhat atypical when he writes about his life in pre-war Poland: 'I never experienced any difficulties as a Jew attending Polish schools, because Krakow was a very nice city and the Polish people were very nice.'<sup>130</sup> Later, when he is settled in a small town in Kazakhstan he is again careful to resist placing emphasis on any 'ethnic' differences within the refugee population: 'There was a Polish community, but the Jewish community was very small and we really didn't know who was Jewish and who was not ... There was no anti-Semitism there.'<sup>131</sup>

After April 1943, with the Germans now in retreat from the USSR, the already intense ambivalence felt by many of the Jewish refugees with regard to their past and present identity as Poles, not to mention their future relationship with an as yet unknown, post-war Poland, were put to a further test. For reasons that lie outside the scope of this article, but revolve around irreconcilable differences on the exact location of the future Poland-USSR borders, the Soviet Government's already uneasy relationship with General Sikorski's Government-in-Exile fractured completely.

Even before this final break, the Soviet political strategy had already turned toward making effective use of the Polish refugees inside the USSR as part of their broader geo-political ambitions to establish a predominant influence over a compliant, post-war, communist Poland. To these ends, the Soviets assisted in the setting up of two important new Polish institutions: the first was the formation of the Polish Army in the USSR, to be drawn entirely from Polish refugees, that would fight alongside the Red Army in the liberation of Poland from the Germans; the second was a political organisation, the Union of Polish Patriots (known also by its acronym in Polish as the ZPP), aimed at recruiting any Polish communists who were still alive, and other Poles whose political credentials met Soviet requirements, to be trained to play leading roles in a future Polish Government.

On 8 May 1943, two weeks after they broke off all relations with the Polish Government-in-Exile, the Soviet Government announced the formation of the first military unit of the 'new' Polish Army which was to be under the command of Colonel Zygmunt Berling and strategically named, after the Polish national hero, the Tadeusz Kosciuszko division.<sup>132</sup> The number of recruits continued to grow so that by the summer of 1944, when this 'new' Polish Army re-entered Poland alongside Soviet forces, it consisted of more than 100,000 soldiers. In the

recruiting process there was considerably less discrimination against Jews than had been the case with the earlier Polish Army under General Anders, and it is estimated that around 12,000 Jewish soldiers served, with a high Jewish representation amongst the officers.<sup>133</sup>

Fela Steinbock's brother was 'drafted' into the Kosciuszko unit in 1944.<sup>134</sup> But Zev Katz presents a less sanguine view of this 'new' Polish Army, suggesting anti-Semitic discrimination was still in evidence. When he and his brother tried to volunteer, they were rejected and told that the recruiters had been warned that the Polish Army 'had too many Abramoviches already, they do not need any more.'<sup>135</sup> Felix Rosenbloom also writes that he was rejected when he tried to join the Polish Army in 1944.<sup>136</sup>

Jews were, however, well represented in the ZPP, leading one academic author to suggest: 'The best period for Polish Jewish refugees was from May 1943 until the end of July 1946 because Stalin had assigned them a role in the process of transforming Poland into a "peoples" republic and a Soviet satellite.'<sup>137</sup>

Zyga Elton joined the ZPP soon after its formation and late in 1944 was recruited as an assistant to the local branch secretary in Buchara, Uzbekistan. He writes: 'My task was to organise cells at workplaces where there were at least five Polish citizens working. I had to call and attend meetings at which we were to enlighten the members of the merits of The Polish Committee of National Liberation,<sup>138</sup> and the future of the new Polish Democratic Republic.' He was assigned to visit collective farms outside Buchara 'with substantial Polish-Christian populations who were generally little interested in what I had to say, except with regard to what was on their minds: repatriation to Poland'. The hostility towards Elton as a representative of the Soviet-sponsored organisation was so intense that he felt 'hatred in their eyes'.<sup>139</sup> After these experiences he came to realise that the ZPP had no standing within the Polish-Christian community for whom: 'As an organisation of former communists and Jews, ZPP was a complete anathema.'<sup>140</sup>

Larry Wenig, in another town in Uzbekistan, observed that the ZPP opened their own schools in areas where there was a Polish refugee population into which Polish-speaking students were encouraged to transfer. The schools took care that the educational curriculum followed was supportive of Soviet ambitions for the direction of the 'new' Poland.<sup>141</sup>

By 1944 some Polish Jews were being 'called up' to serve in the Soviet Army, although they discovered they were to be assigned to a 'labour battalion' rather than a fighting unit. Often this meant being recruited to work under conditions not dissimilar from those in the regular Soviet 'labour camp'. On being drafted, Leo Cooper was taken with many others by train from Uzbekistan to a camp not far from Leningrad where most of the other conscripts laboured in coal mines, while, because he was skilled, Cooper was assigned work in the maintenance shop.<sup>142</sup> A similar story is told by Zyga Elton who also had a brief stint in a Red Army labour unit that involved a train journey of several weeks across the USSR followed by

work in a coal mine, before he was released from duty on health grounds.<sup>143</sup>

Although the end of the war was now in sight, and most of the Polish Jews were keen to assist the Allied cause and speed up what now appeared to be the inevitable military defeat of Germany, the total unpredictability of their situation was still sometimes forcefully brought home to them. Moshe Grossman was imprisoned as a 'class enemy' early in the war, then released under the Polish amnesty of 1941 and spent his next three years in Uzbekistan. But in February 1944 he was suddenly re-arrested by the NKVD and charged with 'counter-revolutionary agitation'. After several months of interrogation he was sent to a prison camp, and in his reflection on the seemingly endless vicissitudes of his own experiences in the Soviet Union he articulately enumerates the bewilderingly diverse range of circumstances encountered and, as a response, the necessary adaptability in finding an effective survival strategy, shared by most of his fellow Polish refugees:

During the years that I spent in Soviet Russia I had almost instinctively tried to pass through everything experienced by a considerable part of the citizens and above all by the Jewish refugees from Poland. I already had been in exile and in prisons, I had already been in hospitals and kolkhozes. Had worked at digging earth, at cotton plantations. I had carried clay and bricks, worked as a bookkeeper, served as a nightwatchman, sawn wood in the forests, worked as a sailor on a freighter, starved, slept in the streets, had been tortured and beaten during interrogation. The only thing missing to round matters off was a concentration camp.<sup>144</sup>

Grossman was deported to a labour camp, but again fate intervened, in the form of Stalin's grander political ambitions. Two months after Germany's unconditional surrender in May 1945, the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union declared a new amnesty for all Polish citizens, including the right to be repatriated to the 'new' Poland. This even included persons sentenced to not more than three years imprisonment, so on 4 August 1945 Grossman was once again a free man.<sup>145</sup>

### **Repatriation and Dispersion (1945–)**

For the Polish Jews who had remained under Soviet control for the best part of six years, the belief that they would one day be free to leave the Soviet Union had seemingly ebbed and flowed with the political tides. By late 1939, if they were permanent residents of Eastern Poland, they were Soviet citizens by decree; and in 1940, if they were 'refugees' from German-occupied Poland, they either became 'voluntary' Soviet citizens or were deported to labour camps for refusing this honour. By the summer of 1941, they were all theoretically Polish citizens again; and by 1943, when relations between the Soviets and the Polish Government-in-Exile fractured, they were again Soviet citizens. As they were by now dispersed throughout the USSR and subject to various civilian and military authorities, who



often interpreted these sudden 'policy' shifts in unpredictable and idiosyncratic ways, it is not surprising that in the last few years of the war many Jews were perpetually confused and anxious about their precise status and fearful about exactly what might happen to them after Germany was defeated.

By late 1944, with the territory of Poland retaken by the Red Army, supported by the Soviet-sponsored 'Polish Army in the USSR', the Polish Committee of National Liberation that Stalin had earlier sanctioned was installed in the temporary 'capital' of Lublin as the new government of communist Poland. For a range of strategic and political reasons, the Soviets considered it important to solicit the support of the more than a million Poles (including Polish Jews) who had survived the war inside the USSR.<sup>146</sup> After the end of hostilities, this approach was reaffirmed in the form of the announcement on 6 July 1945 declaring 'the right of persons, Polish or Jewish by nationality, living in the USSR, to change their Soviet citizenship and be evacuated to Poland.'<sup>147</sup> In a recent article, Albert Kaganovitch suggests a few of the strategic rationales that probably influenced Stalin in taking this fateful decision:

In addition to relieving the USSR of a potentially unreliable group and increasing the population of its future satellite state, another consideration in permitting a large-scale emigration may have been Stalin's desire to gain sympathy in the West during negotiations over Poland's future borders, and thus to neutralise one basis for the hostility promoted by the London-based Polish Government-in-exile.<sup>148</sup>

Not surprisingly, when the news of this latest 'amnesty' spread through the Polish exile population, there was a rush to register for repatriation. While some of the Polish Jews were suspicious that it might be another ruse by the Soviets and rather than be returned to Poland they would end up back in a labour camp,<sup>149</sup> they very quickly overcame these initial apprehensions.

Their path towards repatriation was smoothed further by the general looseness of the registration process, with virtually any form of documentation accepted as sufficient proof of former Polish citizenship. Even where there was no documentation, as Leo Cooper observed, 'two witnesses who would confirm that they knew the person as a former Polish citizen' was sufficient.<sup>150</sup> The final decisions were left to local Soviet bureaucrats often joined by members of the ZPP.<sup>151</sup> Zyga Elton, who as a representative of the ZPP in Bucharra was placed in charge of organising the registration process there, notes that sometimes more creative assistance was necessary:

... we had to invent ways for those who had no documents, but who were genuine Poles, to get through the bureaucratic maze ... Any document with a slight indication of Polish locality was made valid. We even accepted medical prescriptions in the Polish language as valid documents ...<sup>152</sup>

The complex logistics for repatriation took considerable time to organise, as most of the Polish citizens, in particular the Jews, required transportation from thousands of kilometres away. Some who, when the war ended, were located in the western parts of the USSR including Eastern Poland, managed to return in 1945, but most of the others did not gain access to available transportation until the spring and summer of 1946. Before they departed, many of the refugees were less than subtly encouraged by their Soviet hosts to consider and appreciate, upon their return to Poland, the benefits and assistance they had received during their stay in the USSR. Zev Katz was awarded his degree from the University of Kazakhstan before he was scheduled to depart in the summer of 1946. He recalls that after the graduation ceremony he was invited to the Dean's office and told:

You have been one of our best students. We have given you education and made a major effort to see that you graduate ... You will shortly return to Poland. A Polish student who graduated from a Soviet university, who studied Marxism-Leninism is very important to us. I am sure that you will be able to make a meaningful contribution for the good of both our countries.<sup>153</sup>

Leo Cooper tells of a similar experience. Following the release of Poles being repatriated from working in a Soviet military labour battalion, at a celebration ostensibly to honour their imminent departure, local officials 'expressed the hope that we would remember with gratitude our stay in the Soviet Union and would continue to work for the cause of socialism in liberated Poland.'<sup>154</sup>

The Soviet authorities employed other strategies designed to gain sympathy of repatriates, for example providing comfortable travelling conditions on the trains that took the refugees back to Poland including ample provisions, available medical support and even free clothing and footwear.<sup>155</sup> Commenting on her train journey in April 1946, Anna Bruell confirms that they were repatriated without being required to pay a fare.<sup>156</sup>

In the end, while few of the Polish Jews were left with a particularly favourable view of Soviet communism as a political system, many did retain positive feelings about the people – Russians, Kazakhs, Uzbeks and others – who, in the main had treated them decently and with compassion, and a heartfelt appreciation for the relatively safe and peaceful refuge they had been fortunate enough to find inside the USSR. In her memoir, Toby Klodawska Flam recalls her rather effusive parting words on the train leaving the Soviet Union in March 1946: 'Goodbye, my friends! ... Goodbye, friendly country! ... I'll never forget you, goodbye!'<sup>157</sup> Leo Cooper is more measured, but also quite open about feeling some ambivalence when it was time for him to take his leave of the Soviet Union. He recalls being 'overcome by a strange feeling. It was a feeling of uncertainty about what lay ahead mixed with sadness of leaving behind the people amongst whom I lived for over seven

years of my prime youth, of leaving my Russian friends who treated me with so much kindness and understanding.'<sup>158</sup>

For two of the memoir writers, however, their last years in the USSR were anything but compassionate or benign. While, by the end of 1946, due to the unprecedented but politically calculated display of Soviet 'generosity', most of the other Polish Jews had already been repatriated, Arthur Spindler and Ruth Turkow Kaminska had instead been subjected to a rather unpleasant taste of the impenetrable, 'Kafkaesque' Soviet judicial process in action.

Spindler had moved into the Soviet-occupied part of Poland in 1939, but soon after returned to his family in German-occupied Poland. Working as an electrician in Tarnow he was employed by the German military, but when Jews began being rounded-up and a ghetto established, he obtained false 'Aryan' papers and moved to Warsaw. Now presenting himself as an ethnic Pole he again found work with a German company dealing in wheat. Some time later, he was contacted by Polish Partisans who persuaded him that, as a 'Polish patriot', he should assist their cause by diverting some of the company product for their benefit. The double irony here, as he notes, was: 'Me, a Jew being asked to join the Polish underground! It had been made all too clear that Jews were not welcome in the organisation.' Spindler was given a Polish code name and sworn in on the Holy Cross.<sup>159</sup> Events took an even stranger turn when in December 1944, the Soviets reoccupied the town and, as they considered the Polish partisan movement to be an ultra-nationalist and anti-Soviet organisation, Spindler was arrested. Despite his protestations that he was really a Jew hiding under false papers, he was transported to a 'gulag' inside the USSR and not released until late in 1947 when, as the beneficiary of another 'friendly' Soviet gesture towards the new communist Polish Government, he was finally allowed to return to Poland.

We last mentioned Ruth Turkow Kaminska in 1940, when she and her husband, Adi Rosner, were on a national tour with his jazz band. While many of the other Polish Jews were being deported to labour camps, they seem to have stumbled into an alternative universe, and were living the ostentatious and lavish lifestyle of the Soviet *Nomenklatura*, associating mostly with high officials, favoured artists, writers and other 'celebrities'. After successful, lengthy seasons playing the two major cities, their tour continued into the 'provinces' covering the Soviet Central Asian republics and the 'far east'. This also included a concert in the so-called 'Jewish Autonomous region' of Birobidzhan, the Soviet-created 'Jewish Homeland' referred to at the beginning of this article, where they found little evidence of 'Yiddish culture' and a noticeably impoverished living standard. At one point they were all flown to a Black Sea resort town and directed to perform a 'special concert' played to a completely empty theatre, except for one curtained box, which they later believed was probably occupied by Comrade Stalin himself. By 1944 they were being asked to provide entertainment relief for frontline troops

of the Red Army during its advance into Poland and, as a reward, gained possession of a 'war trophy' – a Ford automobile left behind by the retreating Germans.

Their musical careers and privileged lifestyle continued until the summer of 1946. They started to sense that the emerging Cold War rhetoric was casting their form of entertainment as at odds with the current ideological climate, so, having completed their contractual obligations, they requested permission to return to Poland along with the other repatriated refugees. They were scheduled to leave late in November, on one of the last repatriation trains from Lwow in the Ukraine, but on the evening before their departure they were paid a visit by NKVD officers who searched their apartment and arrested Adi. Within a short time, Ruth was also in prison. Both were sentenced to lengthy terms of imprisonment. Ruth served five years, the first part in prison, and later in exile in Kazakhstan. She was finally 'rehabilitated' after Stalin's death and only managed to return to her home in Warsaw in 1956.<sup>160</sup>

However, what awaited the Jews who returned to Poland from the USSR in the eighteen months following the end of the war was more horrific and shocking than anything that they could have ever imagined. Some news of the Nazi campaign to exterminate European Jewry had filtered through while they were in the Soviet Union, but now they came face to face with the unimaginable extent of the devastation and loss. What they quickly learned was that the majority, and in some cases all, of the members of the families, friends and entire communities they had left behind a few years before had all vanished, leaving barely a trace.

The sense of desolation was undoubtedly amplified by the widely noted hostility they faced from their fellow Poles upon their return. Zyga Elton experienced a taste of what was to come as soon as the train bringing him back crossed over the Polish border: 'Wherever we stopped on the Polish side, we attracted the local population who stared at us, taunting and jeering, exhorting us to go back from whence we came ... We realised that our troubles were not yet over.'<sup>161</sup> Leo Cooper points to a certain ironic symmetry in being warned by the Russian conductor on the train against returning to Poland, where Jews are already being killed by their fellow Poles, echoing the sentiments expressed in the story from 1939: 'Fools, where are you going?'<sup>162</sup>

Almost every one of the memoir writers makes a point of reporting the coldness and rejection they encountered from 'ethnic' Poles, often quoting almost identical phrases of hatred and contempt as the first words with which they were 'greeted': 'You are alive? I thought all the Jews were killed?';<sup>163</sup> 'So many of you still survived?';<sup>164</sup> 'Where are all these Jews coming from? We thought Hitler finished all of them. Pity he didn't.'<sup>165</sup> While having his hair cut following his return to Cracow in 1945, Larry Wenig overheard a fellow Pole exclaiming: 'We must forever be grateful to Hitler. He got rid of the Jews.'<sup>166</sup> Zyga Elton was saddened by the total lack of empathy towards the Jews who had survived: 'I could not understand the mentality of these people who had witnessed the destruction

of their neighbours without showing any compassion. They could not find in their heart a word of consolation for those who survived.'<sup>167</sup>

Using documentation now available, we still cannot be certain of the exact number of Jews who returned to Poland from the Soviet Union. In their recent article, Jockusch and Lewinsky estimate that 200,000 had been repatriated by late 1946.<sup>168</sup> Taking a longer time frame, as some Jews in the Soviet Union did not return to Poland until the later 1940s and even well into the 1950s, Dobroszycki has calculated that a total of 'about 240,000–250,000 returned arriving at different points in time.'<sup>169</sup> There was also a much smaller number of Polish Jews liberated in the territory of the former Polish state – Jockusch and Lewinsky give a figure of 50,000 – either from the concentration camps, in hiding or with partisan groups.

As the comments from the memoirs cited above suggest, in general the homecoming was not a sweet one and many who did return stayed in Poland for a very short time. The official Polish Government policy was to direct the returning Jews towards settling in the western areas of Poland, such as Lower Silesia and Pomerania, that had been 'cleared' of their former high concentrations of ethnic Germans.<sup>170</sup> David Kay describes arriving in the virtually empty Upper Silesian city of Szczecin only a few weeks after it was taken by Soviet troops. Still only a young boy, he and his family were 'dropped at the end of the street, told to choose whatever flat we wanted and to register with the police the next morning with details of the property we had appropriated.'<sup>171</sup> Fela Steinbock, Chaim Künstlich and Anna Bruell were also first resettled in Silesia. Anna Bruell writes of the savage Polish reaction as more of the returning refugees from Russia began arriving in Szczecin: 'After a few weeks the Poles started a real "pogrom", attacking the traders at the market, robbing them and beating some savagely to death.'<sup>172</sup>

Zev Katz found, to his dismay, that his family had been resettled in Lodz in a house that was previously part of the Jewish ghetto from which, only a few months previously when the Lodz ghetto had been 'liquidated', the former inhabitants had been expelled and transported to a Nazi death camp.<sup>173</sup> On coming 'home' to physically devastated Warsaw, Zyga Elton poignantly captures the feelings of total helplessness and despair that many who returned must have experienced:

As I was taking my first hesitating steps in the city of my childhood, now almost completely destroyed, I could hardly recognise the outlay of the streets ... An immense sadness descended upon me as I realised the enormity of the destruction and the tragic fate of my family. I could hardly see anything in front of me as my eyes filled with tears of helplessness ... There were only ruins where the apartment house stood when we said goodbye to my parents and sister, leaving them in their hour of need. It was then that I felt guilty and remorseful for leaving them on their own, powerless as they were to defend themselves. I wandered around aimlessly, trying to imagine what and how it all

happened. There was no one to whom I could turn for help.<sup>174</sup>

It is in no way surprising then that most who came back also very quickly came to the conclusion that there was no place for Jews in the new Poland. The rejection and verbal insults they encountered were accompanied by serious outbreaks of violence; an estimated 1500–2000 Jews were killed in such attacks between 1945–47. The most infamous, the Kielce Pogrom that took place in that city on 4 July 1946, finally convinced many Jews who were still in doubt to leave Poland as soon as they could.<sup>175</sup> The extent of the flight was dramatic: overall, around 275,000 Jews were living in Poland for some period of time between 1944 and the spring of 1947,<sup>176</sup> but the post-war Jewish population reached its peak of around 240,000 in the summer of 1946 following the mass repatriation from the USSR; in the nine month period between mid-1946 and March 1947, 140,000 Jews left Poland for good.<sup>177</sup>

A large number of these Polish Jews who were looking to leave quickly were assisted by a Zionist 'underground railway' known as the *Bricha*,<sup>178</sup> a network of more than 150 special emissaries sent from Palestine who helped them to make their way into Displaced Person camps in Germany, Austria and Italy.<sup>179</sup> From there they moved on to Palestine, or to other cities in western Europe, particularly Paris, and then some even further to other countries of immigration that began accepting European refugees in the late 1940s. Most settled in Palestine or the USA, but a smaller number, by the late 1940s and early 1950s, had managed to obtain the necessary documents providing them with permanent migration status for Australia, Canada or some of the countries of South America.

### A Different Silence

I now return to the observation in the introduction concerning the historical and cultural marginalisation of the events, contexts and stories I have been recounting above. Awareness of this process is not new and was already being publicly commented on very soon after the war ended. Writing about the Jews in European Displaced Person camps in 1947, journalist Mordkhe Libhaber observed that the survivors in these camps 'had not adequately addressed Soviet exile'. He saw this as a paradox, since he was aware that Polish Jews who had survived in the Soviet Union constituted the majority of the displaced Jews in Germany.<sup>180</sup> Yet, as recently as 2010, historian Atina Grossman makes an almost identical point, noting that the image of the 'Holocaust survivor', both through representations in popular cultural forms such as films, documentaries, novels, and museum exhibits, as well as in the academic and scholarly literature, 'does not in fact reflect the historical experience of most survivors. This does seem to me rather extraordinary.'<sup>181</sup>

What are the individual and collective processes that seem to have cumulatively ensured that the experiences of so many Polish Jews who survived in the Soviet Union continue to be relegated to, at best, a historical footnote in the

history of the Holocaust? The difficulties faced by many Jewish survivors over many decades in articulating their experiences, both to their children and to 'the world' in general, has been captured in the well documented explanatory concept of Holocaust 'silence' – the central theme in Ruth Wajnryb's book on intergenerational transmission of parental memories, emotions and experiences with which this article began. It seems to me that the events and stories that I have explored above are not widely known because they have often been buried underneath not one but three 'layers' of silence.

The first layer of silence is one that they share with all the other survivors – those who were in the Nazi camps, in hiding, in the forests – to which the major contributors are the feelings of grief, loss and guilt around those close to them who did not survive.<sup>182</sup> The experience of returning to Poland after their time in the Soviet Union to find their families and communities wiped out would have triggered a similar range of emotional and psychological responses as it did for all other survivors.

Also in this layer of 'shared silence', something common to all survivors who left Europe soon after the war and then immediately confronted issues associated with immigration and settlement in a new country – finding work, a place to live, learning a new language, bringing up young families – is that most 'simply did not have time ... to record – let alone publish – their experiences.'<sup>183</sup> Some preferred anyway to follow the advice given in 1946 by Larry Wenig's uncle when he came to meet his father on their arrival in the United States from a DP camp in Europe: 'You're in America now. Forget the past.'<sup>184</sup>

Another aspect of 'shared silence' is related to language. Most of the Polish survivors who came to the west were not fluent in English, and many who settled in Israel spoke Hebrew as a second language. For almost all, their first language was either Yiddish or in some cases Polish, which increased the difficulty of effectively 'communicating complex, nuanced "information"' even to their own children, much less to their new non-European friends and neighbours.<sup>185</sup> As I noted above, the few early published accounts of the Jewish experiences inside the Soviet Union were almost exclusively in Yiddish.

The second layer is 'politically motivated silence'. The Soviet Union, Stalin and the international communist movement all represented polarising global political symbols and Jews were just as divided about them as everyone else, perhaps even more so. As the Jewish refugees had been, for the period of the war, 'guests' of the Soviet Union, how were they to respond to the country and the political system that, for whatever reasons, saved them from likely extermination at the hands of the Nazis? A certain level of ambivalence was inevitable, as the journalist Mordkhe Libhaber already observed in 1947: 'A feeling of strong gratitude towards the Soviet Government, mixed with accusations against it, is part of the problem.'<sup>186</sup>

Many were fully aware that the intention behind the decision by the Soviet

authorities to deport them to labour camps was not to 'save' them, and that the reason they were still alive was the fortuitous combination of historical accident and good fortune. Their own limited agency in responding to their situation is captured in the realisation by Zyga Elton in his memoir: 'During the war years we were moved around under difficult circumstances, without exercising our own will. We lived from day to day, victims of war. We were not asked what we would like to do. We were always pushed by ensuing events.'<sup>187</sup>

The ambivalence many felt was complicated further by the intensification of Cold War rhetoric in the west. While they remained in Soviet-dominated Poland it was best not to criticise the USSR, and when many of them moved to the west it was generally wise not to praise it. It is then not surprising that, at least publicly, most preferred to say as little as possible. It was only with the collapse of communism in the USSR and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s that 'the need for justification, political positioning, and settling scores with the Soviet Union became obsolete.' It is probably not coincidental that almost all the autobiographical memoirs cited above written by Polish Jews who spent the war years in the Soviet Union were published after 1990. 'The motivation to write these memoirs generally was not political; rather, the authors sought to leave personal testimonies for the second and third generations.'<sup>188</sup>

The third layer of silence is the position of 'relative silence' both imposed upon and accepted by the Jews who returned from the Soviet Union in relation to other Holocaust survivors, that derives from what some observers have called 'the hierarchy of victimhood'. Many of the returnees were quickly made aware that, in the general context of what had happened to others, their 'suffering' had been relatively minor.<sup>189</sup> These sentiments are echoed in a number of the memoirs. Anna Bruell writes: 'Much later when we heard about the concentration camps and what happened to people there, we called ourselves lucky. Despite the hard conditions we still had a chance to survive – they had none.'<sup>190</sup> In the foreword to his autobiographical memoir, Felix Rosenbloom admits that he finally succumbed to the 'nagging' of his two sons who for years had wanted him to write down his 'life story': 'They did not agree with my approach, that I survived the war years in the comparative safety of the then Soviet Union, and that only people who were incarcerated in ghettos or concentration camps or had been in hiding from the Nazis, should leave eye-witness accounts of those terrible years.'<sup>191</sup>

Among Holocaust survivors there were socially sanctioned mechanisms soon in place that enabled them to very quickly bring their personal experiences and grieving to the attention of the broader general public and particularly to others within the local and global Jewish community. Already by the early 1950s, in Australia and elsewhere, there were ritualised communal forms of public commemoration of the Nazi horrors inflicted in the death camps and the ghettos. Certainly for almost all of the Polish Jews who survived in the Soviet Union, and also later for many of their children, there was an equally strong impetus to be



part of these, as many of them had lost most, and in some cases all, of the families who had remained in Nazi-controlled Poland. However, their own particular stories around their mode of 'escape' and 'survival' tended to remain a private and family affair. There was little impetus or desire from them to form organisations, to be with others who had similar experiences or, even though there were deaths of family and children while they were in the Soviet Union, to create any special public rituals of commemoration.

The diminished status assigned to the refugee experience in the USSR has, over many decades, permeated into many of the debates amongst Jews around Holocaust memory and appropriate commemoration. In most cases, those belonging to both groups have either colluded with or accepted the *de facto* 'hierarchy of suffering', already in place soon after the war, 'with concentration camp survival at the top and the Soviet experience at the bottom.'<sup>192</sup> Since then, we see in virtually every aspect of the memorialisation process, either the total exclusion of the Polish refugee experience from the status of 'survivorhood', as is often the case with museums and displays devoted to the Holocaust, or, at best, allowing some of the Poles who were in the Soviet Union to 'slip into' the 'survivor' category. This is what has occurred, for example, in accepting their oral testimonies as part of recently accumulated collections such as that undertaken by the worldwide Shoah Foundation project that houses more than 50,000 interviews, or among the more than 1300 that have been accumulated in the more locally oriented Phillip Maisel Testimonies Project at Melbourne's Jewish Holocaust Centre. However, despite this, it is significant that were they to be attributed, or feel themselves as 'deserving' of, 'full' survivor status, they should constitute the majority of the testimonies. But my initial examination of the online information on the interviews conducted in Australia shows that, in each of these collections, Polish Jews who had been in the Soviet Union represent fewer than 15 per cent of all the Poland-born interviewees.

Similarly, with the noticeable emergence of published autobiographical memoirs by Jews who had been in the USSR over the past twenty years. I have been able to locate fourteen of these for this article, and certainly more have been published, but again these figures must be considered in a broader context. As recently as 2004, the distinguished historian of the Holocaust, Yehuda Bauer, was careful to note in his foreword to Zev Katz's autobiography that, compared with the many hundreds by Holocaust survivors, 'not many Jews who fled or were deported to the Soviet Union wrote memoirs.'<sup>193</sup>

My purpose in this paper, then, has been to try to counter the pervasive influence of the combined weight of the three layers of silence I have identified, that have for a long time relegated the experience of this very large body of Jewish refugees to the periphery of historical awareness and, I would suggest, clouded our ability to fully grasp and comprehend their experiences. In including material from some of the now available first-person memoirs I am belatedly responding

to the plea from historian, Meir Korzen, who more than half a century ago wrote:

The life of horror, the dramatic struggle for survival and the premature, bitter end the Jews eventually suffered under the Nazi regime, has overshadowed the fate of the Jewish refugees in the Soviet Union which has consequently been relegated to secondary importance ... And yet, this episode is definitely worthy of the historian's attention, not only because it involves so many human beings, but also because its study reflects particular experiences that have an impact on the present generation and are likely to impress future generations, no less in their way, than do the experiences and consequences of the Nazi regime.<sup>194</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Ruth Wajnryb, *The Silence: How Tragedy Shapes Talk* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2001), p. 236.
- 2 *ibid.*, p. 40. This is the operational definition of 'Holocaust Survivor' she chose for the purposes of her research.
- 3 *ibid.*, pp. 212-13.
- 4 In their particular instance, they travelled by train from Lithuania all the way across the USSR from west to east as far as Vladivostok, then on to Japan and eventually to Shanghai. It is likely they were among the more than 2000 Polish and Lithuanian Jews who, together with a much larger group of around 17,000 mostly Austrian and German Jews, were able, between 1938 and 1941, to take advantage of the extremely loose entry requirements into the international settlements of Shanghai and, for the duration of the Second World War, found a relatively safe wartime refuge in this cosmopolitan 'Paris of the East'.
- 5 The recent revival of academic interest in the topic has yielded differing estimates of the total number who returned from the Soviet Union, as the proportion of all Polish Jews who survived the war. These range from around two thirds, see, Laura Jockusch and Tamar Lewinsky, 'Paradise Lost? Postwar Memory of Polish Jewish Survival in the Soviet Union', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, vol. 24, no. 3 (2010), p. 374; to a high of more than 80 per cent suggested by Atina Grossmann, "'Deported to Life": Reconstructing the Lost Story of Polish Jews in the Soviet Union During World War II', p. 2 of her personal notes for the paper she presented to the *Association of Jewish Studies Conference* (Boston, December 20, 2010), a copy of which she was kind enough to provide me. Most researchers agree that definitive figures are virtually impossible to ascertain, and tend to make do with rounded approximations, calculated using a range of available data sources of both the overall number of Polish Jews who survived the war and the number of these who returned to Poland from the Soviet Union.
- 6 This includes both the sections of Eastern Poland and Lithuania annexed by the Soviets after September 1939 and the 'greater' USSR itself.
- 7 Naomi Rosh White, *From Darkness to Light* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1988). The 1954 Australian Census recorded 6603 Poland-born Jews resident in Victoria.

compared with 2030 in NSW. See the figures in the table presented as Appendix IIIa in Charles Price, 'Jewish Settlers in Australia', *AJHS Journal*, vol. V (1964).

8 See the biographical notes on 'Kuba', in Naomi Rosh White, op. cit., pp. 44-5.

9 One of the earliest overviews, published in 1953, was that of Bernard Weinryb, 'Polish Jews Under Soviet Rule' in Peter Meyer et al (eds), *The Jews In The Soviet Satellites*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1953) pp. 329-69, in which he presents an extremely detailed historical chronology and politically well-informed outline of events. Another early contribution, an article by the historian Meir Korzen, was published in 1959: 'Problems arising out of Research into the History of Jewish Refugees in the USSR during the Second World War', *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 3 (1959), pp. 119-40. It is telling, given when it was written, that he begins by noting that the Nazi destruction of Jewish communities throughout Europe 'has almost completely diverted the attention of contemporary Jewish historiography from another dramatic and interesting episode in the history of the Jews in the Second World War – that of the Jewish refugees in the Soviet Union.' (p. 119). Following an extended discussion drawn from sources and material already available, Korzen concludes by urging interested researchers to initiate a new study of Polish Jews who had spent the war years in the USSR, even going so far as to provide them with an extremely comprehensive ten-page, thirteen section, sociological questionnaire they could apply to potential respondents, seeking more detailed information on a variety of locations and circumstances that confronted different groups among the refugees during their stay in the Soviet Union (pp. 131-40).

Interest in the subject by historians, political scientists and sociologists cooled over the next 20 years, but there was a revival that began in the late 1970s and has continued up to the present. Some examples of articles published between the late 1970s and early 1980s include two by Ben-Cion Pinchuk, whose attention is primarily concentrated on the period 1939-41 in Soviet-occupied Eastern Poland. The first is a more general paper: 'Jewish Refugees in Soviet Poland 1939-1941', *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 40, no. 2 (1978), pp. 141-58. Pinchuk's second paper: 'The Sovietization of the Jewish Community of Eastern Poland 1939-1941', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 56, no. 3 (1978), pp. 387-410, looks at the attempts by the Soviet authorities in Eastern Poland to politically 're-educate' the Jewish refugees. Another paper published during this period take a closer look at a very early document that illuminates aspects of the underlying political tensions between, and very different interests of, the Soviets and the Polish-Government-in-Exile in relation to the situation of Polish Jewish refugees in Eastern Poland: David Engel, 'An Early Account of Polish Jewry under Nazi and Soviet Occupation Presented to the Polish Government-In-Exile, February 1940', *Jewish Social Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1, (1983), pp. 1-16.

Academic interest in recent decades has been spurred considerably by the fall of the Soviet Union and the other Eastern European communist regimes in the early 1990s, which has opened up an enormous volume of new data and archival material to researchers. Some more recent contributions that have proved useful for my own study include: Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Survivors of the Holocaust in Poland: A Portrait Based on Jewish Community Records 1944-1947* (Armonk, NY, M. E. Sharpe, 1994) which is primarily a presentation of detailed data on Jewish survivors, in particular

children, but also includes a lengthy introductory overview essay; another detailed exposition of both the broader context and the sequence of events surrounding the Polish Jewish refugees survival inside the USSR can be found in Yosef Litvak, 'Jewish Refugees from Poland in the USSR, 1939-1946' in Zvi Gitelman (ed) *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 123-50; Jockusch and Lewinsky, op. cit., pp. 373-99, is the most extensive and comprehensive among recent contributions, and also seeks to identify and explore some the reasons why, given the obviously expanding interest in Holocaust stories both in academic and broader public circles, this one has remained so 'under-explored': Albert Kaganovitch, 'Stalin's Great Power Politics, the Return of Jewish Refugees to Poland, and Continued Migration to Palestine, 1944-1946', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* vol. 26, no. 1 (Spring 2012), pp. 59-94, provides a useful political analysis of the labyrinthine cross-cutting motives and interests of the major international players in the ultimate decision by the Soviets to allow the Polish Jews to leave the USSR after the end of the war.

- 10 Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (eds), *Jews in Eastern Poland and the USSR, 1939-1946* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991) is an edited volume that includes papers presented at an academic conference held in Jerusalem in 1988, as well as a number of contributions commissioned later by the editors. It consists of fourteen chapters, each by different authors, and presents essays on an impressive range of specialist topics under the broad umbrella of the title theme. The book also includes 150 pages of relevant primary documents.

- 11 One of the earliest of these was by Moshe Grossman, a well-known Yiddish writer of novels and short stories from Warsaw, who was already in this mid 30s when war broke out and he fled into Eastern Poland. His memoir of the years he spent under Soviet rule is titled, with obvious irony, *In The Enchanted Land: My Seven Years in Soviet Russia* (Tel Aviv: Rachel, 1960) and was originally published in Yiddish in 1949. Grossman later settled in Israel and the book was republished there in Hebrew in 1951.

Presented as a fictional story of a protagonist named 'Michael', Melbourne Yiddish writer, Moshe Ajzenbud's thinly veiled memoir of his years in the Soviet Union, *The Commissar Took Care*, (Brunswick, Vic: Globe Press, 1986) was another quite early personal account, first published in Yiddish in 1956.

- 12 Of the fourteen published autobiographical works I consulted for this article, the authors of nine of the books are Polish Jews who settled in Australia. These include three recent publications that emerged from the ongoing 'Write Your Own Story' program initiated in the 1990s by Melbourne's Makor Jewish Library to encourage and assist older members of the local community to document their lives in print. With the exception of the very early book by Moshe Ajzenbud, op. cit., all of the other eight Australian-published autobiographical memoirs have appeared since 1994: Leo Cooper, *Stakhanovites and Others: The Story of a Worker in the Soviet Union* (Melbourne: Hudson Publishing, 1994); Fela and Felix Rosenbloom, *Miracles Do Happen* (Melbourne: Scribe, 1994); Anna Bruell, *Autumn In Springtime: Memories of World War II* (Melbourne: Printed privately, 1995); Zyga Elton (Elbaum), *Destination Buchara* (Ripponlea, Vic: Dizal Nominees, 1996); Arthur Spindler, *Outwitting Hitler, Surviving Stalin* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press,

1997); David Kay, *Tough Kid: Surviving Siberia in Style* (Caulfield South, Vic: Makor Jewish Community Library, 2005); Fela Steinbock, *My Life: Surviving in Russia* (Caulfield South, Vic: Makor Jewish Community Library, 2007); Chaim Benjamin Künstlich, *L'Chaim: Surviving Soviet Labour Camps to Rebuild a Life in Postwar Poland*, (Caulfield South, Vic: Makor Jewish Community Library, 2009). Of the five non-Australian publications, two of the authors immigrated to the USA: Ruth Turkow Kaminska, *Mink Coats and Barbed Wire* (London: Collins and Harvill Press, 1979); and, Larry Wenig, *From Nazi Inferno To Soviet Hell* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2000). Two others settled in Israel in the late 1940s: Moshe Grossman, op. cit.; and, Zev Katz, *From The Gestapo To The Gulags: One Jewish Life* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2004). And one memoir writer settled in Canada after the war: Toby Klodawska Flam, *Toby: Her Journey from Lodz to Samarkand (and Beyond)* (Toronto: Childe Thursday, 1989).

13 Poland's new borders and integrity as an independent nation-state were re-established immediately following the First World War. For more than a century before this all of the territory of Poland had been conquered and then divided, with sections subsumed under the authority of Imperial Russia in the east, the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the south and the Prussian, later German, State in the west.

14 Litvak, op. cit., pp. 122-24.

15 Zyga Elton, op. cit., p. 104.

16 While Elton was in Warsaw, Felix Rosenbloom was in Lodz and reports an almost identical experience there, only some days earlier: On Tuesday, September 5, 1939, radio announced a 'strategic retreat' of military units from Lodz and 'urged all able-bodied males, between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, to leave the city during the night and to head towards Warsaw, to help defend the capital of Poland.' Felix also heeded the call but observing the general atmosphere of disorganisation and panic with 'tens of thousands' on the roads, he soon returned home. Fela and Felix Rosenbloom, op. cit., pp. 61-2.

17 Zyga Elton, op. cit., pp. 104-17.

18 Bernard Weinryb, op. cit., p. 330.

19 Fela and Felix Rosenbloom, op. cit., pp. 67-72.

20 Toby Klodawska Flam, op. cit., p. 39.

21 ibid., p. 40.

22 ibid., p. 42. Perhaps the ease with which she was able to cross the border had something to do with when this took place. Pinchuk (1978), op. cit., notes that while the new borders between the USSR and Germany were drawn on 28 September 1939: 'During the month of October, the Soviet authorities did not object to the German practice of forcing entire Jewish communities to cross into Soviet Poland.' (p. 143). And: 'The Soviets were still ready to accept thousands of Jewish refugees, either those who had been expelled or were fleeing on their own.' (p. 144).

23 Fela Steinbock, op. cit., p. 73.

24 Leo Cooper, op. cit., pp. 12-18.

25 Fela and Felix Rosenbloom, op. cit., p. 71.

26 Zev Katz, op. cit., p. xiv.

27 Anna Bruell, op. cit., pp. 19-27.

28 Arthur Spindler, op. cit., pp. 23-30.

- 29 Naomi Rosh White, op. cit. See particularly the biographical information provided by her interviewees: Frania (p. 18), Wladek (p. 32), Kuba (p. 44) and Henryk (p. 50).
- 30 Pinchuk (1978), op. cit., p. 145.
- 31 Moshe Ajzenbud, op. cit., p. 5.
- 32 Anna Bruell, op. cit., p. 27.
- 33 Weinryb, op. cit. p. 333.
- 34 Notwithstanding the fact that the Polish Communist Party had been virtually destroyed in the late 1930s ostensibly because Stalin suspected it was controlled by 'Trotskyists'.
- 35 This is discussed in considerable detail in: Elazar Barkan, Elizabeth A. Cole, and Kai Struve, 'Introduction' in Elazar Barkan, Elizabeth A. Cole, and Kai Struve (eds), *Shared History – Divided Memory: Jews and Others in Soviet-Occupied Poland, 1939–1941*, Leipziger Beiträge zur Jüdischen Geschichte und Kultur, no. 5. (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2007), pp. 13-42.
- 36 David Kay, op. cit., p. 3.
- 37 ibid., pp. 19-20.
- 38 Zev Katz, op. cit., p. 32.
- 39 Pinchuk (1978), op. cit., p. 146.
- 40 ibid., pp. 149-50. He notes that, in particular: 'Teachers, engineers, technicians, accountants and physicians were in great demand.'
- 41 Zev Katz, op. cit. p. 45.
- 42 Leo Cooper, op. cit. pp. 21-9.
- 43 Zyga Elton, op. cit. pp. 162-3.
- 44 Toby Kłodawska Flam, op. cit., pp. 43-6.
- 45 Leo Cooper, op. cit., p. 40.
- 46 Moshe Ajzenbud, op. cit., p. 39.
- 47 Larry Wenig, op. cit. p. 96. Both Ajzenbud and Wenig's personal accounts find support in the academic overviews by Litvak, op. cit. pp.127-28; and by Pinchuk (1978), op. cit., p. 20, who notes that among the Jewish refugees who registered for work in the USSR: 'quite a few among them came back. What might have been considered by the Soviet authorities to be a generous offer of conditions equal to their own citizens was believed by the refugees to be hard labor that they were not accustomed to performing.'
- 48 Ruth Turkow Kaminska, op. cit.
- 49 ibid., pp. 9-39.
- 50 Korzen, op. cit., p. 123.
- 51 Litvak, op. cit. p. 128. The Soviets seriously suspected that some of the Jewish refugees who had fled into their territories could have been planted to undertake espionage on behalf of Nazi Germany or other Western countries, ibid., p. 126.
- 52 Toby Kłodawska Flam, op. cit., p. 40.
- 53 Chaim Künstlich, op. cit., p. 60.
- 54 Leo Cooper, op. cit, p. 30.
- 55 Pinchuk, (1978), op. cit., p. 152.
- 56 Leo Cooper, op. cit., p. 31. Pinchuk also mentions this same incident, which he reports is an 'authentic story'; see Pinchuk (1978), op. cit., p. 153.

- 57 Pinchuk (1978), op. cit., pp. 150-51. Litvak, op. cit. p. 129 writes: 'More than half the refugees from the German-occupied zone were registered to return to their homes on the German side. Most of those registered to return were lone individuals, hoping that in this way they might be united with their family members.'
- 58 Pinchuk (1978) op. cit., p. 153.
- 59 Litvak, op. cit. pp. 129-30. Especially targeted among permanent residents of Eastern Poland included: 'leading members of Zionist organizations as well as other political parties, especially the "Bund," former representatives of the Polish Sejm and senate and local authorities, some wealthy people and rabbis, as well as people who were suspected informants and collaborators with the Polish police against the Communists.'
- 60 Fela Steinbock, op. cit., pp. 84-5.
- 61 Anna Bruell, op. cit., p. pp. 38-41.
- 62 Zev Katz, op. cit., p. 45.
- 63 *ibid.*, pp. 47-8.
- 64 Weinryb, op. cit., p. 349.
- 65 Stephen A. Barnes, 'All For The Front, All For Victory! The Mobilization of Forced Labour in the Soviet Union during World War Two', *International Labour and Working Class History*, No. 58 (2000), p. 241.
- 66 Litvak, op. cit., p. 131.
- 67 Larry Wenig, op. cit., pp. 113-31.
- 68 *ibid.*, p. 105.
- 69 While most of the refugees in Eastern Poland had been deported by the end of June 1940, further deportations continued, but on a smaller scale, until the outbreak of German-Soviet War almost a year later. See: Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky, 'Introduction', in Norman Davies and Antony Polonsky (eds), op. cit., pp. 28-9.
- 70 This figure is given by Edward D. Wynot Jr in his article 'World of Delusions and Disillusions: The National Minorities of Poland during World War II', *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, vol. 7, no. 2, (1979), p. 188. He estimates that 80 per cent of all Polish Jewish refugees were taken in these deportations, which seems far too high a proportion. Similar figures, drawn from documents compiled by the wartime Polish Government-in-Exile based in London are cited in Maciej Siekierski, 'The Jews in Soviet-Occupied Eastern Poland at the end of 1939: Numbers and Distribution', in Davies and Polonsky (eds), op. cit., p. 113.
- 71 This is the figure provided in the recent article by Kaganovitch, op. cit. p. 63, and seems more accurate as a considerable number of refugees were able to avoid being caught up in the deportation dragnet by having already left the major cities of Eastern Poland, many to take up work inside the USSR. However, to this must also be added the 100,000 Polish Jews who were deported as 'class enemies' from Eastern Poland very soon after the Soviets took control in 1939, see, Jockusch and Lewinsky, op. cit., p. 373.
- 72 Anna Bruell, op. cit., p. 43.
- 73 Cited in Naomi Rosh White, op. cit., pp. 44-5. About bedbugs Larry Wenig, op. cit., p. 134, similarly observes: 'The war on the bug problem was continuous, with

never a victory.'

- 74 This point is strongly argued by Eva Marks, originally from Austria, who is a young girl when the Nazis take control in 1938, and then moves with her family to Riga, Latvia. In 1940 the Soviets briefly take control of Latvia, but when the Germans invade in June 1941, she and her family are transported to Soviet labour camps, the first in Siberia and later another in Kazakhstan where they spend the next seven years. In her autobiographical memoir she argues that this situation can be psychologically more damaging than the one facing a 'normal' Soviet prisoner who knows precisely the length of their sentence: 'The fact that we had no ... definite sentence imposed on us, played continuously on our minds and caused incredible stress. In some ways, it was worse than physical deprivation.' Eva Marks, *A Patchwork Life* (Caulfield South, Vic: Makor Jewish Community Library, 2003), p. 60.
- 75 Words to this effect are recalled by both Anna Bruell, op. cit., p. 43 and, by Zev Katz, op. cit., p. 48.
- 76 Kaganovitch, op. cit., p. 63. Fela Steinbock, op. cit., pp. 87-8, recalls that: 'In Siberia there was a saying ... "If you won't get used to it, you'll die" and some who couldn't cope did.'
- 77 Anna Bruell, op. cit., p. 48.
- 78 Chaim Künstlich, op. cit., p. 63.
- 79 Anna Bruell, op. cit., p. 59.
- 80 Zev Katz, op. cit., pp. 66-7.
- 81 *ibid.*, pp. 55-64.
- 82 Larry Wenig, op. cit., p. 175.
- 83 Chaim Künstlich, op. cit., p. 64.
- 84 Larry Wenig, op. cit., p. 175.
- 85 Zev Katz, op. cit., pp. 71-6.
- 86 According to Weinryb, op. cit., p. 353: to these groups must also be added, between 120,000 and 180,000 local, meaning eastern Polish, Jews who fled into the Soviet Union ahead of the advancing German Army, thus swelling the number of Polish Jews in the USSR to at least 400,000.
- 87 Davies and Polonsky, 'Introduction', in Davies and Polonsky (eds) op. cit., p. 33.
- 88 Weinryb, op. cit., p. 355.
- 89 Zev Katz, op. cit., p. 79.
- 90 *ibid.*, pp. 81-3.
- 91 Larry Wenig, op. cit., p. 187.
- 92 Anna Bruell, op. cit., p. 70.
- 93 *ibid.*, pp. 71-83.
- 94 Fela Steinbock, op. cit., pp. 91-4; Chaim Künstlich, op. cit., pp. 70-1.
- 95 Moshe Ajzenbud, op. cit., p. 43-56.
- 96 Moshe Grossman, op. cit., p. 123. As Meir Korzen, op. cit., p. 129 points out, many of these ethnic Poles were 'former colonists, police constables, officials and well-to-do estate-holders' who had been forced off their property when the Soviet Army took over Eastern Poland in 1939. 'They had always been chauvinistic, and now their national pride had been hurt by the sudden and unexpected downfall of Poland, and embittered by personal misfortune they readily pointed to the Jewish scapegoat, claiming indignantly that "the Jews had welcomed the Red Army" etc.



Not even the bitter common fate that they shared with the Jewish refugees who, like them, had been made homeless and taken to remote forced labour camps and work villages, could abate their Jew-hatred.'

- 97 Moshe Grossman, op. cit., p. 173.
- 98 ibid., pp. 125-7.
- 99 ibid., pp. 127-8.
- 100 Yisrael Gutman, 'Jews in General Anders' Army in the Soviet Union', *Yad Vashem Studies*, 12 (1977), p. 236.
- 101 For an extended and comprehensive discussion providing detailed documentation of the internecine political maneuverings behind the severely restricted Jewish participation in General Anders' Polish Army, see: Yisrael Gutman, op. cit., pp. 231-333; and also, the much briefer summary by Ryszard Terlecki, 'The Jewish Issue in the Polish Army in the USSR and the Near East, 1941-1944', in Davies and Polonsky (eds), op. cit., pp. 161-71.
- 102 Zyga Elton, op. cit., p. 183.
- 103 Larry Wenig, op. cit., p.215; p. 258.
- 104 Moshe Grossman, op. cit., p. 210.
- 105 Leo Cooper, op. cit., pp. 84-7.
- 106 ibid., pp. 88-9.
- 107 See Gutman, op. cit., p. 285; and Terlecki, op. cit., pp. 166-8. One of the deserters when the Anders Army was stationed in Palestine was the future Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin. Some Jews did not desert and remained in the Polish Army that later fought with the Allies in Italy. After the war, as a reward for their service to the British cause, veterans of General Anders' Polish Corps were granted permission to settle in the UK rather than be repatriated to the 'new' and increasingly communist-oriented Poland. This was the path taken by *Kuba* (one of the interviewees in Naomi Rosh White's study) who then spent five years in the UK before immigrating to Australia. Naomi Rosh White, op. cit., pp. 45-6.
- 108 See, Rebecca Manley, *To The Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War*, (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), p. 50.
- 109 Zyga Elton, op. cit., pp. 188-9.
- 110 Moshe Ajzenbud, op. cit., p. 77.
- 111 Anna Bruell, op. cit., pp. 89-101.
- 112 Moshe Grossman, op. cit., pp. 139-42.
- 113 Anna Bruell, op. cit., p. 85.
- 114 Zyga Elton, op. cit., p. 211. Also, according to David Kay, op. cit., p. 35, because they were extremely 'nationalistic' Russians avoided plundering any goods directed towards the military.
- 115 David Kay, op. cit., pp. 28-31.
- 116 So, for example, Moshe Ajzenbud, introduces a lengthy, literary description of the town of Zirbulack in Uzbekistan with the observation that: 'he felt as though he had stepped back in time ... The streets were narrow and dusty between small scattered mud-house. The air was filled with unfamiliar sounds of camels and mules, used for transporting all kinds of goods. The small, state-owned shops that surrounded the market-place were uninteresting and sold poor-quality rugs and household goods, but there were also shabby, privately-owned stalls that sold *catie* – a kind

of yoghurt, tiny balls of butter and an abundance of delicious, exotic fruits which Michael had never seen before. There were honeydews and watermelon, cantaloupes, juicy grapes as long as your finger, figs, dates, pomegranates and many others. On the ground were bags of rice, nuts, and all kinds of vegetables which, having ripened in the hot sun of the region, tasted exceptionally sweet. In round, mud-ovens women baked *lepishkas*, the Uzbek bread, and sold it on the spot. In another part of the market *shashlik* was cooked and Michael was surprised to see Uzbeks sitting on the ground around a big dish of plow – the traditional meal of rice, mutton and vegetables cooked in oil – and eating with their fingers.’ And further: ‘In time he grew accustomed to the people and their ways, even to the women who walked through the streets with their faces hidden by *parangas*, black muslin veils. Young women wore long, colourful dresses and delicately embroidered *tubiteykas* on their thick black hair that was braided into one single, heavy plait or into many tiny ones’. Moshe Ajzenbud, op. cit., pp. 56-7.

117 Fela Steinbock, op. cit., p. 63.

118 Moshe Ajzenbud, op. cit., p. 57.

119 Anna Bruell, op. cit., pp. 88-9.

120 Chaim Künstlich, op. cit., p. 71.

121 Zyga Elton, op. cit., p. 193.

122 *ibid.*, p. 194.

123 Larry Wenig, op. cit., p. 246.

124 Moshe Grossman, op. cit., p. 187.

125 *ibid.*, pp. 202-03.

126 Anna Bruell, op. cit., pp. 90-1.

127 David Kay, op. cit., p. 35.

128 Zev Katz, op. cit., pp. 81-114.

129 Fela and Felix Rosenbloom, op. cit., p. 95.

130 Chaim Künstlich, op. cit., p. 10.

131 *ibid.*, pp. 70-1.

132 For a detailed discussion of this new Polish Army, see: Klemens Nussbaum, ‘Jews in the Kosciuszko Division and First Polish Army’, in Davies and Polonsky (eds), op. cit., pp. 183-213.

133 *ibid.*, pp. 194-208. Kaganovitch, op. cit., p. 62, contends that Stalin encouraged the enlistment of Polish Jews into the Soviet-controlled Polish Army ‘in part to boost the Soviet position in the imminent diplomatic struggle for Eastern Poland.’

134 Fela Steinbock, op. cit., p. 68.

135 Zev Katz, op. cit., p. 106.

136 Fela and Felix Rosenbloom, op. cit., p. 106.

137 Litvak, op. cit., p. 148.

138 This was a Polish committee sanctioned by Stalin in July 1944 that subsequently became the new government of Communist Poland; see, Kaganovitch, op. cit., p. 66.

139 Zyga Elton, op. cit., p. 238.

140 *ibid.*, p. 245.

141 Larry Wenig, op. cit., pp. 264-5.

142 Leo Cooper, op. cit., pp. 108-20.

- 143 Zyga Elton, *op. cit.*, p.230.
- 144 Moshe Grossman, *op. cit.*, p. 320.
- 145 *ibid.*, pp. 380-83.
- 146 For an extended discussion of the likely geo-political rationales that lay behind Stalin's decision to permit Polish Jews to leave the USSR, see, Kaganovitch, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-83.
- 147 Dobroszycki, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- 148 Kaganovitch, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
- 149 Anna Bruell, *op. cit.*, p. 122.
- 150 Leo Cooper, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-42.
- 151 Kaganovitch, *op. cit.*, p. 67.
- 152 Zyga Elton, *op. cit.*, p. 258. He also notes that there were 'some Polish citizens who refused repatriation and preferred to stay behind', either for family or ideological reasons. Many of those who remained in the USSR took advantage of a further opportunity to return to Poland provided in the late 1950s.
- 153 Zev Katz, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
- 154 Leo Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 146.
- 155 Kaganovitch, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
- 156 Anna Bruell, *op. cit.*, p. 123.
- 157 Toby Kłodawska Flam, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
- 158 Leo Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 150.
- 159 Arthur Spindler, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
- 160 Ruth Turkow Kaminska, *op. cit.*, pp. 39 ff. The marriage did not survive the prison terms, and after Ruth returned to Poland, Adi, who was released in 1954, remained in the Soviet Union as a musician, bandleader and occasional film actor, only returning to his native Germany in 1973. Ruth and her mother Ida eventually emigrated from Poland and settled in the United States.
- 161 Zyga Elton, *op. cit.*, p. 259.
- 162 Leo Cooper, *op. cit.*, p. 148.
- 163 Toby Kłodawska Flam, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-80.
- 164 Fela Steinbock, *op. cit.*, p. 104.
- 165 Anna Bruell, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-28.
- 166 Larry Wenig, *op. cit.*, p. 304.
- 167 Zyga Elton, *op. cit.*, pp. 262-63.
- 168 Jockusch and Lewinsky, *op. cit.* p. 374. The last figure is supported by Kaganovitch, *op. cit.*, p. 75, who carefully calculated that 'during the first two stages of the repatriation in 1944-6 slightly more than 202,000 Jewish former citizens of Poland officially left the USSR, including those who cleared border control with false documents, children from orphanages (who had been registered separately), and Polish Jews who had served in the Red Army. Thousands remained in the USSR, even after several later repatriations, but this remains a subject for future research.'
- 169 Dobroszycki, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- 170 Jockusch and Lewinsky, *op. cit.* p. 376.
- 171 David Kay, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
- 172 Fela Steinbock, *op. cit.*, p. 104; Chaim Benjamin Künstlich, *op. cit.*, p. 92; Anna Bruell, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

- 173 Zev Katz, op. cit., pp. 116-117.
- 174 Zyga Elton, op. cit., p. 261.
- 175 Joanna Michlic, 'The Holocaust and Its Aftermath as Perceived in Poland: Voices of Polish Intellectuals, 1945-1947', in David Bankier (ed) *The Jews Are Coming Back: The Return of the Jews to their Countries of Origin after World War II*. (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), p. 211.
- 176 Dobroszycki, op. cit., p. 25.
- 177 Dobroszycki, op. cit., p.10; pp. 26-27. 90,000 Jews remained in Poland in 1947, but most of these also eventually left during three subsequent emigration waves: one in 1949-51; the next in the mid 1950s; and the last in 1968-9.
- 178 On the organisation and work of the *Bricha* see, Zeev Tzahor, 'Holocaust Survivors as a Political Factor', *Middle-Eastern Studies*, vol. 24, no. 4 (1988), pp. 432-44.
- 179 Jockusch and Lewinsky, op. cit., p. 380, write that Jews repatriated from the USSR made up two-thirds of the entire Jewish DP population and 85 percent of the Polish Jews among the DPs.
- 180 *ibid.*
- 181 Atina Grossmann, op. cit., p. 2.
- 182 As Naomi Rosh White, op. cit., p. 217 observed in relation to the survivors she interviewed in her Melbourne study: 'The deepest feelings of grief and anger are triggered by the interviewees' recollections of abruptly severed family contacts, of partings which turned out to be final. The most painful recollections for the interviewees who had been separated from their families were not those dealing with the deprivations that they had experienced themselves, but those that had been experienced by their families.'
- 183 Jockusch and Lewinsky, op. cit. p. 377.
- 184 Larry Wenig, op. cit., p. 319.
- 185 Ruth Wajnryb, op. cit., p. 134.
- 186 Cited by Jockusch and Lewinsky, op. cit. p. 381.
- 187 Zyga Elton, op. cit., p. 230.
- 188 Jockusch and Lewinsky, op. cit. p. 392.
- 189 *ibid.*, pp. 377-86. The origins and early development of this 'hierarchy' which was already in place in the European DP camps is explored here in some detail.
- 190 Anna Bruell, op. cit., p. 90.
- 191 Fela and Felix Rosenbloom, op. cit., p. viii.
- 192 Jockusch and Lewinsky, op. cit., p. 384.
- 193 Zev Katz, op. cit., p. vii.
- 194 Korzen, op. cit., p. 119.

# **'THE GENERAL AWAKENING OF JEWISH CONSCIOUSNESS': THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE JEWISH STUDENTS' STUDY GROUP IN MELBOURNE**

*Daniel C. Tabor*

'You are not obliged to complete the task, but neither are you free to give it up'.

*Ethics of the Fathers*, Chap. 3, v. 20.

## **Introduction**

This article describes the origin and development of the Jewish Students' Study Group (JSSG) in Melbourne from 1941, when it was started by my late father, David Tabor (1913–2005). David was a research physicist who had completed his PhD at the University of Cambridge in 1938, and was invited in 1940 to join his former supervisor, Philip Bowden, in Melbourne, at a newly formed laboratory which had the unglamorous title of 'Lubricants and Bearings'. It was a division of the Australian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), and was housed in the newly completed Chemistry building at Melbourne University. The laboratory made a considerable scientific contribution to the Australian war effort, and at the same time enabled David and other scientists working there to initiate fundamental lines of research that were developed after the war.<sup>1</sup>

David Tabor was born in London in 1913, the sixth child of immigrants from Tzarist Russia. As well as pursuing an outstandingly successful career in Physics, he was a deeply devout Jew (self-defined at this stage as 'orthodox'), with an excellent knowledge of classical and modern Hebrew, as well as being a socialist and a committed Zionist. In London he was actively involved in the Young Zionist movement and Habonim, and the Inter-University Jewish Federation. At Cambridge he was for a time Secretary of the Cambridge University Jewish Society, when Aubrey ('Abba') Eban was its President, and one of his closest friends.

On arrival in Melbourne in early 1940, David decided not to involve himself with Jewish youth work, but to concentrate on his research. He was made welcome by Dr Jona, President of the Zionist Federation<sup>2</sup> (to whom he had an introduction from Zionist friends in London), and he made contact with some of the leaders of the Jewish community in Melbourne, such as Rabbi Freedman

(Rabbi of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation),<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Gurewicz (Rabbi of the Carlton United Hebrew Congregation), and the Reverend and Mrs Super, all of whom extended generous hospitality to David. The Supers in particular provided a Yiddish-speaking environment that was like a home-from-home. As Dr Tabor from Cambridge University, he had status, and this may have made his entrée into the Jewish community relatively easy.

David remembered the vibrant atmosphere in the Jewish community in Melbourne at this time:<sup>4</sup>

... Everything there was on the boil. We had in Melbourne at that time, a microcosm of Jewish life in Europe. There had been immigrants too, immigrants from Eastern Europe during the period in which such immigration had ceased in Britain, so we had Jews who came to Australia between say 1925 and 1938 who came from all parts of Russian and Polish and Lithuanian Jewry, as well as some Jews who had come from Palestine who had found conditions there too difficult. So the *Yiddisher gasse* ['Jewish street'] was really a hive of activity with every possible type of Jewish movement and activity represented by one or two or more keen apostles of that particular line.

For the first time I heard people lecturing on Shomer Ha-tzair [a left-wing Zionist movement from the Continent], on the Bund [Jewish socialist workers' party], on Jewish communism, on all sorts of movements which in England hardly existed at all or if they did they were only by report and not by the direct participation of people. Jewish life there was extremely active.<sup>5</sup>

However, I made a decision that during my first year in Melbourne I would not get involved with any sort of Jewish life. I had been so busy in Britain as a young Zionist in Jewish student work that I decided to have a break and for my first year all that I did was I would go to the synagogue and I would meet one or two people, but I would do nothing else, and I spent that year studying very remarkable book by a man called Joos called 'Theoretical Physics' which for me was an eye-opener ...

However, in his first year in Melbourne, David joined the Melbourne University Labour Club, as he found it was the only forum where young people were prepared to discuss pressing social and political issues. As an orthodox Jew, a socialist and a Zionist, assertive yet modest in manner, he must have cut a somewhat unusual figure.

### **Involvement with Jewish youth work**

The nature of the Zionist Youth Organisation in Melbourne led David to observe that this was 'where we were in England 10 years ago.'<sup>6</sup> In early July 1941 he

agreed to take over the running of the local Habonim group, and soon he was spending part of every weekend with his group, and at least one evening a week writing articles and liaising with Young Zionist organisations in Sydney. One of his first innovations was to run the group on the lines of English Habonim, and this soon became popular, as he remembered:

... The real point was that this pattern of activity was suited to Australian conditions ... Particularly in areas like Carlton, where the mixture of Hebrew songs and Jewish education and discipline appealed very much to parents and also to the youngsters themselves, the movement caught on. Very soon we were having groups in other parts of Melbourne. Some older people, used to youth movements in Poland, realised that this was a pattern much more appropriate to Australia than the type of youth movement they had been used to in Eastern Europe.<sup>7</sup>

The young people in Sydney also began to become active at that time. They were mainly teenagers and they started an organisation called Shomrim [Hebrew for 'Guardians'] and your mother [Hannalene Stillschweig] was a member of that body.<sup>8</sup> We co-operated and I think they then started to form Habonim groups in Sydney, too. Of course the war was in full flood. France had fallen and Japan was coming into the war so that interstate travel became very difficult ... The only thing that was permitted was the organisation of inter-state summer camps for recognised youth movements, and indeed we held a number of summer camps under canvas ...

David received most support in the early days from Dr Jona and Rabbi Freedman, who knew about the success of Habonim in England. He was appointed the first Chairman of the Youth Department of the Zionist Federation, and working with the support of Dr Shlomo Lowy, the emissary from Keren Ha-Yesod (Foundation Fund), who became one of David's close friends, he was able to promote dialogue between Sydney and Melbourne youth. David's involvement with the Australian Zionist organisations at State and national levels enabled him to develop Habonim, so that eventually it became a successful pan-Australian movement.

### **Jewish Students' Study Group (JSSG)**

David's initial impression of the Australian-born Jewish students at Melbourne University was rather negative, and in his diary he commented, 'I fear I have a sort of grievance against intelligent Jewish students with a good J.[ewish] background who take no interest in J.[ewish] affairs.'<sup>9</sup> Such students, in David's eyes, appeared to be more interested in 'socials' than developing their knowledge of Jewish culture and religion. However, a discussion with friends in March 1941

led to the suggestion that David should start some educational activities with Jewish students, and he agreed to start a study group.<sup>10</sup> Looking back 45 years later, he remembered that:

... Most of the members were European youngsters who could not serve in the Armed Forces but felt the need for some form of Jewish activity and they were probably evening students or part-time students at the university. We used to meet weekly or monthly (I can't remember) and have discussions on Jewish subjects and activities that were quite successful. We had some difficulty in attracting Australian students, [as] many of them didn't want to join, and what is more, opposed it.

I remember that when we used to hold our annual meeting, those Jewish students who had never attended any meeting would come along and vote down the proposal that we should join the Student Union at Melbourne University. I think that it was on the third occasion that we finally decided to be truly democratic in a practical sort of way, and we circulated only our own members about our annual meeting, and then there was unanimous agreement that we should become affiliated to the Student Union. Since then Jewish student movements in Australia have multiplied and I suppose every major university has got some Jewish student group.

Indeed, when we were in Canberra a couple of years ago [early 1980s] there was an all-Australian conference of Jewish students which Hanna and I attended and the opening given by Sir Zalman [sic] Cowen, the Governor-General of Australia, who had been a member of the Melbourne Jewish student movement before disappearing into the navy ...<sup>11</sup>

Jewish Study Groups started in England in 1942, on the initiative of the Reverend Joseph Halpern, who wanted to provide some form of Jewish education for children evacuated during the Blitz, so it appears that the Jewish Students' Study Group (JSSG) in Melbourne was the first of its kind in the English-speaking world.<sup>12</sup> David's diaries for 1941–2 contain a number of entries about the study group. For example, in May he attended a meeting at Joffé's (room) to discuss the formation of the Jewish Students' Study Group. David gives a brief pen-portrait of each of the eleven students present, often using no more than a phrase to sum up their qualities (e.g. 'sensible', 'seemed a very sound fellow', 'nice but a little muddled', etc.). He concluded: 'Went off better than I thought – my first mtg. [meeting] of this type for 18 months – I tend to take my leadership too much for granted: after having had so much of students.'<sup>13</sup> This meeting most probably involved the planning of the initial sessions (which often included supper), because later on in the month, David gives an account of a meeting that was attended by



students. Though he does not specifically identify it as such, it was most probably the first meeting of the JSSG:

In evening got to [Bill] Lasica's. A full house of about 25 students. Rabbi Saenger [Sanger] spoke on 'Some Main Trends in Jewish History'. I thought him good, not original but clear along Dubnow's lines. The discussion wasn't bad. I was rather encouraged. Tony Rubenstein made a hash of a question on the Economic & Social Factors. I closed at the end, very nervously indeed. Solvey was good but 'standard' ... He is well read. A good supper. Back gratified at 12.<sup>14</sup>

In July David describes attending a talk to the group by Schnockis (?) on 'The Spanish Period':

About 25 present of whom 12 were the regulars. There were several new ones including Isaacs & Solomons from Queen's College (Malayan Sephardim). The talk was very good. Many facts & a reasonable attempt to present strong general lines. Discussion quite good. Arranged next papers. Supper ...<sup>15</sup>

In August, Joseph Solvey gave another talk to the study group, and by this stage David was very busy with scientific work, involvement with Zionist Youth work and running the local Habonim group(s). The pace of his working life is implied by the terse nature of his diary entry for this meeting:

In evening missed Dr Heymann's talk on Surface Chemistry to go to Solvey's talk on Jewish position in Europe before present War. Only about 15 students present. Talk good but too long on first part, and so had to have last part in brief outline ...<sup>16</sup>

The meeting in September was also addressed by Solvey, and held at Rabbi Gurewicz's house:

After dinner to Gurewitz. Solvey spoke on Christianity in 1<sup>st</sup> century B.C. & A.D. Not bad. He doesn't give his own ideas sufficiently. He certainly has a remarkable background. Poor discussion – too much on details – and in my conclusion I tried to be general, as usual. Lively tea and off at 11:30.

In spite of his critical comments about the talk, the friendship with Joseph Solvey developed, and there are many positive references to him in David's diary. In October, he records that he started to prepare for a talk on the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment), which involved reading works by several Jewish historians, but in the event he only had a couple of hours to write the paper, just before the meeting. His account of it is very brief: 'Off to meeting at Claire Feiglin's. About 15 present. Not bad reception. Little discussion. At supper spoke to Claire about Hebrew – not too definite.'<sup>17</sup>

The Feiglins were a large orthodox family who had come from Palestine, and

would have spoken Hebrew. The importance of learning Hebrew, in the context of the Zionist movement, and the need to start a Jewish school in Melbourne which would teach Hebrew, was much discussed at the time, and David was involved in these discussions.

In November the study group heard a talk from Dr Shlomo Lowy, about the 'Nineteenth Century', which triggered off 'a fierce discussion on assimilation initiated by Tannenbaum ... Miss Lasica got quite worked up about our modern problems. A newcomer, Miss Rabkis, recently arrived from Kerch [in eastern Crimea] via Shanghai. Also Miss Roth who offered to help in camp with cooking – thank the Lord ...'<sup>18</sup>

JSSG camps did not start till 1948, two years after David had left Australia, and it could be that the reference to cooking refers to the Habonim camps that David organised. The last meeting of the year of the JSSG was held at Sol Encel's room in Queen's College, and the talk was given by Norman Landau on 'Assimilation':

His paper was well worked out. He dealt with the 3 main periods of Ass[imilation]: Alexandria. Spain & Germany. Concluded that it was no solution but that in different circumstances in the future it might solve say 2 out of the 5 factors involving Antisemitism. Discussion not bad. I was too tired. Walter Schnoek was very good. Good supper. In bed 12:30, dead tired.<sup>19</sup>

The first JSSG meeting described in 1942 took place in February:

Off to Shmeul [sic] [Rosenkrantz] in evening: met Lowy, had dinner there. Off to students' study group. Quite a big collection [?] & some new faces. Tony Rubenstein spoke on 'Socialism & the Jewish Problem'. Not as fuddled as I had feared: but rather trite – merely a comparison of position of J.[ews] in Capitalist countries & in Russia. Fairly fierce discussion, though not very helpful. I closed with, I think, a fairly satisfactory version of the whole position vis à vis Zionism.<sup>20</sup>

It should also be remembered that the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942 were dark days for the Allies, with German victories in Europe and the successful Japanese conquest of much of South-East Asia, in particular the fall of Singapore in February 1941. The invasion of Australia by Japan seemed a real possibility, and the entire Australian economy was put on a war footing. America had become involved in the defence of Australia on a massive scale from December 1941, in the face of Japanese military successes and the eclipse of British power in the Pacific.<sup>21</sup> It is remarkable that Jewish youth work, and regular meetings of the JSSG, continued under such adverse conditions.

The next meeting, in March 1942, was part of what for David had become a typically hectic routine: a long day in the lab, shopping errands at lunchtime, a stint at the Zionist Office after work to write some letters, 'and then to Joffé for Lowy's talk to our Student Group on [the] Jewish Labour Movement. It was

in parts good: but a bit long & assumed too much knowledge by our members. Home after 12.’<sup>22</sup>

The Study Group attracted students who may not have had much prior Jewish involvement, which was a tribute to the growing appeal of the group. Some sessions were inevitably more successful than others, as is indicated by David’s brief description of a meeting held at Morowitz’s apartment in April. About twenty students attended, and ‘... Paul spoke – not too well – he hadn’t thought his subject out sufficiently well. His wife later told me that this group was the first Jewish contact he has ever had. *Darf man gehen in Australia!!* [Yiddish: That’s why you go to Australia!]<sup>23</sup>

Political topics linked to Zionism tended to dominate the choice of subjects discussed at the Study Group. For example in May, at the next meeting, Marianne Roth spoke on ‘collective settlements’. David commented: ‘Not at all a bad effort. Plenty of discussion ... Quite a jolly affair.’<sup>24</sup> Local personalities or visitors were asked to contribute to the meetings, and in late May, Michael Traub, the professional fundraiser from the JNF, then visiting Melbourne, gave a talk for one and a half hours on ‘National and Private Capital’. David’s only comment was ‘I enjoyed it and learned a lot,’<sup>25</sup> though it would have been interesting to know more about the students’ responses and the type of discussion that took place.

There was a June meeting at Morowitz’s which was:

Fully crowded out. Traub on ‘Jews & Arabs’ in Palestine was well behaved & in a good mood. He was very good but dealt too much with the economics of Arab leadership & ignored political & psychological aspects of the Problem. But I only thought of this afterwards, so we missed this discussion.<sup>26</sup>

At the end of July, Mrs Fitzpatrick,<sup>27</sup> a friend from his boarding house, Grey Court in Parkville, and a keen socialist, gave a talk to the Study Group on ‘[An] Historian looks at the Jewish Problem’. David’s account of the talk is interesting, as much for what it says about his own position, as it is a record of an idealistic Socialist viewpoint:

Fine analysis but abstract without any real reference to the Jewish problem in its real crude form. She really spoke about the problem of Judaism in the New Order. Her theme was really that the J[ewish] Problem [and] anti-semitism will only disappear in a Socialist Society. In such conditions Jews would be free to assimilate without the danger of recurring pogroms. If so – good. If not – what aspects of Judaism could a Jew retain without being anti-social towards the Socialist State[?]. Here followed a pleasant review of Judaism & its social ethics and she concluded by thinking that Shabbat & Kashrut ought to go. It was interesting and valid but almost irrelevant in these days. Her Jewish contacts are restricted to Australians and refs [refugees].

As if orthodoxy is a problem!! Often the most nationalistic Jews are the least orthodox. I spoke for too long in the discussion & felt a little ashamed of myself. Some other discussions. Attendance – God knows why – rather poor.<sup>28</sup>

How the students contributed to the discussion is not recorded in David's diary, though the tragic irony of Mrs Fitzpatrick's position was that by 1942 the wholesale destruction of Jewry in occupied Europe was well under way, and her arguments were totally irrelevant to the disaster facing those communities.

There is little indication in David's diary as to how the meetings of the JSSG were organised or planned until August 1942, when he records a late-night planning session at the Zionist Office, where he often went after work:

In evening off to Z.[ionist] Office. Looked through correspondence ... & then we had a meeting of Students' Group. Vivian Abrahams, Stella Encel, Esther Lipman and a friend, Sol Encel ... Bernie G[urewicz] ... Joseph Solvey talkative and pleasantly obstinate, & Walter Lipmann, fighting hard for the Youth Council. I was as usual rather unassertive. Adjourned to Wentworth & finally fixed on program [of] activities & reorganisation for next four months. Came back fairly full of beans and typed out minutes of the meeting. To bed 1 am.<sup>29</sup>

This suggests that David was now working with a group of students or graduates who wanted to be actively involved in planning the program of meetings. At another meeting at Morowitz's in September, Traub gave a talk which was attended by a mixture of students and academics. It is not clear from the diary whether this was a meeting of the JSSG or a meeting linked to the University Labour Club, though it shows that the relationship between Zionism and socialist ideas was a subject for discussion among politically engaged Jews and non-Jews, including (on this occasion):

... Prof. Crawford, [Norman] Harper,<sup>30</sup> Mrs Fitzpatrick, George Paul, & Geff Lieben who looked uncomfortable and out of place the whole evening. Also Miss Schneider & Vivienne Abrahams, Solvey, Sam Cohen, & of all people Mr & Mrs Morry Cowen. Traub spoke very well – gave an excellent review of the factors producing Labour Palestine & its achievements. Good discussion – Harper and Crawford obviously very impressed – Mrs F still a bit unsympathetic, I thought ... Traub replied very well – a pity Ralph Gibson & Jean Muir didn't (couldn't!) come.<sup>31</sup>

It is interesting to note that since the Soviet Union had been invaded by Nazi Germany in June 1941, the war had become, according to Soviet propaganda, a People's War which everyone should support. There was far more open debate between communists, socialists and Zionists in 1942 than had been possible in 1939–40 (when the Communist Party had been banned in Australia).

The next explicit reference to a meeting of the JSSG occurs on 22 October, when David gave a talk on 'H.G. Wells and the Jews':

I scribbled a few notes of the train – finished them at Lasica's & then plunged headlong into my talk ... It didn't go too badly. Discussion fairly widespread. Interesting comments (intelligent, fluent and well-spoken) by an American soldier Rob Levy and by Stella Encel, Esther Lipson, Cebon, Tannenbaum, Gertie but not by Rochelle ... Back to lab – a full three hours' work. Successful and interesting. To bed by 3.40.<sup>32</sup>

In one of his weekly letters home, written a few days later, he commented that although he had prepared his talk on the train, 'nobody there had read very much by Wells, so I that I was able to get away with it ...'<sup>33</sup> On 7 November there is reference to an evening social event with the students which consisted of supper, a sing song and gossip, and on 19 November he met with a group of the students (only Joseph Solvey and Vivienne Abrahams are mentioned by name) to discuss the future program; 'Went quite well. Adjourned to Wentworth. Then at last we discussed the Social ...' There are no further references to the JSSG for the remainder of 1942.

In late January 1943, David records the following JSSG meeting:

Rushed off to Cebon's place. Still terribly hot, small gathering. Joseph Solvey spoke excellently on Yiddish & Hebrew; short & convincing. A spirited defence of Y[iddish] by Mr Cebon senior, & by Tony R opposed equally by Gertrude ... Persuaded Helen L to come to Habonim on Saturday.<sup>34</sup>

David continued to spend several evenings a week at the Zionist Office, writing letters and organising youth work, after which he would often go to a meeting or some cultural event. In mid-February, after a day at the lab and a stint at the Zionist Office, he wrote:

... Rushed to J[ewish] S[tudents] S[tudy] G[rroup] meeting. Sol Encel on Jewish role in Holland & England. Not at all bad – quite interesting but not too sound and rather "journalistic" ... Fair discussion. Met Walter S again, looking a little fatter but the same kind gentle manner. Also Jim Levy (USA) ...<sup>35</sup>

This was the last meeting of the JSSG that David wrote about in his diary. 1943 was a momentous year for him, and for my mother, Hanna (Hannalene Stillschweig), as they had got engaged in January at an inter-state Zionist Youth Conference and were married in mid-March. David stopped keeping the diary in early March, a few days before he departed for Sydney to get married.<sup>36</sup>

The JSSG continued to flourish, with a lively program of meetings, but no detailed record of the activities of the Group has survived in David's papers during the period 1943–6.

## Meetings of the JSSG 1945–46

In papers left by the late Ephraim ('Effy') Ehrmann, there are several undated handwritten sheets briefly summarising meetings in 1945–6. Ehrmann, a refugee from Nazi Germany, arrived in Australia as a teenager in 1939 and had very successful career after the war as a dental surgeon.<sup>37</sup> He played a leading role in the Jewish Students' Study Group, Habonim, and other communal organisations.

The meetings in 1945 included a talk in June by Professor Goldman<sup>38</sup> (recently appointed to the first Chair of Semitic Studies at Melbourne University) on the topic: 'Is there a Jewish way of looking at things?', and a few weeks later he gave a lecture on Aramaic. A 'Symposium on the Jew' in the Board Room of the Toorak Synagogue focused on two books, which were reviewed by members of the group. There is a note to the effect that meetings were held fortnightly at this stage, and on 23 September, Dr David Tabor is recorded as giving a talk on 'The Prophets'.

The eclectic mix of topics is reflected in the list of activities in 1946. A symposium on 3 February dealt with the question 'How should Jewish Youth react to [the] problems confronting World Jewry?', involving Solvey, Rischin, Tennenbaum and Isaacs. Given the revelations of the full extent of the Holocaust in the immediate post-war era, the arrival of traumatised survivors and displaced persons in Australia, and increasing violence in Palestine, this was a timely topic. Other meetings were addressed by Rabbi Blumental and Dr Urman on traditional Judaism (17 February); Professor Hector Maclean gave a talk on 10 March on 'Judaism and Christianity', and Professor Goldman gave a talk on 7 April on 'Impressions of Palestine'. A social event and General Meeting took place in mid-April, and the group marked Anzac Day with a hike.

Early in 1946 my parents returned to post-war, austerity Britain, as David had been offered a post at Cambridge University by his supervisor and boss in Melbourne, Philip Bowden. It was the start of a very successful academic career. His contribution to Zionist youth work in Australia was much appreciated by his contemporaries, as the following tribute shows:

Tabor is described as being an individual of outstanding general education, knowledgeable, kind and modest, yet with a conviction which enabled him to facilitate great changes in the Zionist Youth Movement in Australia.<sup>39</sup>

## The summer camps

David kept in touch with his Jewish friends in Melbourne, maintaining a considerable correspondence over several years. Recently, two of David's letters to Ephraim Ehrmann from 1948 have been discovered, and they throw light on the continuing vitality of the Group and its activities, in particular the summer camps or conferences.<sup>40</sup> I have reproduced extended extracts of the letters here, because they also indicate David's motivation in setting up the JSSG, and his aspirations

for its members, who he hoped would become the new generation of leaders in the Jewish community.

Cambridge  
11 Jan. 1948

Dear Ephraim

I was delighted to receive your letters of 25<sup>th</sup> Dec a few days ago and to learn that you are still full of beans and active in the Students' Group. As you know, I always hoped that the Students' Group would produce future leaders of Jewish Youth work in Melbourne but apart from the solitary case of Ruth Harris who helped to found He-Atid [a form of Habonim for younger children] these hopes were never fulfilled. It is a rather depressing spectacle to find that Jewish students have so little sense of responsibility towards the community and so poor an understanding of the wonderful work they could do. Mostly, of course, they complain that they haven't enough time but in actual fact that is the one period in one's life when one can really find time for everything. (One clear example is the Hebrew Course at the University which you have taken although your dental course is a very heavy one.) I wonder how many of our Jewish Arts students have made any effort to attend. I don't know if Melbourne students realise how lucky they are to have this course at their doorstep and I envy them their opportunity (even if they don't make use of it). As a result of Prof. Goldman's chair it is possible to study Hebrew in Melbourne in a way that it is impossible to study it in Cambridge.

Anyhow, your current efforts to organise a Summer School seem to have attracted a good deal of support and I do hope that a new phase of activity for the J.S.S.G. will result. The program you have drawn up is frankly a very ambitious one but it is well-planned and of the speakers, I know, you seem to have chosen well. What with the Synopsis & glossary I am sure the course as such will be a great success quite apart from the swimming, tennis, cricket, etc. etc. and the natural attractions of Warrandyte. You might be interested to know that there has been a parallel development in Jewish Studies circles in England. Recently the I.U.J.F. [Inter-University Jewish Federation] has organised a number of study schools during the vacations on a variety of subjects. There was one in Cambridge over Christmas on medieval Jewry which 40 students attended in spite of the cold weather. I couldn't attend myself – being a working man – but the standard was I think very good and the interest pretty genuine. This stands in marked contrast to conditions 10 years ago when some of us raised the problem of Jewish education at the annual conference of I.U.J.F. and

had it ruled 'out of order' on the grounds that Jewish education had nothing to do with Jewish students at their annual conference.

Things have changed, and there is a much greater interest Jewish cultural and political affairs than there was before the war. Nevertheless, apart from term-time (which occupies only 28 weeks in the year) there is practically no Jewish activity in Cambridge and we are much more in *Golus* ['exile'] here than ever we were in Melbourne. Sometimes I pine for the boisterous meetings in Herzl Hall (do they yet use my brooms to keep the floors clean?!!) and the emotional atmosphere of a Kadimah function. Certainly I wish that for this midsummer week could be with you in Warrandyte enjoying the company, the sunny weather, the food, the swimming, the lectures and last but not least the discussions which always proved such a successful part of our Jewish student meetings.

With best wishes for a successful school, and kindest regards to you and all our mutual friends,

from Hannah & David Tabor

The letter conveys much of David's warmth, and his engagement with the Jewish students in Melbourne, and it shows how the JSSG continued to flourish with an ambitious program of lectures and discussions at the summer school. The leadership of the JSSG was provided by a mixture of young Jews who had come to Australia as refugees, as well as 'native-born' Australian Jews.

The first 'Summer Conference' ran on 14–21 January 1948, and was held at Koorngong, a co-educational school in the bush outside Warrandyte, then a beautiful country area eighteen miles from Melbourne. Both Ephraim Ehrmann and Bernard Rechter had attended a Melbourne University Labour Club conference there, and thought the location ideal for the JSSG Conference, with its large dining room and kitchen, an assembly room and numerous huts of various sizes nestling in the bush landscape.

The conference title was 'From the Expulsion from Spain to the rise of Hitlerism'. There were eleven sessions, starting with talk on the geographical distribution and external condition of the Jews at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and finishing with a session on 'Jews and Fascism'. The speakers included Rabbis Freedman, Asher and Stransky, and Professor Goldman, as well as younger members of the Study Group such as Joseph Solvey. The Chairman of the JSSG was Abner Shavitsky, the conference secretary was Richard Dreyfus, and the Treasurer was Ephraim Ehrmann. Those attending were provided with a reading list and glossary beforehand, as well as notes about each lecture.

In addition to the lectures, there were two discussion sessions. The first, on the Friday night, consisted of three groups discussing different aspects of 'The role of the Jewish Religion in the Jewish State'. On the Sunday discussion session,



there were six groups which discussed different aspects of 'The role of the Jewish Religion in the Diaspora'. Each discussion group was lead by a different member of the JSSG. The Conference also included socials and musical events and opportunities for swimming, tennis, etc. There was always the additional attraction that a young participant might meet his or her life-partner at the Conference.

The mix of activities was hugely successful, even though the accommodation was very simple; the food (kosher, dairy) was cooked by Mrs Ginsberg and helpers. The kitchen rosters were organised by Murray Crawcour and Manfred Anson, and vegetables and fruit were supplied by Sam Bloom's father from his shop, at wholesale prices.<sup>41</sup> Correspondence from Ephraim Ehrmann's files show that the organisers had approached the State of Victoria's Board of Jewish Deputies for funding, as well as asking private sponsors for help. In the event, the Conference was over-subscribed and though it received some funding, it paid its way. Sixty people attended, and five of these were from outside Victoria.

The Conference was well reported in the local Jewish press, and in the *Jewish Herald* (23 January 1948) there was a very positive account under the headline 'Students' Summer School, A Successful Experiment'. The range and standard of the lectures, the lively nature of the discussions, the lovely 'Shabbat Atmosphere' on Friday night, are all approvingly described. There was one dissenting voice, an anonymous correspondent, identified by the initials J. M., who complained in a letter to the paper that the lectures etc. were too 'popular' and 'controversial', and should instead be aimed at a small academic circle, since 'popularisation may reach wider audiences in a direct manner but can never make a real contribution to Jewish cultural life' (letter to the *Jewish Herald*, 27 February 1948). This claim was dismissed in a letter from Geoff Masel (12 March 1948), where he rejected the claim of 'cheap popularisation', emphasised the academic calibre of the lectures given at the Conference, and argued against an elitist view of Jewish culture: 'Unlike the cultures of most nations, Jewish cultural life has been an essential thread in the fabric of our existence.' This could be taken as a mission statement for the inclusive approach of the JSSG. Study Group conferences were being organised at this time in NSW at the Great Synagogue in Sydney, and maybe there was an implicit suggestion in J. M.'s letter that the Sydney conferences were somehow more 'academic'.<sup>42</sup>

In 2003, Ephraim Ehrmann wrote an account of the first camp, from which the following extract is taken:

... We decided to print a program as was distinct from all our other literature which had usually been roneoed, i.e. typed on an ordinary typewriter and then simply stencilled. This was before the days of electric typewriters and certainly before the days of computers. Richard [Dreyfus] arranged for his father, who ran the American Carpet Cleaning Company, to place an advertisement on the back page

and we printed a few hundred copies to be distributed by many of our members and friends. We were overwhelmed by the response, over one hundred people applied and when that number had been reached, we had to close applications.

Today, Warrandyte is a suburb of Melbourne. Fifty-five years ago it was in the bush. If you wanted to go to Warrandyte you caught a train to Ringwood and then a bus to the bridge in Warrandyte. From the bridge there was a bush track to Koornong. No[t] one of us had a car with one exception, and that was an old Dodge owned by Phil Symons. It was a pre-war car, two doors with a dicky seat. It had a 'crash' gear box and when changing gears you had to double de-clutch. Phil was very generous. He often drove us to Warrandyte ... To get to the campsite we hired a furniture van with a bench on either side and we climbed into the van. ... By today's standards the conditions and facilities were primitive. We certainly did not mind as we all had a most enjoyable time.

... We sat on benches at fairly rough tables in no particular order. Everybody had been asked to bring his own cutlery and crockery and people queued up, waiting for their food to be dished out of a large pot. Many of our guest speakers stayed for the meal, some even stayed over the weekend and most joined the queue, talking and joking with the students, obviously wanting to be part of the group...

... The bush setting was quite idyllic. Most of our lectures were held in the open in a natural amphitheatre, with most of the participants simply squatting on the ground, sitting on mats or on groundsheets. The lecturer and the chairman usually sat in front. For recreation, there were tennis courts, cricket pitches and above all the Yarra, which was amazingly clean and flowed very swiftly past the property...

... The official policy of the camps respected kashrut and all religious laws ... [On the first Shabbat, Rabbi Freedman was present and agreed to read from the Torah. Before Shabbat started, Ephraim announced that all participants should refrain from smoking, but if anyone felt they had to, they should go into the bush for a smoke.] ... I sat down feeling pleased with myself but then got into trouble with Rabbi Freedman who told me that I had no right to ... tell anybody to go into the bush to smoke. I felt suitably chastened.

Another participant at the first Study Camp at Koornong remembers a lunchtime 'broadcast' of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony from the flat roof of the refectory, using an amplifying system:

No-one of my age had ever heard the Choral Symphony, and nobody

known to me owned the large set of 12" vinyl recordings. In the years following the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, recordings of any kind were rare and expensive. Beethoven's 9<sup>th</sup> was known to be very long, requiring a set of eight or nine double-sided disks. Even if a set came up for sale, the cost would have been out of range for most people. In any case, most might well have preferred the earlier symphonies, which are shorter and were relatively familiar from concerts and broadcasts.

We lay or sat on the refectory roof in windless and glorious sunshine with light filtering through the leaves of near-by trees, the music dominating the senses. We were conscious that the 9<sup>th</sup> was held to be the highest achievement of European music in the classical tradition. I left the refectory misty-eyed. The experience had been seminal for me. ...<sup>43</sup>

The success of the Conference led the organisers to plan a second conference for 1948 on Yiddish literature for five nights over the Easter weekend 25–30 March. The conference title was 'Yiddish Literature as a Mirror of Jewish Life', and the cost was £2-5-0 in addition to the 5/- (shillings) booking fee. The organising secretary was Geulah Loven, though Ephraim Ehrmann was closely involved with the planning, and as at the previous conference, a reading list and background notes were issued in advance to participants. The venue was also at Koorong School, Warrandyte, and participants were asked to bring their own bedding, cutlery and crockery, and butter and tea coupons. All the lectures were in English, with the inaugural lecture being given at the Caulfield Jewish Centre by Reuben Havin. Seven lectures were given at Warrandyte on: Mendele Mocher Seforim and Sholem Aleichem (Chaim Gurt), the development of Yiddish (Marc Kronenberg and Leon Cebon), Yiddish writers such as Peretz (I. Giligich), Sholem Asch (H. Munz), I. J. Singer (Dr A. L. Patkin), and Yiddish Literature in Australia (Judah Waten). Herz Bergner, described in the program as the 'foremost Yiddish writer living in Australia', was present at the last lecture. There was also a Purim Celebration, an Oneg Shabbat, a Peretz evening (with English and Yiddish sessions), an evening of Jewish music and an 'acted playreading'. On the Sunday afternoon there was a two-hour question and answer session with Rev. B. Cherrick on the Hebrew University and the situation in Palestine. The mixture of lectures, group and social activities proved to be very popular, and over ninety people attended. The Conference was reported to be 'a success' in the local Jewish press, where it was described in some detail.<sup>44</sup>

Ephraim had written to David Tabor about the Easter conference, though David's reply is dated 1 June 1948. Only a few weeks before, the State of Israel had been established, the culmination of the dreams and aspirations of Zionists around the world. At the same time, the fledgling state had been attacked by Arab armies and was engaged in a desperate fight for survival, and though there are

a few references to the situation in Israel in David's letter, the main focus is the progress of Jewish youth work in Melbourne, in particular the development of the Jewish Students' Study Group.

Dear Effy

[David apologises for his lateness in replying] ... First of all, I was very pleased indeed to hear from you and I appreciate very much your happy thought of asking friends at the J. Summer School to add their regards. You might thank Claire Feiglin, Leah Indikt, Rochelle B. and Tamara [Lowy] for their greetings and good wishes. Your long letter written at the end of Feb was a very vivid and encouraging account of your J.S.S.G. activities. At the same time I received the full details of the program at the School and greatly admire the scope and depth of the course. The growth and development of the Study Group is a great tribute to the energy and 'staying-power' of old timers like yourself. Of course, I think that it is also due to the general awakening of Jewish consciousness that is going on all over the world. But without a few dauntless enthusiasts a great deal of this awakening would be frustrated and aimless. That's why I think that people who have this experience like yourself can do a great deal to set things going in the right direction before they make place for the younger hands!!! ...

I was also very glad indeed to read that you have, at last, got a Student Group started at the Shop. Good for you! My own view is the same as yours. That little is to be gained by affiliating to the S[student] Z[ionist] C[ouncil] and by calling yourselves officially Zionist. On the contrary you will lose a good deal. I have always felt that labels are the least important possession of a Youth Movement, particularly a student one, but then I have never been a good party-line man. (The position would be different if you became say a *Halutzic* movement – but there would still be [a] need for a general Jewish student body.) In any case, as the Jewish State becomes more firmly established and more accepted a part of world affairs, I imagine that these distinctions will gradually lose their meaning. Your main task is still, I am convinced, largely an educational one for J[ewish] students themselves and partly an educational and propaganda one for *goyim*. In this connection I should like to ask how Goldman's dept. in the University is progressing. How many of our people are taking Hebrew? How effective is Goldman himself and Bennie S. Gurewicz? I feel terribly envious of all those Jewish students who could use this opportunity if only they wanted to!!!

[David thanks Ephraim for returning a book to him.] ... I have also

received your magnificent synopsis of the Easter School on Yiddish literature. I do not share the recent enthusiasm of the 'Melbourne Jewish Herald' for Yiddish but it's a good subject to know something about. Incidentally is their attitude to Yiddish a result of their recent Yiddish weekly?

Finally, I should like to know how you are getting on at your studies and what you intend to do when you are qualified. I see that Sol Encel has got himself a job in Jerusalem: What is Pinchas doing these days, and how is Habonim progressing? I suppose Tamar [Lowy] must be very worried about current events [i.e. in Israel] but consoled by the thought that she will soon be going home again.

[David refers to mutual friends in London who he had been unable to visit recently.]

Hanna is very well and our son Daniel is a big, flourishing baby almost 10 months old. Time certainly marches on!!! Please write again when you can & I promise to reply with less delay. With kindest regards to your parents and your brother.

*Hazak, David*

What is interesting is David's insistence that while there was a real need for general Jewish education among students, the JSSG should avoid being tied to one specific political or ideological agenda. The reference to the 'shop' refers to the decision made earlier in the year to form study groups at Melbourne and Sydney Universities, but separate from the existing student Jewish Societies and Zionist organisations.<sup>45</sup> David's own motivation was to encourage in others a growing Jewish consciousness, and a greater sense of Jewish peoplehood. One could argue that this sounds a bit vague, but the intention was to appeal to as wide a range of young Jews as possible.

No further correspondence from David or his friends in the JSSG survives from this post-war period. The leadership of the Study Group was in the hands of a group of dedicated enthusiasts, and it continued to flourish, with regular meetings and a membership of approximately 60–80 (according to lists from this period).<sup>46</sup>

The third conference was also held at Warrandyte, 27 January–7 February 1949, on the theme of 'Religion in a Changing World: A Sociological survey of the Role of Religion in Jewish Life'. The conference secretary was Tessa Komesaroff, though the 'Organising secretary' was Ephraim Ehrmann. The cost was £4-10-0 for the full eleven days, and there was a varied menu of cultural and sporting 'extra-conference' activities, as before. There were 85 participants, including students from Perth, Adelaide and Sydney, as well as Melbourne.

The ten lectures followed a broadly historical perspective, starting with a lecture by Dr Weyman on 'Forerunners of early Jewish Religion', two lectures

by Rabbi Freedman on the development of Judaism from the Babylonian exile through to the Talmudic period ('The Sociology of the Talmud'), lectures on the Spanish period, the Jewish Enlightenment. 'Religion in the Jewish State' was the subject of two lectures, one by Rabbi Berkowits, an orthodox rabbi from the Great Synagogue in Sydney, from the traditional viewpoint, and a second lecture on the same topic by Dr Weyman, giving a 'non-religious' view. For Lecture 9, Rabbi Berkowits talked on 'The Role of Religion in the Modern Jewish Community' from a traditional point of view, while Lecture 10 was given by Judah Waten on the same topic, but from a secular perspective. This pairing of different viewpoints must have been very stimulating for the participants, and I cannot help reflecting sadly on those orthodox rabbis who refuse to participate at Limmud conferences in Britain today, in case they find themselves sharing a platform with a non-orthodox Jew. JSSG provided a forum where different views on what it means to be Jewish in the modern world could be discussed and argued over.

A letter from Rabbi Berkowits to Ephraim Ehrmann, dated 12 April 1949, says that he enjoyed participating in 'your camp' and that he would like to give the study group 'every support' in the future. He comments on how the subject of ethics and religion emerged strongly in the discussions, and adds that: 'it can be treated fruitfully only by the "Non-orthodox" of either the right or left. "Orthodoxy", whether Jewish-Religious or of the Marxian left or even nationalist-secular, is incapable of honest thinking.'

This is, perhaps, an unexpected view from an orthodox rabbi who went on to have a very distinguished career in America and Israel. The Conference was much praised in the local Jewish press. For example, the *Jewish Herald's* article focused on Rabbi Berkowits, with the headline 'Rabbi Berkovits [sic] on Today's Problems. Praise for Students' Conference'. The Rabbi's view (highlighted in bold) was that 'he had never witnessed anything to compare with the conference and that the Students' Group was deserving of every possible communal support. He could not praise the organisers too highly' (*Jewish Herald*, 11 February 1949, p.5). His two lectures were reprinted in the *Jewish Herald* in the following month.

Ephraim Ehrmann described the impact of Rabbi Berkowits' personality on the participants:

... Elieser Berkowits proved an immense success. He loved being among young people and mixed happily with everybody. Both he and his wife were happy to stand in a queue waiting for their food and after a lecture and at night he would often stay up until two in the morning arguing with people who disagreed with him. We had our normal Shabbat service in which he read the Torah quite beautifully, and when one of our members who was called up and wanted to *shnoder* [Yiddish: To pledge a donation] for the Communist Party he just smiled benignly ...<sup>47</sup>

It should be noted that the study camp idea had caught on in the wider Jewish community, and the Zionist Youth League organisation 'Hatikvah' (which Ephraim Ehrmann was also involved in) organised a weekend study camp at Warrandyte on 11–14 March 1949. The subject was 'The Social Significance of the Jewish State', and of the five lectures, at least two were given by members of the JSSG: Miriam Komesaroff and Joseph Solvey. There was considerable overlap between those involved in JSSG and local Zionist organisations. For example, Ephraim Ehrmann had also been a *madrich* in the Melbourne Habonim as a teenager in the early 1940s, when he first got to know David Tabor.

The JSSG became embroiled in a controversy over the relationship between Jewish communities and German culture when the group organised a 'Concert of Jewish Youth', in aid of the United Israel Appeal, on 5 June 1949, at the YMHA rooms. The fifteen items included two songs by Schubert, and at the concert one member of the audience objected loudly to the inclusion of the German songs in the program, and had to be asked to leave. There followed a furious correspondence in the local Jewish press about the rights and wrongs of performing German songs at a Jewish function, or indeed of having anything to do with German culture. The committee of the JSSG was moved to write an official reply, arguing that attempts to censor the Group's activities was in the spirit of fascism, and so represented 'a far greater danger to the Jewish people' than performing two songs by Schubert.<sup>48</sup> What this correspondence reveals is how traumatised refugees and survivors were by their recent experiences in Europe; the wounds were very raw. The issue is still a sensitive one in Israel, over whether orchestras should perform the music of Richard Wagner.

From 1948, if not earlier, regular meetings of the group were held on Sunday evenings at the 'Y' (YMHA) rooms at Elizabeth Street. A program of five talks from 1950, given between May and August (i.e. at approximately monthly intervals), conveys the flavour of the topics that were chosen. For this program, the talks were on the theme of 'The Hebrew Prophets', and the speakers were two members of the Study Group, Z. Aron ('Introductory Meeting') and Bernard Rechter ('The Social Policy of the Prophets'), followed by Rabbi Sanger ('The Prophets and the Jewish Religion'), the Rev. W. Bottomley ('The Influence of the Prophets on Christianity') and Professor Goldman ('The Prophets and Modern Criticism'). It sounds like a stimulating course of lectures. Some meetings were held in private homes, as Miriam Mantel (who graduated from Melbourne University in 1948) remembered:

In about 1950, Robert and I regularly hosted meetings at our home about every 3–4 weeks. Each member participating in the group presented a research paper on a topic of Jewish interest that had previously not been dealt with in depth. I remember, for example, that Robert presented a paper on the Falashas, about whom little was

known at that time. We tried through these educational & social means (because supper invariably followed the meetings & was sometimes accompanied by Jewish music) to encourage young Jewish people to become well-integrated into Jewish society. A special emphasis was placed upon the integration of post-Holocaust immigrants, most of whom were sole survivors of their families & who were usually very shy & lonely. I remember for example Shoshana, who later married Ray Loven, being an enthusiastic member of this group ...<sup>49</sup>

The Fifth Summer Conference of the JSSG was held on 2–12 February 1951 at St Marks Holiday Home, Mt Evelyn; the organising secretary was Miss Geulah Loven. In the program, the Holiday Home is described as providing ‘luxurious surroundings’ at Mt Evelyn, and the level of comfort was different from the first conference in 1948. Hot water, beds with sprung mattresses were provided, and all meals were (as at previous conferences) strictly kosher, though unlike previous conferences, they were described in the program as being cooked by ‘a leading London chef’. Student humour does not change greatly over the generations.

The cost of the Conference was £6-00, and its theme was ‘The Jewish Community. A historical survey of communal organisation over the last two thousand years – with particular emphasis on present day problems.’ The eleven sessions followed a broadly historical perspective from the earliest days, to the last two sessions which dealt with structures and educational problems of the Australian Jewish community. The need for more democratic and representative structures within the Jewish community, especially in Sydney and Melbourne, had been a concern in the community since the early years of the war,<sup>50</sup> so there is no doubt that those attending the conference would have had strong views on this topic, as well as the need to develop Jewish education in Australia. The names of the main speakers are not identified in the program, and this is the last Conference program in Ephraim Ehrmann’s files.

Susie Ehrmann remembers that attending her first Study Camp at Mt Evelyn was an ‘enormously exciting’ experience:

I had grown up in the Reform movement and gone to a Methodist school so the range of opinions and values was eye-opening. There were very religious people and ardent communists and yiddishists and Zionists and secular Jews all discussing and arguing and necking in the undergrowth ...<sup>51</sup>

In 1952, the Melbourne Youth Council purchased a campsite at Beaconsfield, and many of the JSSG members became involved with this project. Lionel Sharpe recalled his involvement in organising a camp there in 1953.<sup>52</sup>

Susie Ehrmann has written the following notes about the origin and development of the JSSG:

... It was not the University J[ewish] Society but a group of young



adults, many of them students (but many who were not). They believed that the local organisations for young people were too social – they saw a need for serious Jewish learning in a modern setting and with access to modern scholarship. Some of the members were post-war Jewish migrants who had missed out on education, but most were either 1920-30's migrants (Ephraim Ehrmann, Richard Dreyfus, Leon Cebon, Abner Shavitsky), or locally-born Jews who wanted to explore their heritage (Phil Symons, Geoff Masel, Ron Rosanove). Many future leaders of the J[ewish] community came from JSSG such as Arnold Bloch ... The residential camps were the most stimulating and exciting part of the movement. Each camp and each annual lecture programme, was carefully thought out to develop a topic/area in depth. The camp was kosher (dairy) and always included left-wing, right-wing, orthodox, liberal and atheist students – that was what made it so exciting! ... I was on the committee under Geulah Solomon (Loven) in the early fifties. Camps were later held at Beaconsfield. With the growth of Youth Movements, especially B'nai Akiva, people gradually separated into ideologically-shaped streams and the Study Group fizzled out.<sup>53</sup>

Less is known about how and why the JSSG changed in the late 1950s, and this may be a fruitful topic for further research. Tom Rado joined the group in 1958 and left in 1962, though just before he joined, it had dropped the word 'Student' and become the 'Jewish Study Group'. He held the position of President and Vice-President for a couple of years during his four-year period of membership, though the group folded up in 1962 or 1963. Rado, along with some of his contemporaries, founded the de-facto continuation of the group in the form of 'The Jewish Graduates' in 1962.<sup>54</sup>

### **The JSSG reunion in 1997<sup>55</sup>**

A reunion of the JSSG was held on 28 September 1997 at Beth Weizmann in South Caulfield (the Zionist headquarters in Melbourne), focusing on the years 1946–56. It was organised by Phil Symons, Ephraim Ehrmann and Bernard Rechter, and many of the stalwarts from this era attended, including Geulah Solomon (née Loven), Geoff Masel, Leon Cebon and Lionel Sharpe. Altogether 70–100 people attended; the proceeding were chaired by Phil Symons, and displays of photos, newspaper cuttings and old programs were prepared by Ephraim Ehrmann. Many of those present shared their memories of the summer camps and lectures, and Phil Symons spoke for many when he described JSSG as a 'unique, outstanding organisation.' Several speakers referred to the way the JSSG brought together young Jews from all walks of life, and from different political and religious

backgrounds, enabling them to discuss issues, and to learn more about their Jewish heritage. Geoff Masel said, 'I did learn a lot about people ... I remember a huge degree of tolerance ...' Geulah Solomon commented that though many young people came to the lectures in the 'Y' rooms in the hope of meeting other young men or women, 'we were determined to give them [Jewish] culture.' She remembered passionate debates about the role of religion in Israel, the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora, issues which are 'still current and relevant today'. She observed that the membership of the JSSG made a big impact on the wider Jewish community in Melbourne, and many speakers regretted that as the community had grown in size and confidence, it had become more divided, and such a forum for open discussion no longer existed.

## Conclusion

The JSSG was formed in 1941 amid the turbulent conditions of World War II. The Jewish community in Melbourne at that time contained a cross-section of refugees from occupied Europe, with their different ideologies and the full spectrum of Jewish observance. There were also the Australian-born Jews, some welcoming, but many suspicious and apprehensive about the impact that the refugees (often referred to derogatively as 'refos') would have on their standing in the wider society.<sup>56</sup> David Tabor recognised that there was a need for a broadly-based Jewish educational experience for many of the young people he encountered, and so the JSSG was born. It was his vision, and the enthusiasm of the young Jews who became the leaders of the JSSG, that enabled the Group to flourish and develop. Many of those involved in JSSG went on to become leaders in their chosen professional fields, and in the Jewish community in Melbourne. The JSSG was a precursor of the Jewish study groups that developed in the universities of English-speaking countries after the war, and eventually led to the formation of Limmud. The hallmarks of the JSSG meetings and camps were: the inclusive approach to discussion and debate, the attitude (in the best Jewish tradition) that no point of view was off-limits, and the willingness to engage with others on the basis of mutual respect. These qualities are particularly relevant in today's increasingly polarised Jewish world.

## Endnotes

- 1 For accounts of Bowden's and Tabor's careers in Physics, see D. Tabor, 'Frank Philip Bowden, 1903-1968', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society*, vol. 15 (November) (London: The Royal Society, 1969), pp.1-58; J. Field, 'David Tabor', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society*, vol. 54 (London: The Royal Society, 2008), pp. 425-59.
- 2 Dr Jona was President of both the State Zionist Council of Victoria and the Zionist Federation of Australia from 1939-41. See R. Benjamin, *A serious influx of Jews: a history of Jewish Welfare in Victoria* (St. Leonards NSW: Allen & Unwin 1998),

pp.58-9, and B. Hyams, *The History of the Australian Zionist Movement* (Victoria: Zionist Federation of Australia 1998), p. 48 and p. 62.

- 3 'Freedman, Harry Mordecai (1901-1982)' by Suzanne Rutland, in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/freedman-harry-mordecai-12510>, accessed 15 August 2012.
- 4 I interviewed David in 1983 and 1985; his account is based on these interviews.
- 5 For an account of growing up in the Jewish community of Carlton in the 1930s and 1940s, see Esther Refaeli, (Shapiro) (2007) 'My Jewish Carlton - Recollections' in *Jewish History Australia*, at [www.ajhs.info/jha](http://www.ajhs.info/jha), accessed 12 July 2012. For a refugee's experiences, see H. Liffmann, 'In search of my identity', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1985), pp. 10-28.
- 6 Diary, 23 June 1941.
- 7 For a summary of the changes that David Tabor introduced in the organisation of Habonim, particularly after October 1942, see B. Hyams, op. cit., p. 79; G.H. Gordon, *Guardians of Zion, The Shomrim in Australia 1939-1943* (Sydney: Mandelbaum Trust), p. 54; S. D. Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, (New York/London: Holmes & Meier 1997; second, revised edition), p. 320.
- 8 Hannalene Stillschweig (1923-2010) came to Australia with her family in early 1939, after a near-miraculous escape from Berlin in the immediate aftermath of *Kristallnacht*. For references to Hannalene Stillschweig's role in the formation of *Shomrim*, see Gordon, op. cit., p. 57, p. 97, p. 133, and pp. 158-9.
- 9 Diary, 10 June 1940.
- 10 Diary, 2 March 1942.
- 11 Sir Zelman Cowan (1919-2011), Governor-General of Australia 1977-82. A representative obituary is at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jan/02/sir-zelman-cowan>, accessed 26 July 2012.
- 12 See 'Friends, Britons, Study Groupers ...' in *The Jerusalem Post*, 28 April 1992, p. 7. The article reports the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion at Bar-Ilan University of the Jewish Youth Study Groups in Britain.
- 13 Diary, 8 May 1941.
- 14 Diary, 29 May 1941.
- 15 Diary, 3 July 1941.
- 16 Diary, 6 August 1941.
- 17 Diary, 26 October, 1941.
- 18 Diary, 27 November 1941.
- 19 Diary 17 December 1941.
- 20 Diary, 12 February 1942.
- 21 J. Beaumont, 'Australia's War: Asia and the Pacific', in J. Beaumont (ed.), *Australia's War, 1939-45* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin), pp. 26-53.
- 22 Diary 19 March 1942.
- 23 Diary, 19 April 1942.
- 24 Diary, 7 May 1942.
- 25 Diary, 27 May 1942.
- 26 Diary, 25 June 1942.
- 27 'Fitzpatrick, Kathleen Elizabeth 1905-1990' by Alison Patrick in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/fitzpatrick-kathleen>

- elizabeth-12500, accessed 15 August 2012. Mrs Fitzpatrick became an Associate Professor in History at Melbourne University after the war, and Susie Ehrmann remembers her as a 'marvellous lecturer' (Email to Daniel Tabor, 28 July 2012).
- 28 Diary, 30 July 1942.
- 29 Diary, 27 August 1942.
- 30 Professor Crawford was the Head of the History Department at Melbourne University; Norman Harper was a Senior Lecturer, and along with Mrs Fitzpatrick, they were regarded as 'leading intellectuals in the general community' (Susie Ehrmann, email to Daniel Tabor, 28 July 2012).
- 31 Diary, 17 September 1942. Ralph Gibson and Jean Muir were friends of David Tabor's from the Melbourne University Labour Club, with very left-wing views.
- 32 Diary, 22 October 1942.
- 33 Letter, 27 October 1942.
- 34 28 January 1943.
- 35 Diary, 18 February 1943.
- 36 The 'Great Wedding' of David Tabor and Hannalene Stillschweig on 13 March 1943 paved the way for the union of Habonim and Shomrim, and led to the development of a national Habonim movement in Australia in 1944. See Hyams, *op. cit.*, p. 98, p. 106.
- 37 Ernst ('Effy') Ehrmann OAM (1924–2011). For an appreciation of Ehrmann's professional achievements, see: *College News* (Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons), vol 9, issue 3, 2011, pp. 24–5.
- 38 'Goldman, Maurice David (1898–1957)' by Nina Christesen, in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/goldman-maurice-david-10319>, accessed on 15 August 2012.
- 39 Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 59.
- 40 I am most grateful to Ephraim Ehrmann's widow, Susie Ehrmann, for sending me these letters, and for providing detailed comments on a previous draft of this article.
- 41 The information in this sentence is taken from a letter from Ephraim Ehrmann to Sam Bloom, dated 20 January 2003.
- 42 The Study Groups in Sydney are not dealt with in this article, and could be the subject of further research.
- 43 Extract from typed account by Peter Glow, dated 3 June 2003, in Ehrmann's JSSG files.
- 44 See in particular 'The Jewish Students' Study Group Easter Conference' by Ben Zion Marks in the *Australian Jewish News*, 2 April 1948.
- 45 See 'Report of the Commission on Student Zionist Activities, January 1948' (typed report), where this decision is recorded.
- 46 This includes one list on JSSG notepaper, found by a Jewish bookseller in late 2011/early 2012 at the back of a second-hand book and given to Lionel Sharpe. It contains about 60 names. Lists in Ephraim Ehrmann's files from this period contain about 80 names, though not all would have attended meetings regularly.
- 47 Extract from typed manuscript by Ephraim Ehrmann, dated 2003.
- 48 'Study Group's Official Reply', in *Australian Jewish News*, 17 June 1949.
- 49 Extract from letter by Miriam Mantel to Ephraim Ehrmann. 14 February 2003.

- 50 The pressure for more democratic and accountable structures in the Zionist and Jewish communal organisations at this time is discussed (from different viewpoints) in Gordon, op. cit., pp. 87-89; Hyams, op. cit., pp. 86-88; Rutland, op. cit., pp. 216-19; M. Freilich, *Zion In Our Time* (Sydney: Morgan Publications 1967), pp. 101-2.
- 51 Extract from email from Susie Ehrmann to Daniel Tabor, 25 July 2012.
- 52 Email from Lionel Sharpe to Daniel Tabor, 1 January 2012.
- 53 Extracts from handwritten notes by Susie Ehrmann, 2011.
- 54 Email from Tom Rado to Ephraim Ehrmann, 15 March 2003.
- 55 I have drawn on a few notes about the reunion in Ephraim Ehrmann's files, and a recording of the opening session of the reunion, kindly forwarded to me by Howard Freeman.
- 56 Rutland, op. cit., pp. 184-88.

### **Editors' note**

Any slips in names, perspectives and judgments should be excused as they are largely taken from David Tabor's own contemporaneous diaries. The names of some important people have probably been left out. Perhaps this article will encourage others to add what they know, or to rediscover documents still in their possession.

## A FATA MORGANA ON THE EDGE OF A DESERT: IMPRESSIONS OF A VISIT IN 1962

*Mendel Mann*

Lygon Street in Melbourne cuts through Carlton. As one turns right or left from that street, one sees one-time Jewish streets. Here have remained the Beth Midrashim, several schools and the big building that houses the Kadimah Library. The Jews have dispersed over the more distant richer suburbs. It is eight in the evening. I have nowhere to park; both sides of the road are crowded with dark cars. Infinite rows. Jews have come to listen to a lecture in Yiddish. The hall is full. I am led to wonder: are these the homely Jews nearest to the Polish shtetl? The same Bialystok Jews, the same melodies of the Czechower, Mlawer and Warsaw Jews? Even the faces are the same. Only the women have changed. They wear modern clothes, jewellery and drive cars.

Melbourne Jews like a lecturer to speak for a full two hours, without notes, by heart. There still rule here the laws of the 'union' of one-time Poland. The new immigration dates itself back to the year 1928. They came here as young apprentice-tailors, as 'hands' in a poor workshop. Their Jewishness consisted of one to two years in a cheder and evening courses where an eminent and enlightened man instructed them in Yiddish. Now they manage factories. They employ Italian seamstresses, Greek cutters, Ukrainian labourers and gentile book-keepers. They have become not only manufacturers in the garment industry, but also builders of flats, buyers of property and importers of Japanese materials.

They sit in the large hall of the Kadimah amongst their ship's-brothers with whom they came thirty years ago. There are also found in the hall many who have been brought out after the War, their entry facilitated by a permit sent to a distant relative or compatriot in one of the UNRWA camps in Germany. They have 'worked themselves up' a bit too quickly, say the veterans who silently cannot forgive the 'green ones' for having succeeded so soon. It is not so much a complaint against those who arrived after the War as against fate which had been so harsh towards them when they first trod upon Australian soil.

\* \* \*

It would be a mistake to believe that all Jews in Australia are happy and rich. I saw unhappy apathetic faces of people who came to the last stage of their wandering and became sorely disillusioned, the country being an infinite wasteland of yesterdays and a desert that stretches out from the very threshold of one's home:

a double desert, where there is nothing with which to fill one's days and nights – no taste, no content in life. Even their children have left them while still living at home, moving away from their parents even as they grow. So have they remained alone, utterly alone. Australians are polite, good-natured and friendly, but also reserved. Gentiles do not attend Jewish celebrations, Jews do not go to gentile celebrations. All remain insulated, isolated in their homes. Even in business, the Jew has little to do with them. They may have lived in Australia for 30 years, but few have yet stepped across the threshold of a non-Jewish home, while even the English-speaking Jews who comprise some 40 per cent of the Melbourne's Jewry keep themselves separate. Should they seek Yiddishkeit, Jewishness, they find at boring parties, where someone sings an old Yiddish folksong and sorrow weighs heavily upon the heart.

About 500 Melbourne Jews sit in the auditorium and listen to me speak in Yiddish. Not only they, but I too am transported as if on wings to the Polish shtetl in the '30s. I speak to them without notes, I speak by heart and I feel how my heart beats more strongly and my iced-over memory melts. I burn with a fire whose flames still burn since that time when the Jew awoke and created the modern secular Yiddish culture and literature. And as applause erupts, I feel tears within me and the joy of having woven a dream of that yesterday out of the bitter reality of our days.

Yes, that is the echo of a yesterday – the fata morgana of a full Jewish life that I have uncovered at the edge of a great Australian desert.

Only he who has seen such a mirage in a desert can know how genuine and real it is; it can reflect thriving cities and villages, rivers and springs that once existed, but have since dried out and become extinct.

\* \* \*

In a spacious Jewish home, people greet me. I shake hands with dozens of Jews.

Suddenly, a heavy hand falls on my shoulder. It belongs to a Jew with a dark-brown complexion and a deeply furrowed face.

A man in his sixties.

'Where are you from?' I ask.

'From Brisk. The city from which comes the expression "neither peace nor war".'

He smiles pleasantly. I see before me a working man.

'Before you stands a wood chopper,' he goes on to say.

A wood chopper in Australia? A Jewish wood chopper?

We sit together for hours and talk about Australian eucalyptus forests, ancient forests where the crowns are dashed with snow. The man works in a sawmill where trees two metres thick are sawn.

Thirty years he has now worked in those Australian forests.

Nearby sits another Jew. He is over 70, a former pioneer of a Jewish village created in Australia 35 years earlier but which has now disappeared. The name of that village was Berwick.

There used to be pioneering contests to extend Australia's land and forests with Jewish labour.

Yet another Jew stands beside us, one who has become an Australian expert on wool. He has written books about sheep farming, raw wool and about the particular features of the Australian desert that are best for the grazing and breeding of sheep.

An interesting discussion follows with the man of the soil. Around us gather Jewish tailors, businessmen, flat-builders, brokers, confectioners and knitters, Jews who have not yet secured both feet into Australian life, Jews who have not yet seen the native-born and do not yet know their nearest neighbour - the Australian. They listen with wonder and curiosity to the talk of the several weather-beaten men of the soil and forest and pasture who are also there and smile –ironically – to themselves. Poor men! They attained nothing. Their years and their health wasted ...

\* \* \*

A Jew who arrived a half century ago from Russia says to me: 'I have throughout my life been a Jewish farmer in Australia. Have you heard of the Jewish township in Victoria, Berwick? I was one of its first colonists.'

I look upon the Jew, see his brown face, the furrows on his brow, the hands that rest on his knees and listen as he speaks with a Dvinsker Yiddish.

'Berwick was a Jewish town. We worked the fields, planted fruit trees, raised sheep. Our property was separated from the others by miles. Ay, it was a fine dream to transform at least a part of the Jewish community into agriculturalists.'

It is raining outside. The Jew sits opposite me and falls silent. I have a hundred questions but I do not ask them, for when the spring rain falls in Australia, one wishes to remain silent. The kookaburra sings its song. His harsh laughter tears the stillness apart.

'It will stop raining soon,' the Jew says to me, 'but do let me tell you a story about a Jewish swagman.'

'A swagman?' I ask curiously.

'You don't know what a swagman is?'

I recognise on the old man's face the quiet pleasure of one who, by telling of something new, reveals to you an unfamiliar world.

'A swagman is simply a wanderer, a vagabond. But there is a basic difference. The difference is that the swagman is an active man with a colossal and fantastic dream. His dream is gold. He roams about with a small bundle that consists of a sieve, a billy can and a bag. He wanders alone through desolate parts and sandy fields and looks for gold. He digs the earth, washes it through his sieve and, if the heavens smile upon him, he finds after long days of sifting sand a small nugget



of gold. He does not allow himself to go with anyone else. A swagman has no company. He is alone. No, not altogether alone, but accompanied by his dream of gold. Even a woman cannot accompany him. She is false and would mislead him – like a nightmare. While a companion is uncertain. He will rob you, for a grain or a nugget of gold cannot be divided. And if he should discover it, he will hide it from you and desert you in the middle of the night, taking with him that little kernel and vanish. There has been no shortage of swagmen with slit throats. I myself saw such a man lying on the edge of the road and how a grey bird with a yellow beak pecked out his eyes.'

So speaks the old Jew.

'One day there appeared on my farm a tall lean man with a black tangled beard and asked me for some milk. I knew that for several days he had been staying in a valley several miles away where in autumn and winter there trickles a small stream. I knew right away that this was a swagman. I invited him inside. On the threshold he stopped, looked at the mezuzah on my door and said in Yiddish: "I am a Jew. Sholem Aleichem to you."

"And where are you from, may I ask?" I said.

"From a Polish town. I don't remember its name. I came here as a child."

"Stop looking for fortune," I said. "Become a farmer. I will give you work."

That lean-boned man was ageless; he could have been 30 or 60. Dishevelled, neglected. Around his neck hung a black string. At first, it occurred to me that to that string was attached a cross. That must be an apostatised Jew, I thought. Then I put aside that suspicion.

"Why do you wear a noose around your neck?" I asked.

"Yes, it is truly a noose. I hang on the tree of a golden dream."

He opened his shirt, took a little yellow bag out of a sheep's bladder and scattered upon the table five or six grains of gold. His eyes lit up and their whites became covered with a golden shine, as turbid as the Yarra.

'His name was Nahum. He worked on my farm for four weeks. I noticed that each evening he would go away into the fields and take with him his bottle of milk. At sunrise, he would return. Out of curiosity, I followed his footprints. They led me to a dry riverbed. At the foot of a shrub, on a mattress of grass, lay a dog and beside it five small pups. The swagman Nahum said to me: "I stayed here one month so that my bitch should have these pups and that they should grow a little. Thank you for your milk. Tomorrow morning, when the sun rises, I shall be moving on. The gold is calling me. It shines out of the dark earth. It isn't only gold. It is my whole life. I collect it in my bag and carry it on my heart..."'

The rain has stopped. 'The rain is breaking through for the tenth time,' says the one-time colonist of Berwick.

'Do you think that the Jewish swagmen in Australia have gone, vanished? No, you would be making a mistake. You can recognise them. Today, they drive fine cars; they have splendid houses; they have big factories. They do not carry their

While in Melbourne, I saw overcrowded halls where audiences came to watch Yiddish theatre. I saw halls packed with Jews who came to hear a Yiddish word. I saw thousands of Jewish children who studied in Jewish schools, in English, in Hebrew, in Yiddish. I saw dozens of synagogues with worshippers. I saw cheders and a Yeshiva. I heard the Hatikvah sung at every Jewish celebration and the Shemah in Waks House. I heard Yiddish folksongs sung by Jewish choirs and marvelled at the Jewish sports clubs renowned throughout the country. I saw authentic Jews for whom Jewishness is air itself and for whom a Jewish book is a holy thing.

I met in Australia with Jewish cultural workers, quiet supporters of Yiddish literature, and spoke with writers who created their works in Yiddish. There are two Jewish weekly newspapers; from time to time a Yiddish book is published and one can even hear a Hebrew lecture from an emissary come from Jerusalem.

Like a rainbow, a diverse and colourful Jewishness rises over that distant corner of the world, Australia.

*This article originally appeared in Yiddish in the Australische-Yiddische Almanac, No. 3, 1967, published by the Melbourne Jewish National Library and Cultural Centre, Kadimah, and has been translated by Dr Serge Liberman for the AJHS Journal.*

## A FIRST HOME IN A FREE COUNTRY

*Helen Light*

One day in the early 1990s, I came home to my house in Middle Park, the address where I and my family have lived since 1981. I was surprised to see two women inside the front garden, looking into the bedroom window. I approached them and asked if I could help them. One asked me if I lived in this house, indeed in the whole house. I answered in the affirmative.

She then explained that she was showing her friend what had been her first home in a free country. She explained that she had first lived in this house, having come with her family – her husband and son – from the DP camps after World War II. Steffi Reisner was Jewish and her daughter-in-law was known to me as a volunteer at the Jewish Museum of Australia, where I worked at the time. She told me that this house, our home, had been a boarding house that was home to a chain migration of Bratislavan Jews, all of whom had arrived in Australia in the late 1940s, either from the DP camps or as escapees from communism. Four families lived in this house at any one time, an average of sixteen people. She told me that several businesses were started in our corridor, with women working treadle machines. She had fond memories of seders and communal living and, pre-eminently, of freedom in a land far from the killing fields of the Shoah.

From further research, I learned that many people I knew had first lived in this Middle Park house, including one of my now-close friends, who did not remember as she was too young at the time.

But at her urging, we arranged a reunion of some of the Bratislavan Jews who had passed through this house. About 25 families had resided here for various lengths of time. We filmed the reunion and learned a lot about the history of the immigration and particularly the first settlement of these Jewish survivors.

The story of the residents in this house is but a microcosm of that of all immigrants and refugees, and most particularly typical of the some 30,000 Jewish refugees who found a haven in Australia after the horrors of the Shoah.

Jews had lived in Czechoslovakia since at least 906 CE and, as in most of Europe, experienced periods of acceptance and periods of discrimination and persecution.

The Czech Republic was established in 1918 after the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. At that time Jews numbered over 356,000 and made up about 2.5 per cent of the Czech population. In this period, under President Tomas G. Masaryk, Jews from all over Czechoslovakia enjoyed a ‘golden age’

in a democracy which encouraged cultural pluralism.

Before World War II, during the First Republic, almost half of the Czech Jews lived in the Slovakian region of Czechoslovakia, of which Bratislava was the major city. The Slovakian Jews were generally strongly identified as Jews living vibrant communal lives with social and educational activities that centred on religious and, later, Zionist institutions. (Most of the people who lived in this house either knew each other in Bratislava or had mutual acquaintances.)

However, the German army occupied Czechoslovakia in 1938. About 70,000 Czech Jews escaped the country shortly before the war but 250,000 Czech Jews were murdered in the Holocaust. About 26,000 Jews survived the war in Czechoslovakia, most of whom left as soon as possible at war's end. Most went to Eretz Israel or to the United States. Very few of them found their way to Australia, and those who did came mainly because they were able to obtain visas. According to those who resided at 260 Richardson Street, they also chose Australia – as did so many refugees – because it was the furthest place they could imagine escaping to from Europe.

Some of the residents of 260 Richardson Street only left Czechoslovakia after it had become a communist country in 1948.

Herbert Lamm was influential in helping many of these people obtain visas, migrate to Australia and find this first home. They all became friends because they had shared the trauma of the Shoah and spent much time talking and comparing their stories of suffering and survival.

There were several such boarding houses in Middle Park because of its proximity to the port area and also to the General Motors Holden factory in Port Melbourne where so many post-war refugees were employed.

The house at 260 Richardson Street was owned by 'a good man', known as such because he, unlike most owners of boarding houses, let rooms to people



with children. Max Stern soon became responsible for the keys, for collecting the rent and for caretaking. In return, he was given the 'nicest' room. Max lived in the house from 1948 to 1952, a longer period than that of other residents. He was already working as a philatelist, and those who were children remember helping him sort stamps.

*Gerta Eckstein and Erica Heino darning socks  
in the front garden of 260 Richardson Street,  
Middle Park c. 1950*

The rent was 4 guineas a week. At that time most the residents earned £5 per week and usually the husband and wife both worked.

Every family had one room and access to a shower and a small kitchen. Erica Frommer (nee Heino) describes how the beds in the room had to be packed up every morning so that the family could eat, live and work in the same room.

Erica's mother worked at Electrolux but she also sewed, as did many of the other women. She made shirts and also kittels and other religious items. Mrs Reisner said that many a schmatte business was started in the corridors, or on the floor, at 260 Richardson Street.

Although they lived in this house for a very short time and then moved nearby to Canterbury Road, Wally and Jonas Eckstein sent affidavits for a number of people who came to live in Richardson Street, once they had identified the migrant family that was coming.

Mrs Eckstein stocked their small cupboard with basic groceries – flour, sugar, tea and eggs – so that people would be able to make a modest meal upon arrival.

Most of the residents here were very poor but adjusted well to living in a new country with a different culture – they were young and alive and free. Many were religious and enjoyed living and celebrating their Judaism. They talked about their first seders in the house, and about walking to the shule at Montefiore Homes in St Kilda Road.

Some of the children went from Richardson Street to Mt Scopus College when it too was located in St Kilda Road. Mary Herzog remembers going first to Middle Park State School, where she was shocked to encounter anti-Semitism when she was called a 'bloody Jew'. She was then transferred for a short time to Mt Scopus.

Several favourite stories are retold. Willy Eckstein was playing 'blind man's bluff' with Mary Schwarz and Erica Heino when he knocked over a kerosene heater and started a fire. Erica and Mary saved him, and the firemen saved the house. Someone else saved the *schwarz gelt* hidden under the carpet!

There was a resident dentist who practised his profession from the house illegally. The residents remember the strong smell of cloves and also the need to keep an eye out for policemen.

Most families lived in this boarding house for only one or two years, until they had made enough money and contacts to seek a more comfortable dwelling. They saw this period as a short transition for them during their acclimatisation to the new land. Their experiences during the Shoah and the more permanent establishment of homes, families and businesses here were far more important to them.



*Mrs Heino sewing shirts in her room at 260 Richardson Street, Middle Park, with her daughter Erica, c. 1950*

Alan, who was born and died in the house next door, remembered a period when 260 Richardson Street was full of people from a foreign land who spoke to each other in a strange tongue, and to him in strangled English with strange accents.

But this house, for many years now our home, gave these people a good start as a secure home in a safe country. We are particularly delighted that our home has this history, particularly as my parents, and my husband's parents, when they arrived here from Germany, Poland and the Netherlands, also first settled in houses that provided them with havens after the storm.



*The Heino family at 260 Richardson St Middle Park.  
Photograph courtesy of Erica Frommer (nee Heino)*

# LIFE OUTSIDE THE FRAME: A CASE STUDY IN MISREPRESENTATION

Ann M. Mitchell

## Introduction

This paper was presented in a shortened form at the recent International Auto/Biography Association (IABA) conference held in Canberra 17–20 July 2012. Readers of this *Journal* who may be familiar with my work will recognise some elements pertaining to John Monash from elsewhere, and not least the article ‘At home with the Monashes’ (AJHSJ, Vol. XX 2010, Part 1, pp. 22–57), but the context here is new and I have preferred to present the text as originally conceived.

That stated, a few editorial changes have been necessary to preserve confidentiality in relation to records searches that are ongoing. I am a professional archivist as well as historian, and all my years of training have been brought to bear on the many challenges presented by the hunt for material deriving from Family Bentwich. It is my earnest hope that this paper will serve to encourage those family members who are still deliberating over the future for their papers to take professional advice which will ensure preservation in one or other of the repositories that already have significant collections of Bentwich papers.<sup>1</sup>

The focus here will be on the evidentiary records-searching necessary to counter what 80 years’ worth of fantasy and indifference has failed to deliver, regarding the intensely personal relationship between General Sir John Monash (1865–1931), national hero, and his wife’s old friend, Miss Elizabeth Bentwich (1874–1954), aka Lizzie, Liz or Lizette. This fourteen-year liaison was always perceived as unequal. But recent attempts to rehabilitate Lizzie’s reputation à la *môde* have little substance in known facts. And thereby hangs the nub of my tale.

The first substantial academic biography of John Monash by the late Geoffrey Serle, published in 1982, is still the standard. Whilst I treat it as a primary resource in its own right, I am more critical of Serle than of the more recent biography by Roland Perry. For my purposes, I mostly ignore Perry but one cannot ignore Serle.

Because I am more interested in the consequences of image-making rather than imagery, this presentation makes minimal use of the splendid visual resources that are available to anyone prepared to go hunting.<sup>2</sup> For the record, the historical imagery used by 360 Degree Films for their docudrama *Monash the forgotten Anzac* provides the best short introduction to Australian military activity during World War I using *contemporary* footage that I have seen. I don’t argue with that.

What I object to is the wilful misrepresentation of the personal relationship



between John Monash and Elizabeth Bentwitch which has a longer and more complex history than that depicted by either Serle or Perry; or in the docudrama.

For photographs, we must rely mostly on the Monash Papers at the National Library of Australia here in Canberra, and on Victorian newspapers post 1920 – some having a quirky charm but few showing Lizzie to advantage. She did not age well. Hence the puzzlement expressed by those who knew her in later years, namely, what on earth did Monash see in her! His reply, at least in part, was that he found her conversation ‘delightful’.

That said, it is the informational content in the ‘new’ evidence concerning the daily life and experience of Anglo-Bentwiches that has rendered my labour tolerable. Herbert Bentwich (1856–1932), Lizzie’s first cousin, had a fine reputation as a worker for Anglo-Jewish charities. He was deeply involved in the defence of East European Jewish immigration into Britain in the early 1900s and was also a prominent Zionist. Eight of his eleven children lived and were buried in Palestine. His first son, Norman Bentwich (1883–1971), was a sort-of British Mandate midwife, having been the first Attorney-General; he outstayed his welcome in that capacity (1920–31).

The Bentwiches were and still are a family of consequence in Israel, and Cousin Lizzie ensured that she kept in touch with them throughout her long life. This was not solely a matter of reflected glory. Lizzie was not, I think, a political animal but she did share the Zionist vision of Palestine for the Jews. However, companionship was essential to her and, just as important for an unmarried woman, her nearest alpha male cousin had responsibilities towards her as an ‘unprotected’ female. All three of Lizzie’s brothers died long before she did. Both Herbert and Norman certainly knew that Lizzie had independent means but still accepted their duty of care in a small way.

Lizzie lived in respectable boarding houses and hotels all her life after 1901. As one by-product she was lazy, to put it mildly. But if nothing else, her 30-year association with the British Conservative Party’s Ladies’ Imperial Club and its successor, the Ladies’ Carlton Club (closed 1958), gives us some clue not only about Miss Bentwitch’s connections and ‘respectability’, but how she became well-informed enough to pique the curiosity and, in the end, loyalty, of John Monash.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps we should also consider here the differences between men and women which determine not only what a man or woman may target as important evidence (or ignore as ‘unimportant’), but how we all actually read the evidence and still decide to exclude circumstances that are relevant to conduct and outcomes for our protagonists. This has been a problem for all who cannot see beyond Monash’s military fame; and also for anyone attempting to analyse Monash and Bentwich households whence children emerged psychologically damaged for life. In each case it was not simply part of the nature/nurture debate. Nor was it necessarily a question of propriety – although a collective family cover-up does seem to have occurred regarding Herbert Bentwich’s behaviour within his home.



There is no doubt whatsoever that Geoffrey Serle felt constrained when writing about John Monash's lover, Liz Bentwitch, and his sisters Mathilde and Louise – especially Louise. I have dealt with some of this in the paper 'At home with the Monashes'. It has not necessarily made me popular.

As I became aware of distortions and imbalance in *all* biographical representations of John Monash and his extended family, my interest was stimulated in the related poor press regarding Elizabeth Bentwitch. For the fact is that the Bentwiches remain relatively unknown, especially in this country, and they are seriously misunderstood elsewhere, meaning in Israel, England and America.

Yet, Family Bentwich is rather more significant to the modern world than Family Monash – it is just that our Australian parochialism does not allow us to see it.

### **Who were the Bentwiches?**

With a lot of help from the international Jewish genealogy fraternity, I have reinvented Family Bentwich, formerly B.e.r.o.w.i.c.z, from roughly the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century and covering the migration history out of Eastern Poland in broad outline – including family movements into and out of Australia.

Marks Bentwitch (1828–87), the first migrant of interest, left for England in 1840, reputedly on his own, at the age of twelve, from his home town Peiser on the River Warta, then part of Russian Poland.<sup>7</sup> He does not surface in official UK records until 1850 with his marriage. It is his grandchildren, the offspring of his son Herbert and Herbert's wife Susannah Solomon (1861–1915) who provide the focus for much of my research.

In 1857 Marks' brother Morris or Meir Bentwitch (1834–98) – Lizzie's father – arrived in Melbourne. Morris was successful enough as a wholesale and retail tobacconist in Melbourne to retire early and take himself, wife Elizabeth and their daughter Lizzie to London, where he unexpectedly died in August 1898. This event provided the trigger for both the breakup of this Australian family group and the closer ties that developed between the two Australian Elizabeth Bentwiches and their English relatives.<sup>4</sup>

The want of Australian evidence about the family forced me to look elsewhere. Whereas I thought that what the Anglo-Bentwiches had to say about themselves should at least be looked at, Serle did not. Yet the prolific authors, Norman and Margery Bentwich, and two other of their siblings, were mentioned in Lizzie Bentwitch's will. Cousin Norman was her adviser and there is no doubt that he was responsible for suggesting the trend her disposition should take.

Somewhat over two-thirds of Lizzie's estate, which came in eventually at over £31,000 in 1956, went to institutions of higher learning: the University of Melbourne, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Trinity College, Cambridge. She also left £500 to assist with the development of the family's sacred site at Zichron Yaakov in Israel (near Haifa).

Why wasn't Serle even mildly curious about this? I was riveted because as far as is known even now, Lizzie had very little formal education, yet clearly had respected what education could do for any of us. She would have noted the huge difference between her life growing up in Australia and Herbert's in England, even though they were of the same generation (albeit eighteen years apart), of the same stock and shared a migration history.

Cousin Herbert, a solicitor, had not wanted to educate his daughters and was blackmailed into it by his wife whom he had turned into a domestic drudge. Immature at nineteen, Susannah Solomon had given up brilliant prospects as a concert pianist to marry Herbert in December 1880. It is hard to say whether Susannah ever regretted this step – it *was* a love match – but she was dead at 53. As one consequence of her unintended sacrifice, only the eldest of her nine daughters did *not* receive an education suited to her talents. The two sons got whatever was needed without having to fight for it.

As for the girls, their mother's intransigence resulted in two musicians of professional standing, Margery and Thelma; three successful Cambridge University students between 1904–17: Nita, Hebe and Naomi; and a teacher-training degree from Columbia (New York) for Carmel who specialised in kindergarten teaching.<sup>5</sup> Then there was the multi-talented Budge (formal name Hetty Muriel) who, amongst other things, trained as a painter at both the Royal Academy of Art and The Slade. Even the most fragile of the girls, Dorothy (aka Dosh), who was the first in this family to openly defy her father and abandon Judaism, qualified as a District Nurse and survived independently for decades. It is an astonishing rollcall within a family headed by a man stubbornly opposed to educating girls.

Serle had been swamped with local hearsay stories about Lizzie Bentwitch to the point of boredom and didn't do the basics arising from her will until *after* his text had been drafted – by which time it was, of course, far too late to rethink his distaste for and opinions about Miss Bentwitch. Yet he knew that Monash was a womaniser and unscrupulous about it from 1915 on. He also knew that Monash documented his sexual exploits in doggerel à la Jack Lindsay for years, giving this work a name 'Gulston' (possibly an anagram for 'on lust' with the 'g' added for euphony); and that he collected erotica all reputedly destroyed by his own hand prior to his death.

### Getting started

As is now obvious, I treated Lizzie's will as *the* seminal document virtually from the outset. I still have not squeezed it metaphorically dry. But it was essential to the provenance search in relation to Monash University's eventual purchase of a double-portrait miniature of 'General Sir John Monash and Miss Lizette Bentwitch' made in 1927 by Lizzie's friend, Agnes Paterson.<sup>6</sup> This image is what got me started in 1999.

Having obtained the will, I then went on to confirm what had happened to 'Lizzie stuff' in the Monash Papers to which Serle had had exclusive access until his Monash biography was published in the second half of 1982. The outcome was depressing.

Serle stated that the family in the person of Monash's son-in-law, Gershon Bennett, destroyed almost everything pertaining to Lizzie Bentwitch in Monash's papers. This is not to suggest that I am unduly critical of Dr Bennett's actions. He was under instruction from his father-in-law – he loved the man and was indebted to him. He did the best he could. The cull took years.<sup>7</sup>

We can monitor the destructions within Monash's papers in broad terms because Bennett liked to play with them on Sundays and kept lists which Serle and I have used to track what's missing. Curiously, the destructions excluded some snapshots and other images of Lizzie in the late '20s which may, or may not, have been overlooked.<sup>8</sup>

I do not, by the way, think that Bennett's destructions were performed to protect Monash's own reputation, which could look after itself. More likely, they were intended to protect Miss Bentwitch's reputation and Bertha Bennett from her ignorance about her father's sex life and, possibly, any reminders about her own behaviour when she became aware of his intentions regarding Miss Bentwitch (whatever they were).

Bertha had refused to acknowledge her mother's old friend, clearly seeing her as a threat to her lifestyle and to her comfortable relationship with her father, whom she had idolised all her life. No one was going to admit to any of this when Geoffrey Serle was writing in the late 1970s and early '80s.

Quite when it was that Monash agreed to share his home with the Bennetts is not clear but he certainly knew that his wartime paramour, by now Miss Lizette Bentwitch, was due to arrive in Melbourne in September 1920. He wrote to her in time for mail to reach the port call at Adelaide and met her off the *Naldera* in Melbourne on the 23rd, after which she was presented with the *fait accompli* about the intended Monash-Bennett *ménage à trois* at St George's Road, Toorak.

Herbert had been trained for chatelaine duties. Lizzie had no comparable experience and, as I have said, she was lazy. She was 46 and her reputation was already tarnished. John had thought that she was ten years younger and made a discreet check of her birth registration prior to her arrival. Their precise relationship in London had been concealed from her relatives and I have no doubt that she had informed Herbert that she was going back to Australia to marry Sir John. In the end she must have decided that half-a-loaf of companionship was better than no love at all. And she did make him pay – which meant every penny of her expenses until he died eleven years later. As far as I know, she had not needed his money.

Like Serle, I went to Lizzie's trustees and left empty-handed. Although they still have a default policy of not destroying confidential files perceived to have

relevance to distinguished persons, Miss Bentwitch did not qualify. Somehow, neither Serle nor Lizzie's trustees acknowledged the importance of her ongoing benefactions.

The many post-graduate Lizette Bentwitch Scholarship holders and prize winners since that time include two 'national treasures' – our own Peter Sculthorpe (first holder from the University of Melbourne) and Yehuda Bauer of Israel, who went on to become one of the world's most distinguished Holocaust scholars, having enrolled for doctoral studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.<sup>9</sup>

Possibly the single most important issue arising from this sorry history of compromise is how John Monash involved his nearest and dearest and his trustees in lifelong compromise arising from his own personal conduct. Think about it for a minute: everyone was made complicit with his 'private' behaviour at the personal level and forced to act contrary to their instincts. Amongst other things, Lizzie was 'outed' – no light matter for a member of the Ladies Carlton Club; Gershon Bennett had to sign quarterly cheques relating to her annuity from Monash's estate for 23 years until she died; and Bertha Bennett had to put up with salacious gossip about her father for the rest of her life.

So the question then becomes – what did I do to try and remedy the deficiency in the evidence about Lizzie?

### Study abroad

The short answer is 'study abroad'. It is my research trips since 2004 that justify the extended distraction from a purely local story about Lizzie and John. I shifted focus without ever giving up on the possibility that some day something may turn up. This has proven rather fatal to the notion of speedy completion of what I set out to do. But, of course, some 'thing' did turn up at the right time.

In 2004 I began the hunt for Lizzie references in the two main collections of Bentwitch Papers held by the Central Zionist Archives in Jerusalem. The pickings were slim, but during the last week of my visit in August 2004, I came across a closed file in Herbert Bentwitch's papers. I asked why the file was closed and got the equivalent of 'dunno', but that in view of my research *bona fides* they would have a look and if it seemed okay, the file would be opened. I was also informed *en passant* that there were actually 'five boxes' from Margery Bentwitch's estate which were so very 'closed' that no one had any idea what was in them. Would I like to try and get these opened? There seemed to be some legal impediment.

What did I have to do? I asked. Answer: obtain a signed letter granting access for a specific research purpose from a member of the family. Although I had only three days left, one of which was a public holiday, I achieved the minor miracle and got the signed approval which I produced on my last working day. There was no time to broach the mysterious boxes but what I did get was a letter in the closed file that had first attracted my notice, addressed to 'My dear Herbert' written from Melbourne, 19 November 1931, exactly six weeks from the day that

Monash had died, and signed by Herbert's 'loving Cousin Liz'. What follows is a drastic paraphrase but the drift is plain:

I am needless to say still suffering deeply from the recent great grief ... My only comfort still is ... the extraordinary number of friends & others who are constantly with me either personally calling or phoning daily to enquire how I am. I never thought I was so universally held in such high esteem & affection ... The Premier's wife Mrs Hogan when she called again the day before yesterday to see me ... told me that it is just wonderful the hundreds of people that the Premier & herself are continually meeting & how beautifully they all speak of me ... I think I told you in my last letter of all the many hundreds of letters I have received from known, & unknown people, besides cables, telegrams, cards, & 48 baskets & boxes of exquisite flowers, from the Prime Minister to the most humble ... The Chancellor of the University Sir John McFarland has been four times to see me, so you can see what I am thought of, also when I tell you that when he was lying in State at the House of Parliament & thousands of the public were passing by in a queue, by my one & only request I asked to be there alone to say my prayers beside him (as his daughter, & son in law would not allow our Minister, the Rev. Mr Danglow to go into his bedroom whilst he was ill, dying, or dead to see him nor have prayers). So it was arranged ... that the whole of the public were asked to leave, & the doors were closed for half an hour whilst I was taken by one of the Generals into the Queen's Hall where he was lying in State ... His own daughter, & her husband & son were amongst the crowd that passed by in the queue during the afternoon ...

I was hooked: this letter alone was sufficient to ensure that I would stay interested for years in the hunt for related family correspondence that would shed further light on Lizzie Bentwitch who has been seriously underestimated by everyone. She left Melbourne in late February 1932 and stayed over with friends in Cairo, telegraphing polite regrets for her inability to get to Jerusalem when Herbert died there in June 1932.<sup>10</sup>

Lizzie died in Melbourne on 27 November 1954. The obvious question is – what happened to *her* papers? I still don't know. But such correspondence should have included recent incomings from her family abroad and the condolence letters, cards and telegrams regarding John's death just mentioned, which Lizzie surely would not have destroyed. At the risk of being accused of heresy, I believe Serle let us all down. If he had got to the Bentwitch trustees at the start of his work in 1976 rather than at the end of it, he could, perhaps, have given Lizzie a more balanced appraisal – and left me with less to think about.

Want of time forbids further revelations. It must suffice to state that I have

been back to Jerusalem twice since 2004 and my final excursion there is expected to be in 2014.

### **To sum up**

Obviously, what I have recounted here represents a huge distraction from my initial concern to discover the 'real Lizzie Bentwich'. I have not exhausted all possibilities in the global hunt for more documentary evidence concerning her, but I have decided that the effort required is unlikely to add much to what I already know. Future effort will be devoted mostly to finishing the drafts in my portfolio of work in progress.<sup>11</sup>

I asked a question in the original abstract for this paper (not reflected herein) about when work purporting to be biographical turns into fiction – and does this matter? My answer is now clear. Historical fiction is one thing – a genre – and the reader knows (or should) that it is not 'real' but rather, a realisation of what could have been. But biography purporting to represent life as lived is something else – even when described as 'a biography' – as both Serle and Perry did. Surely an honest broker has a duty to seek *all* potential evidence and not trust almost entirely to a single resource – no matter how magnificent that is?

So yes, it does matter when reputable writers, dramatists or film-makers either ignore the evidence available to them or, worse, make up what they don't know about persons of interest such as Miss Bentwich.

There are several benefits arising from my initial curiosity about Lizzie and John. Some of my readers already have welcomed a sharper view of John Monash as a person. He was a remarkable man who does not need the adulation of hero-worshippers to justify interest in his life and work. I certainly hope that under-researched elements in Monash's life will continue to attract scholarly interest.<sup>12</sup> But I consider it more important, at this time, that there should be a revival of interest in the global Bentwich collective.

Hitherto most scholars interested in Bentwich private papers concentrated either on the development of legal process (a quite recent interest, by the way) or on perceived problems with the conduct of British officials (including Norman) during the Mandate era. This is very short-sighted because there are other important elements in the collections which happen to span the most critical turning point in the politics of the Middle East in modern times, that is, the formal declaration of the State of Israel in 1948.<sup>13</sup>

Drawing attention to this potential seems to me to be rather more useful than Australian obsessions either with Monash's aura as Australia's most successful general during World War I or a love affair that had no happy ending.

In the meantime, let us give some credit to Lizzie Bentwich who did have the wit to see that encouraging scholarship in perpetuity was a useful way of justifying her otherwise unremarkable existence.

## Endnotes

- 1 In particular: the Central Zionist Archives (Jerusalem); the Special Collections of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (New York City); and The Women's Library, Metropolitan University, London. Margery Bentwich had been the custodian of family papers that she had inherited or acquired from her father Herbert and others during her long life. It is not yet certain what her instructions to her executors were, concerning the future of her papers. All I know is that some material that had been in Margery's possession at time of her death in 1976, including her own diaries which she is believed to have maintained for decades, is still 'missing'. Practically all Bentwich material deriving from this generation and their parents is in English. As ever, my ambivalence regarding the spelling of the name 'Bentwitch' reflects the small difference between Australian and English usage. Herbert Bentwich dropped the second 't' in the late 1890s.
- 2 There is some brilliant original footage referencing Monash himself, including the moving funeral procession through city streets and down St Kilda Road to the Brighton Cemetery in October 1931. This is still one of the earliest and greatest displays of public mourning ever witnessed in this country. There is also a remarkable and quite long silent film promoting the infant State Electricity Commission of Victoria, of which Monash was first general manager, subsequently re-styled Chairman of Commissioners. Of special interest is the view of him towards the end, demonstrating the spread of SEC tentacles throughout the State c.1924 at a time when his conflict with politicians was out in the open and he was fighting for his professional life (in defence of brown coal, as it happens).
- 3 Claimed to have been the largest residential club for women in London, these successor bodies are seriously under-researched. I have not been able to do more than scratch the surface. Club papers have not been located despite the existence of an active Conservative Party History Group at the time of writing. Should they be found, there is a thesis in it for someone!
- 4 Including the family of Lizzie's mother whose parents (Abraham and Elizabeth Emanuel) had married in London in 1834.
- 5 Nita successfully completed the first Tripos in History but was pulled from Girton to take over as mother's helper when her older sister Lilian was married. Hebe completed modern languages and Naomi did moral sciences – both from Newnham. Carmel had wanted to study piano but her father would not allow it.
- 6 I still have not identified all three versions of the double-portrait thought to have existed: i.e., that presumably owned by Monash himself; the item in Lizzie's possession at time of death which she had willed to her godson, Jeremy George Taylor, and finally, the copy the artist kept for herself which she exhibited from time to time as an example of her work in order to attract new commissions. Whilst I am quietly confident that provenance is sound, there is still a little bit of work to be done to confirm the fate of all presumed copies.
- 7 Bennett also had to deal with the rump of Monash's military papers which eventually went to the Australian War Memorial and may well have given Bennett as much grief as the Lizzie material.
- 8 Easily the most important deliberate destructions probably made by Bennett are

John's diary and outwards correspondence to Miss Bentwitch for 1920. This element of the diary would have contained evidence of dialogue between the parties before Lizzie left London for Melbourne and possibly some reference to the consequential row between father and daughter when Herbert found out. In Monash's outwards correspondence, the other critical missing item is the last very long letter (8 folios) that John wrote to Lizzie dated 1 September 1931, after he got the bad news from his doctors.

- 9 Trinity had managed its smaller pool of Bentwitch money much better than their colleagues elsewhere. Only much later will any of the Trinity students prove to have been distinguished law professionals, judges and more.
- 10 Herbert's October letter has not been found. Lizzie's only visit to Palestine was during 1940–41 when she stopped by on the way back to Melbourne to escape the London bombing. This visit bore fruit because Lizzie's benefactions included several of the Palestinian Bentwiches as well as Cousin Norman of London.
- 11 These include 'Monasches and the Holocaust'; 'Bentwiches and Apostasy'; and a 'Bentwich Timeline'. There are numerous separate genealogical papers mostly concerning the Bentwitch connection – one of which is currently under review for publication.
- 12 Especially: (a) Monash's pre-war business life overall and not least the SEC in the light of 'privatisation', global warming and the inefficiency of brown coal; (b) the trip to India representing the Commonwealth just before he died (unofficially accompanied by Lizzie); (c) his role as Vice Chancellor of the University of Melbourne; and (d) his re-birth as a public Jew which possibly has been over-rated.
- 13 Several family members were caught up with internal conflict from the '20s, starting with an Arab assassination attempt on Norman's life late 1929 and ending with Joseph fighting against the British (his own people) in the 40s, on the other. Areas of interest beyond politics include: Anglo-Jewish family life 1850–1920; the education of women; immigrants' daily life and culture in Palestine from 1912 (music, art, education, science); refugee resettlement from Nazi Germany after 1932 for which there is also a large complementary resource, so far unloved, maintained in Jerusalem by the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People. In addition to his refugee activity, other seriously under-researched elements in Norman Bentwich's life include his commitment as a teacher of International Law and a vocal public figure on behalf of the League of Nations and the United Nations. A bibliography of Norman Bentwich's publication history also would be a useful exercise. The figure usually offered is 35 books and monographs. This probably should be advanced to 'over 40'. His journal and newspaper articles, book reviews of other people's work, obituaries and letters to editors are, probably, countless. His relentless drive to publish worried some peers and especially his sister Margery. But the fact that much of this work was solicited by newspapers and other publishers suggests that what Norman had to say to his mostly Jewish audiences was seen to be valuable. It should not be discounted.



## AUSTRALIA'S ROLE IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ISRAEL

*Chanan Reich*

Australia played an important role in the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the historical Resolution on 29 November 1947 to partition Palestine into independent Jewish and Arab States. That Resolution also called for the internationalisation of the cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, with the aim of ensuring free access to the holy places for Christians, Muslims and Jews. The latter provision was accepted very reluctantly by Ben Gurion. But, in response to Australia's persistence, the UN again passed similar resolutions in 1948 and 1949 recommending the internationalisation of Jerusalem. In the same years Australia also supported Israel's admission to the UN.

Australia's support for the historical UN Resolution on 29 November 1947 to end the British Mandate in Palestine and partition Palestine can largely be attributed to its Minister of External Affairs in the Labor Government of Ben Chifley (1941–49), Dr Herbert Vere Evatt.

In sharp contrast, the conservative Federal Opposition, headed by Robert Menzies, was opposed to the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine, and followed much more closely and less critically the policies of Great Britain which, although officially neutral, was in practice opposed to the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), of which Australia was a member, signed its report on 31 August 1947, recommending the termination of the Mandate for Palestine. Of seven countries, a majority recommended the partitioning of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state and the placing of Jerusalem under an international UN trusteeship. A minority proposed the creation of an independent federal state of Palestine, comprising an Arab state and a Jewish state with Jerusalem as its capital. Australia was the only country to abstain, on the ground that the task of UNSCOP was to elucidate the problem and submit facts rather than make definite proposals. While the Jewish Agency accepted partition as the 'indispensable minimum', the Arab governments and the Arab Higher Executive rejected it.<sup>2</sup> When *Banativ*, the journal of the Youth Department of the Zionist Federation of Australia and New Zealand, expressed profound disappointment with Australia's abstention,<sup>3</sup> Evatt reiterated the investigative nature of UNSCOP.<sup>4</sup> Australian Zionist leader Max Freilich reassured the Jewish Agency that Evatt had promised him his support for partition at the decisive moment.<sup>5</sup>

My research of Australia's official documents of that time convinced me that Evatt's instructions to remain neutral to his chief delegate to UNSCOP, John Hood, who was aided by Sam Atyeo, emanated from his desire to secure the support of Arab and Muslim UN members in his candidature for the presidency of the UN General Assembly. Only when Brazil's Osvaldo Aranha was elected President of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) did Evatt come out fully in support of a Jewish State.

Not surprisingly, Eliahu Elath, an Israeli diplomat, revealed in his memoirs that he and his colleagues in the Jewish Agency delegation at the United Nations in 1947 had very serious reservations about Evatt:

We were not happy at [Evatt's] appointment [as Chairman of the UN Ad Hoc Committee]. We found out that when Evatt campaigned for the position of President of the General Assembly, Hood and Sam Atyeo ... asked the Arab delegations to support Evatt's candidacy, promising them that it would help the Arabs' aim of defeating the Zionists at the General Assembly.<sup>6</sup>

When Oswaldo Aranha of Brazil was re-elected president, Elath and the Jewish Agency, who deeply mistrusted Evatt, were very pleased with the result.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Harry Levin, the first Israeli Consul-General in Australia, wrote in September 1949:

Some keen observers seem to feel that there is nothing at all that Evatt holds dear; even his friendship for Israel, they say, will last no longer than it suits his personal ambition. Evatt himself is making it clear that he expects financial support for Party funds from local Jewish leaders and he expects them to transmit the funds through him personally, there being rivalry among the Party leaders as to who brings in most to the Party coffers.<sup>8</sup>

Likewise, former senior Australian diplomat Alan Renouf claimed that while Evatt was very active in the United Nations in supporting the partition plan, 'he was a little more reluctant about the establishment of Israel than appeared in public'.<sup>9</sup>

Chifley and Evatt were also criticised by Israel's supporters for having pushed through a UN resolution in 1949 calling for the internationalisation of Jerusalem, believing that their action would woo Catholic voters in the pending Federal election.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, some commentators, including Freilich, have insisted that Evatt has been unjustly portrayed as inept and deficient in character. Freilich maintained that Evatt's role and influence was a deciding factor in bringing about the UN resolution in favour of a Jewish state.<sup>11</sup>

My own research has convinced me that Evatt was a very complex person, a politician who sometimes pursued contradictory goals, including his personal ambition to become President of the UN General Assembly. However, from 1943 onwards Evatt was genuinely committed to the establishment of a Jewish state in

Palestine. As his early biographer Kylie Tennant put it, 'He supported the cause of Israel because he felt the Jewish people were a race that must have sanctuary. He thought in large moral issues and this was the way in which he asked the United Nations to think'.<sup>12</sup> At the same time he pursued his own political career and ambitions, which at times affected his actions regarding the interests of Israel. He was neither a villain prepared to sacrifice Israel for the sake of his own political ambitions, nor an unambiguous supporter of Israel.

Thus, Evatt's critics failed to explain adequately his uncompromising public support for Israel after the presentation of UNSCOP's report. This support brought him into sharp conflict with Britain and the United States, and threatened his chances of becoming President of the General Assembly in September 1948. Furthermore, though extremely influential, Evatt was not omnipotent in the formulation and execution of Australian external policy and his support for Israel carried a political price. He antagonised the Arabs, the British, the Americans, much of the Australian electorate and the Australian press. Even his own Prime Minister only grudgingly defended Evatt's support for partition as 'taking the least of a number of evils'.<sup>13</sup>

At any rate, the main focus of the controversy over Evatt's personal role in the establishment of the State of Israel should neither cloud nor underplay the fundamental difference between the mainly pro-Zionist attitudes and policies of the Chifley Labor Government and those of its United Australia Party (later the Liberal and Country Party Coalition) predecessors, Prime Ministers Lyons and Menzies, whose policies towards the Jewish-Arab conflict over Palestine were the product of a unique Australian interpretation of the interests of the British Empire in the Middle East, reinforced by anti-Jewish prejudice.<sup>14</sup>

While supporting the establishment of Israel, the Labor Government adhered strictly to the UN Security Council embargo on the sale of arms to Palestine. In March 1948 the Ministry of External Affairs rejected an application for the export of bulletproof armoured plate to Tel Aviv.<sup>15</sup> In May Chifley revealed that several firms had sought to purchase 68,000 surplus high-velocity Australian rifles, but the government had vetoed that sale.<sup>16</sup> The Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, John Burton, even went so far as to postpone the export by several Jewish firms and individuals of clothing to Israel unless it was approved by the UN mediator as destined for the relief of refugees, because 'the chances of these items being put to warlike use in equipping Israeli forces are considerable'. He later approved the export of ponchos to Israel, arguing that items of clothing should not be withheld from refugees in Palestine in the rigorous winter season.<sup>17</sup>

Australia also acted vigorously to prevent recruitment of people within Australia to fight in the war in Palestine. The Commonwealth Investigation Branch (CIB) monitored the activities of Zionist organisations, which were allegedly involved in such activities.<sup>18</sup> The government also threatened to refuse passports and punish Australians who sought to go to Palestine to fight for either

side.<sup>19</sup> However, despite CIB efforts to prevent it, the Israeli Air Force managed to illegally purchase six aircraft in Australia during 1948–49 and to fly them to Israel, where they took part in battles against the invading Arab forces.<sup>20</sup>

When assessing the role Australia played in the establishment of Israel, one must remember that Australia's 'mother country' and traditional ally, Britain – which had ruled Palestine as a Mandatory power since 1922 – reiterated its refusal to accept responsibility for imposing a settlement in Palestine by force of arms against the wishes of either party. Furthermore, it warned that, in the absence of a settlement to which both Arabs and Jews consented, Britain would have no option but to withdraw from Palestine. Evatt consequently accused Britain and the United Nations of wanting to do nothing about implementing the recommendation of UNSCOP. He went further, accusing the British Government of actively sabotaging partition through their encouragement of the Arabs to resist it by force of arms. Australia informed the Jewish agency that it had let Britain know, in no uncertain terms, that Britain's attitude was not in accord with the UN resolution. Australia also suggested that the permanent members of the Security Council take the lead as Great Powers in establishing an international force in Palestine, and that other countries should contribute proportionally. This brought Australia into conflict with the United States which feared that a contingent of Russian troops, if thus constituted, would never leave the key strategic area of Palestine.<sup>21</sup>

Following invasion of Palestine by the Arab countries, Australia conveyed to Britain its concern over reports that Britain was under obligation to help train and equip the armed forces of Transjordan and to provide equipment for other Arab states, and to veto attempts in the Security Council to take immediate action in Palestine. *Banativ* praised Australia, which 'unlike Britain ... is not lending her support to any plan of settlement which gives territorial concessions in Israel to foreign invaders who had been routed in battle'. *Banativ* also criticised 'certain members of the Opposition [who] have attacked Dr Evatt for failing to follow slavishly the anti-Israel line adopted by Britain'.<sup>22</sup>

Evatt's support for the establishment of Israel had been clearly demonstrated in September–November 1947 when he acted as Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on Palestine, which adopted the plan of partition and economic union. This time Australia voted in favour, while Britain abstained.<sup>23</sup> Michael Comay, a key member of representatives that lobbied the United Nations on behalf of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, consequently praised Evatt for his 'masterly handling of the Ad Hoc Committee' and for having made 'a very vital contribution to the final result'.<sup>24</sup> Evatt also asked UN Secretary-General, Trygve Lie, to persuade UN President Aranha to influence the Latin American countries to support the partition plan. The General Assembly adopted the Ad Hoc Committee's draft resolution for the partition of Palestine and the establishment of an international regime in Jerusalem by a two-thirds majority on 29 November 1947. Again, Australia supported the resolution while Britain abstained.<sup>25</sup>

Evatt was consequently praised by the governing bodies of the *Yishuv* (the Jewish community in Palestine). The Jewish National Fund decided to plant a forest in his honour in Israel. In later years the first President of Israel, Chaim Weizmann, hailed Evatt for having played 'a momentous role in all processes which culminated in the birth of Israel'. Australian Jewish leaders paid tribute to Evatt over the years, and when he died in 1965 the *Australian Jewish News* eulogised him as 'the man who piloted the establishment of Israel through the UN in 1948'.<sup>26</sup> Evatt also demonstrated great political courage following the US dramatic announcement on 19 March 1948 of withdrawing of its previous support for partition in favour of a temporary trusteeship in Palestine.

While Britain supported trusteeship, the Jewish Agency rejected it outright, with Chairman David Ben Gurion insisting that a Jewish state would be established as soon as the *Yishuv* had enough military force to do so.<sup>27</sup> Evatt rejected, in public, the trusteeship proposal as ambiguous, potentially damaging to the authority of the United Nations, and amounting to 'intrigues directed against the Jewish people'. He warned, 'it would be most disturbing if mere consideration of power politics or expediency were allowed to destroy [the UN] decision',<sup>28</sup> and that US vacillation only encouraged Arab intransigence.<sup>29</sup> The Israelis and Secretary-General Lie praised Australia for rejecting trusteeship and adhering to the partition resolution.<sup>30</sup> When opposing trusteeship, Australia found itself in the same camp as the Soviet Union, which accused the United States and Britain of manoeuvres intended to overthrow the partition in order to make way for their military strategic bases in Palestine.<sup>31</sup> Australia also came into conflict with Britain when it rejected UN Mediator Count Folke Bernadotte's recommendation that the Negev be ceded to the Arabs, and that restrictions be imposed on Jewish immigration to Israel.<sup>32</sup> Britain supported Bernadotte's proposals, particularly regarding the Negev, in the hope of establishing military bases there. In contrast, Australia objected to the subtraction of the Negev from Israel on grounds that it would be greatly detrimental to Israel's economy.<sup>33</sup> Israel regarded Australia as a crucial ally in its effort to stave off attempts of the United Nations to rush through Bernadotte's proposals and to persuade member countries to support free and direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Arabs, under UN auspices. In the diplomatic arena, this helped Israel maintain its territorial gains achieved in battle.<sup>34</sup>

Following his election on 21 September 1948 as President of the UN General Assembly, Evatt initiated a draft resolution calling on the UN Security Council to support Israel's application for admission. The application for membership was initially rejected. On 29 January 1949 Chifley announced that the Australian Government had decided to give full recognition to the Jewish State of Israel, and regarded the new nation of Israel as 'a force of special value in the world community'. He also promised that Australia would support the admission of Israel to the United Nations. When Israel reapplied on 4 March 1949, Chifley informed Britain that Australia favoured Israel's admission. The Australian delegation sub-

sequently presented a resolution, proposing that Israel was a peace-loving nation and should be admitted to the UN. On 11 May 1949 the UN General Assembly resolved to admit Israel for membership. Deafening applause greeted the announcement of Israel's admission by UN President Evatt.

Evatt decided shortly afterwards to exchange diplomatic missions with Israel. The first Israeli envoys to Australia, Consul General Yehudah Harry Levin and Consul Gabriel Doron, arrived in Sydney on 14 August 1949. Osmond Charles William Fuhrman, who was appointed by Evatt as Australia's first Minister to Israel, arrived in Israel on 19 December 1949.<sup>35</sup>

## Notes

AA = Australian Archives, Canberra.

ISA = Israel State Archives, Jerusalem.

- 1 *Australian News Summary*, no. 868, 3 December 1947, AA: A3300/2 480, p. 184.
- 2 Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin (eds.), *The Israel-Arab Reader*, p. 108. *Current Notes on International Affairs* (hereafter CNIA), vol. 18, no. 9, October 1947, pp. 577-85.
- 3 *Banativ*, October 1947, Melbourne.
- 4 *Banativ*, February 1948. Melbourne.
- 5 Max Freilich, acting president, ZFA & NZ, Sydney, to A. Lourie, Jewish Agency for Palestine, New York, 18 September 1947, ISA:2266/15.
- 6 CNIA, vol. 20, no. 5, May 1949, pp. 617-19.
- 7 Elath, *Ha'maavak AlHa'medina* (Hebrew), vol. 2, pp. 201-2.
- 8 Levin to Comay, 1 September 1949, ISA: 2582/1.
- 9 Alan Renouf, *Let Justice Be Done: the foreign policy of Dr H.V. Evatt*, University of Queensland Press, 1983, p. 247.
- 10 See: Rodney Gouttman, 'Jerusalem from the Antipodes: A Political View 1947-1967', *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*, volume 6, 1992, pp. 69-103.
- 11 Max Freilich, 'The controversial Herbert Vere Evatt', *The Bridge*, February 1972, p. 46.
- 12 Kylie Tennant: *Evatt, Politics and Justice*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1970, pp. 236-7.
- 13 *Australian News Summary*, no. 868, 3 December 1947, AA: A3300/2 480.
- 14 *Ibid*, p. 184.
- 15 Memorandum from J. J. Kennedy, Comptroller-General, to the Secretary, External Affairs, 48/2031, HF/DMH, 3 March 1948, AA: A1838/256 163/11/24/1. Middle East Section, External Affairs, for the Secretary, 'Export of Armored Plate to Palestine', 8 March 1948, AA: A1838/256 163/11/24/1 Part 1.
- 16 *Sydney Morning Herald* (hereafter SMH), 19 May 1948.
- 17 Memoranda for the Secretary, Department of Commerce, 15 and 17 October, 17 and 22 December 1948, AA: A1838/256 163/11/24/1 Part 1.
- 18 Commonwealth Investigation Service, Canberra, to the Secretary of the Attorney-General, 5 March 1948, AA: A1838/1 191/2/1A Part 3. AA: A432/82 48/240.

- 19 *SMH*, 1 May 1948. *ANIB News Summary*, no. 968, 3 May 1948, AA: A3300/2 729. *SMH*, 4 May 1948. *ANIB News Summary*, no. 969, 4 May 1948, AA: A3300/2 729. 'Cable from Immigration to Australian Trade Commission, Cairo', 11 May 1948, AA: A1838/1 191/2/1A Part 2. Memorandum from the Director, CIB to the Secretary, Attorney-General Department, 6 May 1948, AA: A432/82 48/240. Director to Secretary of External Affairs, AA: A1838/1 191/2/1A Part 2. IDF, 903/71/9.
- 20 AA: A1838 T184 175/10/4 Part 1. I thank Segan-Aluf (Lieutenant-Colonel) Ze'ev Lachish of the Israeli Air Force Archives, Tel Aviv, for his assistance in this matter.
- 21 State of Israel, *Political and Diplomatic Documents*, December 1947–May 1948, document no. 152, pp. 254–7.
- 22 *Banativ*, December 1948, p. 1.
- 23 *CNIA*, vol. 18, no. 10, pp. 675–8.
- 24 Comay to Secretary-General, ZFA & NZ, Sydney, 3 December 1947, *ISA*: 2266/15.
- 25 Tennant, *Evatt*, p. 219.
- 26 *AJN*, 5 November 1965.
- 27 Elath, *Ha'maavak Al Hamedina*, vol. 3, 1982, p. 617.
- 28 Press release by Evatt, 22 March 1948, AA: A1838/1 191/2/1A Part 1.
- 29 Aide memoire (draft), Canberra, 10 April 1948, AA: A1838/238 852/20/2 Part 5.
- 30 From Hood, the Australian Delegation, UN, New York, to Burton, External Affairs, UN 322, AA: A1838/1 191/2/1A Part 2.
- 31 Cable, UN 348, 1.6721/05, Australian UN Delegation to External Affairs, 20 April 1948, AA: A1838/238 852/20/2 Part 5.
- 32 Australia, Department of Information, *Australia in Facts and Figures*, vol. 21, 1948, pp. 28–9; vol. 22, p. 28.
- 33 First Committee, 'Palestine', statement by Australian representative, pp. 6–8, AA: A3300/2. 730. Evatt to Burton, E.14, 1.15637, 27 September 1948, AA: A1838/289 852/20/2/1. Abba Eban, *An Autobiography*, Random House, 1977, p. 132. Moshe Sharett, *B'shaar Haumot, Am Oved*, 1966 (Hebrew), p. 290. *SMH*, 24 November 1948.
- 34 MSC [Comay], Hakirya [Tel Aviv], to Sigalla, General Secretary, ZFA & NZ, Sydney, 3 January 1949, *ISA*: 2485/A13.
- 35 Freilich, 'The Controversial Herbert Vere Evatt', p. 45.

## 100 YEARS AGO: VICTORIA 1912

*Compiled by Lorraine Freeman*

### **From the pages of *The Australian Jewish Herald* for 1912**

In February the death was announced of Lady Fanny Benjamin, widow of the late Sir Benjamin Benjamin, and sister of the late Mr Justice Henry Cohen of Sydney, who died just a month before her.

A meeting of about 150 people was held in March for those interested in establishing the Kadimah (Jewish National Library). Mr Joshua Rochlin, who chaired the meeting, hoped this would foster the revival of the Hebrew language, which he said was so neglected in Australia. The library opened in August.

Rabbi Dr Abrahams of Melbourne Hebrew Congregation was visiting England and arousing great interest, partly because of his eloquent public speaking and partly because he was the first British born Jew to receive both a doctorate and a rabbinic diploma. The reports kindly noted that 'Melbourne could be proud of its minister'.

A fatality was reported at the Montefiore Homes when a resident died from suffocation caused by smoking in bed, and *The Australian Jewish Herald* thundered that he was known to be a heavy smoker, warning of the dangers.

Moves were made by some congregations to strengthen the authority of the Chief Rabbi in Australia, and to create a fund that would enable him to visit the colonies on a regular basis.

In April a meeting of the Victorian Zionist League deplored the lack of Zionist activity in Australia. To begin with it was resolved that the hitherto separate ladies and gentlemen's branches should amalgamate to ensure greater success. As a result there were now two Zionist organisations in Melbourne, the second being 'The Zionist Society', whose main emphasis was on the raising of money for the JNF. The inaugural meeting, held in a private home in Collingwood, admitted women on equal terms with men!

On April 15th the world's largest ocean liner, the Titanic, struck an iceberg on her maiden voyage and sank with the loss of over 1,500 lives. This was the first time that the international radio distress signal 'SOS' was transmitted. The tragedy of the sinking of the Titanic was the cause of much discussion in '*The Australian Jewish Herald*' in May, and reference was made to the 'probable loss of a good many of our co-religionists on the ship'. Notice was drawn to the great response of many Jewish business houses for a fund to assist the survivors.



Later in May the subject of Charles Dickens' portrayal of Jews was discussed at length, and then a letter from Dickens himself (written many years before) was published, in which he assured readers that he felt 'nothing but goodwill to members of the Jewish race'.

In June it was reported that a good many poor Russian Jewish families had been aboard the Titanic and their men-folk were lost. However, as there was no proof of death, their widows were not free to remarry until their husbands' bodies were recovered. There was a danger, moreover, that because these families would be a financial burden on the public, there was a danger that they could be deported. However, in this case, feelings of humanity soon ensured this would not happen.

At the same time, the Russian blood libels, which originated in Kiev, were the subject of powerful protests by a large number of distinguished English clergy, judges and academics. The reports were followed by the 'infamous accusation' of a certain Baron Heyking, the Russian Consul, that such ritual murders were the work of secret Jewish sects, incited by Talmudic teachings. He was roundly attacked in the press by both Jewish and non-Jewish authorities.

In August came a report that a Jewish aviator Arthur Welsh, a colleague of the Wright brothers, had died in the crash of a plane being tested by the Wrights for the US government.

Also in August, at the newly opened Kadimah library, the Jewish attitude to the White Australia Policy was discussed. It was said that the Bible taught the Jewish response, and Jews were obliged to welcome the stranger and never to dispossess him.

The question of whether Columbus was Jewish occupied nearly a whole page in *The Australian Jewish Herald* in September. While evidence was put forward, it was said that the conclusion was 'a wild flight of the imagination'.

In October Mr Aubrey Simmons of Ballarat was made a member of the Australian Society of Magicians, and nine year old Master Hyman Lenzer, son of the Ballarat rabbi, won three prizes for playing violin – Hyman had also been a prize-winner the previous year. However at EMHC the news was less edifying – a congregant was accused of insulting the rabbi by likening him to the caretaker. Later editions of the paper featured letters that either condemned the congregant or praised him.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF AUSTRALASIAN JUDAICA: 1788–2008 (3rd edition)

*By Serge Liberman (ed.)*

*Ormond, Vic.: Hybrid Publishers, 2011, 860 pp.*

No one should underestimate the sheer audacity of this collection – thousands of references spread over 860 pages. As ‘Australasian Judaica’, its wings are also spread across the ditch to New Zealand. The bulk of the entries are about Jewish writers and exhibitions, but there is also a slew of non-Jewish authors whose work impacts on the broad understandings of Australian Judaica. One of its major informants is the *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal*.

The period covered is from Australia’s early colonial experience to the first decade of the 21st century. As for the compilation itself, one can but marvel over the blood, sweat and tears, let alone the patience, required of Serge Liberman and his associates to bring this vast project to fruition.

In the Preface to this third edition of the Bibliography, Liberman explains his motives for tackling such an arduous task, how and why he has structured it as he has, and notes how difficult it was to decide when to stop collecting and actually go to print. With great humility he acknowledges the efforts of the editors of earlier editions, and the muses which inspired and encouraged him to continue in their footsteps.

The text is structured in two major parts – fiction and non-fiction – within which there are many differentiated subsections. Under the rubric ‘Fiction’ there appear all the written arts in both English and Yiddish. These include poetry, short stories, novels and the theatre. Among the earliest works cited are those of Benjamin Leopold Farjeon, a prolific writer in Australia and New Zealand from the 1870s onward. There is a section titled ‘The Jew as a Character in host Australian Literature’, along with others that involve the Middle East conflict, Biblical figures, immigration, settlement and Holocaust survival.

The non-fiction section is divided into at least a dozen subject areas, and these again trawl the arts in all their manifold varieties, together with politics, history, the world wars, Zionism, philosophy, music, autobiography and Holocaust memoir. And that’s not to forget media, sport, genealogy, demography and, especially important for Jews, the culinary.

To have located, let alone read, such an ocean of production, has been a massive undertaking. Moreover, for those engaged in research, the task is now made far easier by a succinct summary for almost every entry. With equal conciseness, a

biographical snapshot of the author is supplied as well. To make cross-referencing easier, a simple asterisk is used to indicate that an author has allied entries elsewhere in the book. There are two comprehensive indexes: a Names (Creators) Index for authors listed, and a Subject Index.

At no stage does Liberman judge or select his material ideologically. His brief rather is to showcase the growing strength and increasingly varied nature of the Australasian Jewish canon.

There is no doubt that this publication is a wonderful database for a rigorous study of Antipodean Jewish life at all levels, particularly the tertiary, a field that has often been neglected to date. The irony is that one of the work's patrons is a university department dedicated to Jewish studies and civilisation. The hope of its editor is that it 'might help to facilitate studies that would enable the Jew in Australia to be understood according to his own multiple and multifarious perspectives, and not through the distorting prisms of preconceptions, caricature and, too often racist ideology'.

It is doubtful whether we will see the likes of this tome again, not just because few persons have the combination of fortitude, ability and altruism of Serge Liberman, but because of the current trend to publish such collections on-line rather than in hard copy. The book has also been made available as an ebook and in digital form.

Dr Rodney Gouttman

**A SHTETL IN EK VELT [A SHTETL AT THE END OF THE WORLD]:  
54 STORIES OF GROWING UP IN JEWISH CARLTON 1925-1945**

*Compiled and edited by Julie Meadows*

*Melbourne: Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation,  
Monash University 275 pp.*

For me the personal highlight of reading this collection of reminiscences of Jewish life in Carlton from 1925 to 1945 was the inclusion of a chapter by one of my relatives, my father's cousin, whom I had never associated with Carlton. Bernie Zerman's parents and brother migrated to Australia from Warsaw in 1926 and Bernie was born in 1932, some thirteen years after his brother, Percy. Bernie's father, Leon, was actively engaged in the Jebudea Welcome Social Club, which assisted the growing stream of new arrivals escaping from Polish impoverishment and anti-Semitism to settle in Australia where, despite hopes that they would find a golden land, many faced an economically precarious future. Carlton, with its cheap housing and proximity to the Queen Victoria Market, was where these Jewish migrants initially settled before dispersing 'south of the river' to join their more established co-religionists. Although Bernie's father did not shirk from his philanthropic obligations to the community and succeeded economically after a period of struggle, his family's story diverges markedly from other stories

presented in this collection. His mother, Edzia, was actively engaged in the family business, with minimal interest in homemaking. Unlike many of the contributors, Bernie did not come from a Yiddish-speaking home, cocooned in a village-like milieu of Jewish shopkeepers and religious observance. He describes his family as outward looking, tolerant and as 'secular, liberal and left-leaning', with a wide circle of non-Jewish friends, many of whom were well-known intellectuals and artists, including Vance and Nettie Palmer and Yosl Bergner. This last snippet of information particularly piqued my interest because, although over the years I have written about the links between interwar Australian writers and artists and the Carlton Jewish community, I was totally unaware of this family connection.

My excitement when discovering 'lost' family history in this volume suggests an important reason for its publication – its ability to reconnect descendants of those who experienced Jewish life in Carlton with what has now become a distant memory of a once vibrant community, even for those who were there at the time. After reading this book I am sure that contributors' children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren alike will take a moment to put down their cafe lattes and look at Carlton with new eyes as they try to imagine streets populated by their Yiddish-speaking forbears, amongst them children, bringing home live chickens from the Victoria market to be slaughtered for the Shabbat meal.

Family history aside, the book also represents a useful source for those wanting to gain a nuanced understanding of the history of Jewish Carlton before 1945, especially because of its clear delineation of three quite distinctive groups of Jewish migrants who found their way there. Polish Jews, like the Zermans, formed the largest cohort. In the latter part of the 1920s to the early 1930s Polish Jews arrived in Australia to seek relief from persecution and impoverishment. The previously most popular destination, the United States, was now out of reach for many because of the imposition of quotas that restricted the numbers of migrants allowed in from each country. A second group comprised Russian Jews who had managed to leave Russia, especially the Ukraine, prior to World War One. Some came directly to Australia, settling in the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, while many others had first tried, unsuccessfully, to make a life in Palestine. When they could no longer cope with the economic and political hardships in Palestine, they joined family members who had pioneered life in Australia. The Russian/Palestinian migration extended over a long period, but peaked in the late 1920s, creating new challenges for the Carlton community. Whereas Polish Jews were well served by the established Yiddishist cultural organisation, the Kadimah, newly arrived Hebrew speakers felt culturally and linguistically marginalised. Eliyahu Honig describes how the situation was to some extent rectified with the establishment in 1928 of the Ivriya (Eretz Israel Society), which promoted the maintenance of modern Hebrew and the teaching of Zionist history. A final group of arrivals came directly to Australia from eastern Europe just prior to the outbreak of the Second World War and in the shadows of impending doom.

Not surprisingly, like many collections of memoir history, *A Shtetl in Ek Velt*, does have limitations as a historical account. Indeed, the editor openly acknowledges that she is not a professional historian and the book is a labour of love. The 54 contributors (with the exception of Yosl Bergner, who provided an extract from his previously published autobiography, and Sam Lipski, who reflects on community responses to the establishment of the State of Israel) were asked to write down their recollections of Jewish life in Carlton. A number of contributors, in fact, resided outside of Carlton, some coming from as far afield as Williamstown, and recount recollections of regular visits. To prompt their memory respondents were sent a form to fill in with details about their family background and their settlement. Although the form was meant to be used for general guidance only, many of the writers appear to follow its structure very closely and this leads to quite a lot of repetition in the structure of the stories, as does the fact that a number of the contributors are related and tell overlapping stories. A further limitation is that because, understandably, so many of the accounts are of childhoods spent in Carlton (hence the subtitle '54 Stories of *Growing Up* in Jewish Carlton' [my emphasis]), there is a tendency for the stories to gloss over the difficulties that must have confronted adults at the time. Perhaps because children were shielded by their parents from some of the harsher realities of life, their memories of family, schools and *shuls*, Jewish education, shopkeepers and food are suffused with a nostalgia that needs to be approached with some skepticism. According to the editor's introduction, this was, indeed, an 'idyllic' period for children, but whether this was true for the broader Jewish community remains open to question.

Two stories that stand out because of their relative lack of sentimentality are those of Malche Brown and Al Spilman. Unlike most of the accounts in the book, they focus on memories of Carlton during and immediately after the Second World War.

Malche Brown, who was born in Poland in 1914, arrived in Australia in 1939 to join her husband, Chaim. Given her great age in 2010 when the book was being compiled, she recounted her story to her son-in-law, rather than write it down. The interview must have been very long so the editor has cut out portions of the transcript and provides summaries that help to contextualise Malche's story. In a matter-of-fact tone Malche describes how through hard work and judicious saving she and her husband managed to buy a house in East Brunswick in 1941. Her description of an earlier Carlton rental property, which had no kitchen or running water inside, is a timely reminder of the slum conditions endured by so many Carlton residents. Her story also underlines how important community support networks were in helping her (and other newcomers) to settle in times of hardship. Thus, as her husband established himself financially, he too assisted fellow Jews in need and after the war sponsored many refugees fleeing postwar Europe. A highlight of the story is the vivid depiction of the sometimes fractious, but always stimulating, world of the Kadimah, and the affirmation at its conclusion

of Malche and Chaim's attachment to Yiddish cultural and linguistic traditions. Although Malche's story covers similar ground to many others in the book, its strength lies in the fact that it is told from the perspective of someone who had an adult's understanding of what was happening at the time – a perspective that goes some way to eschewing sentimentalism, while still celebrating achievement.

By contrast, Al Spilman's memories are indubitably shaped by his childhood, but, unlike other childhood memories of Carlton, his are infused by sadness. Al was born in Melbourne in 1941, three years after his mother and father (aged in their late thirties and mid-forties respectively) arrived from Poland. He was an only, but emotionally neglected, child of deeply traumatised parents who seemed never to recover from the tragedy wreaked upon their families by the Holocaust, or to adjust to life in Australia. Whereas his parents cut themselves off from social contact with the Jewish community, Al embraced it, finding friendship among other Jewish families and participating in community activities. Of particular interest too are Al's references to his non-Jewish working-class neighbours, hard-drinking wharfies, bricklayers, panel beaters, and painters and dockers, who yelled out anti-Semitic insults at passing Jews. While Al remembers Jewish Carlton fondly because it provided a refuge for him from family grief, of all the stories in the book, this one is the most revealing account of a community of considerable public achievement that, nonetheless, was built on private struggles and tragedy.

I am aware that the author had limited resources in producing this book, and its glossary of Yiddish terms is a considerable achievement in itself, but readers would certainly have benefited from a more elaborated academic apparatus. An extended introduction containing more details of the historical context of the community would have given those without specialist or family knowledge greater understanding of what was being described, as would some explanation for the dispersal of the community after the end of the war. A brief biography of the authors themselves beyond what is available in their stories would have further contextualised their accounts. (The benefits of this approach are evident in Malche's chapter.) Contributors were asked to supply family photographs and they certainly bring the community to life. However, what is missing in terms of illustration, is a map of Carlton, with the locations of important institutions, including schools, marked on it, as well as the businesses, shops and cafes that are so often mentioned. An index of names would also have helped the reader to cross-reference the different stories. The extensiveness of this wish list underlines the potential of publications of this nature to contribute to history writing by drawing on personal memories before they are lost. The question is how the effort put into such projects can be harnessed so that their outputs are of value not only to a small group of family members, delighted to learn about their past, but to a broader readership drawn from both the Jewish and wider community.

Pam Maclean

## REPORT TO MEMBERS

This report completes an exciting year, which saw the addition of many documents to our archives and the launch of the Lamm Jewish Library of Anstralia. We are most fortunate to have been allocated dedicated space at 'the Lamm' in which to house the growing AJHS and AJGS collections.

Our meetings, held at the Jewish Museum, have been very well attended, with a keen interest in the topics chosen. There have been many highlights.

On 4 August 2011, Dr June Factor was our guest speaker. June discussed her latest book, which focuses on the 'aliens' in the Australian Army's Employment/Labour companies during World War II. June described the experiences of some of the Jewish men in the years just before the war and their subsequent efforts to join the military.

For our meeting on 22 September 2011, Julie Meadows, who is known as the creator and coordinator of the 'Write Your Story' project, discussed her recently launched anthology of stories written by 54 people who grew up in Carlton in the years before 1945.

An enthusiastic group took part in an historical day trip to Bendigo on 13 November 2011 in which the lives of early Jewish settlers on the Victorian gold fields were explored. We were fortunate to have a tour of the Jewish section of the Whitehills Public Cemetery, guided by Sarah Austin, a local student and historian. There were also talks given by our President, Dr Howard Freeman, James Lerk, a local historian, and Helen Brunier who spoke at length of her remarkable Cohn brewing family, who had migrated to Bendigo in 1853. The day began with a short synagogue service, led by former Justice the Honorable Howard Nathan, and concluded with afternoon tea at 'Beektah' in Mia Mia, the farming property of Ned Upton and Howard Nathan.

Back at the museum, on 17 November 2011, Dr Vivien Silbert spoke to the society about her research. She has compared the intergenerational transmission of trauma to second and third generation Holocaust survivors in Australia. Vivien discussed the long-term psychological effects, and the ways in which Holocaust trauma was transmitted from survivors to the second and third generations. The impact of the parenting received by the second generation, and the way they parented their own children, were discussed at length with the audience.

For our 62nd Annual General Meeting held on 16 February 2012, Dr Chanan Reich spoke to us of the important role that Australia played in the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the historical resolution to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab States. The resolution, passed on 29 November 1947, also called for the internationalisation of the cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, with

the aim of ensuring free access to the Holy Places for Christians, Muslims and Jews. The latter provision was accepted reluctantly by Ben-Gurion, but under Australia's persistence, the UN again passed similar resolutions in 1948 and 1949 concerning Jerusalem. In 1948 and 1949 Australia supported Israel's admission to the UN. This largely pro-Zionist policy can be credited to Australia's minister of External Affairs, Dr. Herbert Vere Evatt.

Arnold Zable spoke to a large audience on 26 April. Arnold discussed the evolution of immigrant communities in Carlton in the post-war era, with particular emphasis on the cultural borders that were crossed, making Carlton a vibrant multicultural suburb.

Our final meeting on 17 May saw Dr Racheline Barda of Sydney discuss her recently released book on Egyptian-Jewish émigrés in Australia. Racheline had interviewed a large number of Jews from Egypt now living in Australia as well as overseas, and they shared with her the largely untold story of their 'second exodus'.

In other news, huge progress has been made with the indexing of our digital marriage database. Most of Melbourne's synagogues have now been completed as well as others from around Australia and New Zealand. Copies of these marriages (up to 1952) are held at the Lamm Library. Our thanks to Rene Eisner, Rodney Eisfelder, Ian Samuel and Max Wald as well as Susie Ehrmann, Evie Katz, Doreen Kenmar and Sarah Wein for their assistance in this ongoing project. A number of members volunteered to assist Howard Freeman to index the archive of Temple Beth Israel, and thanks go to Doreen Kenmar, Brenda Kahan, Susie Ehrmann, Brian Samuel and Lionel Sharpe.

Dr Harvey Cohen continues to maintain our website including downloading podcasts of the latest meetings. Visit <http://www.ajhs.info/Victoria/>

It is with gratitude that we acknowledge donations from Beverley Gorr and from the late Hon. Walter and Alwynne Jona.

Liz James  
Honorary Secretary, AJHS Vic Inc



## **MEMBERS JOINED AJHS VICTORIA INC**

*since November 2011*

George & Eva ERMER

Rena LOPATA

Bernie & Joyce MARKS

Christine ROSENBERG

Robyn TAFT

Max & Pebby WALD

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Lady Anna Cowen**, in her entry in *Who's Who of Australian Women*, said of herself, 'In a long and happy marriage (of 66 years) I have raised a family of 4 children and given support to a husband in public life. Most notably perhaps, during his years as Governor-General of Australia between 1977 and 1982. This partnership has been active and fulfilling'.

**Kate Cowen** gained a Bachelor in Communications, majoring in journalism and PR, then spent several years in the Communications Department of The Clarke Institute of Psychiatry (now Centre for Addiction and Mental Health – Toronto). Kate then worked for some years in a communications role at the Mental Health Research Institute (Melbourne). She is currently a full-time parent to two young daughters, and does volunteer work.

**Lorraine Freeman** BA, Dip Crim, Grad Dip App Soc Psych, is a longstanding member of the Victorian Society, who continues her series of abstracts from the Melbourne Jewish press of 100 years ago.

**Dr Howard Freeman** OAM is president of AJHS Vic Inc, and co-editor of the Victorian edition of the *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal*.

**Liz James** Dip Tch, Dip Lib, is a committee member of AJGS Vic, and Honorary Secretary of the AJHS Vic Inc.

**Dr John Goldlust** taught in the Sociology Program at La Trobe University until 2007 and was a Partner Investigator in the recent Australian Centre for Jewish Civilization-sponsored research project on the Australian Jewish community. His interests include immigration, ethnicity and social identity. He has been researching and writing on the sociology and demography of Jews in Australia since the late 1960s.

**Dr Rodney Gouttman** is a former senior academic, former editor of this *Journal*, and political analyst. An author in the areas of Australia-Israel relations, Australian anti-Semitism, and Australian Jewish history, he is re-evaluating the Australian Jewish story of World War I.

**Dr Helen Light** AM was inaugural Director of the Jewish Museum of Australia, having worked there from 1983–2010. She now works as a consultant in museums,

exhibitions and multicultural heritage. She is currently working on a project to help ethno-specific community groups preserve their material history of migration and settlement. She is also Vice President of the JCCV and represents it on the executive committee of the Jewish Christian Muslim Association. She is an Advisory Board Member for the Australian Centre of Jewish Civilization and is co-Editor of *Gesher 2012*, the Journal for the Council of Christians and Jews (Victoria).

**Pam Maclean**, MA (Hons), University of Melbourne, is currently an Honorary Fellow, Faculty of Arts and Education, Deakin University. Until 2010 she was a Senior Lecturer in History at Deakin University teaching and researching in the area of Holocaust and genocide. She has published widely on Holocaust memory, particularly in relation to Holocaust videotestimony.

**Mendel Mann** (b. Plotzk, Poland 1916, d. Paris, France 1975), a Yiddish writer and artist, was drafted into the Russian Army during World War II, took part in the defence of Moscow and witnessed the liberation of Berlin, the experience of which he subsequently wrote in a trilogy of novels. *At the Gates of Moscow* written in 1963, is the story of a Polish Jew in the Soviet army, set in 1941. The war over, he moved to Israel and later settled in Paris. He visited Australia on a lecture tour in 1962.

**Dr Ann M. Mitchell** is an adjunct research associate of the School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies, Monash University. Ann's most recent publications concerning the Monash family have been published by this *Journal* (2006–10). Her current writing interests include the theme 'Monasches and the Holocaust', whilst her ongoing overseas research remains devoted to the extraordinary Anglo-Zionist Bentwich family.

**Dr Chanan Reich** is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Science at the Yizre'el Valley Academic College in Israel, and is also Adjunct Research Associate at the School of Philosophical, Historical and International Studies, Monash University in Australia. His publications include *Australia and Israel: An ambiguous relationship* (Melbourne University Press 2002).

**Dr Hilary L. Rubinstein** is co-editor of this *Journal*, a former research fellow in history at the University of Melbourne, and the author of numerous books and articles on Australian Jewish history. She is one of the three compilers of *The Palgrave Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish History* (2011).

**Dr Daniel Tabor** is the eldest son of the late Professor David Tabor, the Cambridge physicist. Daniel retired three years ago after a career in teaching; for many years

he was Head of English at a comprehensive school, and has published a number of books and essays on the National Curriculum. Daniel and his wife Hazel live in a village in the Northamptonshire countryside.





## **AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY INC. – NSW**

**Founded 21 August 1938 (Incorporated 1988)**

**Patrons:** Raymond Apple, AM, RFD, BA, LLB, MLitt, Hon LLD, FJC

Harris K. Lewis, AM, MDS, FRACDS, FICD

**President:** Russell Stern, BA, LLM

**Honorary Secretary and Assistant Newsletter Editor:** Philip Moses, BEc  
c/o 385 Abercrombie Street, Darlington, NSW 2008

**Honorary Treasurer:** Russell Stern, BA, LLM (Acting)

### **Committee**

Sophie Caplan, OAM, BA, MEd (Hons) (Immediate Past President)

Roger Davis, BA (Hist), JP

Harris K. Lewis, AM, MDS, FRACDS, FICD

Gary Luke, DipFHS

Anna Marks

Helen Rasko, OAM, JP

Suzanne D. Rutland OAM, MA (Hons), DipEd, PhD (NSW Journal Editor)

Jeannette Tsoulos, BA (Hons), PhC, MPS (Hon. genealogist)

Sarah Vorchheimer, BA DipEd (Syd), LLB (UTS), AIMM, ATM-G, CL

**Fellow of AJHS:** Louise Rosenberg, OAM (Honorary Historian)

### **NSW Benefactor Members**

Colin Marks, LLB; Earle S. Hoffman, OAM, BAgSc, BComm. MS;

Simon Marks-Isaacs, MAppFin, GradDipAdvJewStud, FAICD, FAIM, FCIS, FCMI, FFin

## **AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY (ACT)**

**Founded 9 April 1984**

**President:** Sylvia Deutsch, BA(Hons)

**Immediate Past and Founding President:** Earle Hoffman, OAM, BAgSc, BCom, MS

**Vice-President:** Victor Isaacs

## **JEWISH HISTORICAL AND GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**Founded 1988**

**President:** John Urban

**Vice-Presidents:** Michelle Urban, Joan Charles

**Secretary:** Michael Anderson

**Treasurer:** Julian Levy

**Committee:** Warren Austin, Sue Levy, Jonathan Wolf

### **QUEENSLAND REPRESENTATIVE**

Vivien Sola, 22 Beryl Crescent, Holland Park, Queensland 4121

### **UNITED KINGDOM REPRESENTATIVE**

Anthony P. Joseph, MA, MB, BChir, DOBst, RCOG, MRCPG

3 Edgbaston Road, Smethwick, West Midland B66 4 LA, UK

SUBSCRIPTIONS COMMENCE FROM JANUARY 1<sup>ST</sup> EACH YEAR.

CURRENT CATEGORIES AND FEES MAY BE ASCERTAINED FROM THE HONORARY SECRETARY.

## **AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY – VICTORIA INC.**

**Founded 17 October 1949 (Incorporated 1989)**

**Patron:** Lady Cowen

**President:** Howard A. Freeman OAM, BDSc, LDS

**Honorary Secretary:** Elizabeth James, DipTch, DipLib

PO Box 8420, Armadale, Victoria 3143

**Honorary Treasurer:** Allan Nahum, FCA, FAICD, AIM, AISA, AIAA

### **Committee**

David Cohen, PhD, BSc, DipEd, BEd, TPTC, MA, PsS, FACE

Harvey Cohen, BSc, PhD

Trevor Cohen, LLB

Clive J. Fredman, BArch, FRAIA

John S. Levi, AM, DD, MAHL, MA, DipEd, PhD

Frances Prince, B.Com, Grad Dip Edu, MA (Hebrew Culture and Education)

Ian Samuel OAM, LLB, B.Com

Lionel Sharpe OAM, BA, DipSocStuds, MAPS

### **Victorian Journal Co-Editors**

Howard A. Freeman OAM, BDSc, LDS

Hilary Rubinstein BA(Hons), MS, PhD, FRHistS

## **VICTORIAN BENEFACTOR MEMBERS**

HEATHER COHEN, LLB

TREVOR S. COHEN, LLB

BEVERLEY DAVIS, OAM, ARMA, DipArchives & Records

JOHN M. DAVIS, FRANZCP

HOWARD A. FREEMAN OAM, BDSc, LDS

LORRAINE FREEMAN, BA, DipCrim, GradDipApplSocPsych

ISI J. LEIBLER, AO, CBE, BA(Hons), HonDLitt

LEN LEVIN, BCom

## **VICTORIAN BENEFACTIONS IN MEMORY OF**

Rev. ISAAC AMBER BERNSTEIN

PHYLLIS BRONSTEIN

EILEEN BUCHNER & LEO B. BUCHNER

Rabbi MATTUS HONIG

Sir ISAAC ISAACS

HELENE JEDWAB

Sir JOHN MONASH

HIRSCH & ESTERA MUNZ

ADA PHILLIPS

PATRICIA ALMA REVELMAN

ZARA REVELMAN

RALPH SAMUEL, MBE, JP

Rabbi Dr HERMAN SANGER

## **HONORARY LIFE MEMBERS VICTORIA**

Mrs BEVERLEY DAVIS, OAM, ARMA, DipArchives & Records

Rabbi Dr JOHN S. LEVI, AM, DD, MAHL, MA, DipEd, PhD

Dr HILARY L RUBINSTEIN BA (Hons.), MS, PhD, FRHistS

Professor WILLIAM D RUBINSTEIN BA, MA, PhD, FAHA, FRHistS

Dr MALCOLM J. TURNBULL, BA, MLitt, PhD, Dip. Tchg, Grad. Dip.Lib.