

BI-CENTENARY EXHIBITION

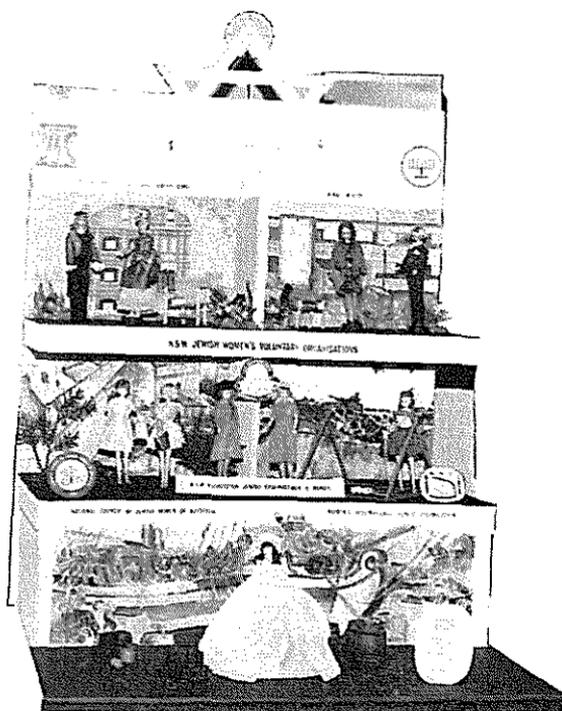
“Jewish Heritage in Australia”

The Exhibition, “Jewish Heritage in Australia”, was part of the Jewish Community’s contribution to the Captain Cook Bi-Centenary Celebrations. It was held in the War Memorial Centre of the Great Synagogue, 166 Castlereagh Street, Sydney, from 3rd to 13th May, 1970, and it was officially opened at 4.30 p.m. on Sunday, 3rd May, by the Lieutenant Governor of New South Wales, Sir Kenneth Street, K.C.M.G., K. St.J.

Rabbi Dr. I. Porush, as the President of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, introduced Sir Kenneth, first stressing the significance of the occasion, and the very real pleasure and gratification the Jewish Community felt at having such a distinguished authority on local history. The Great Synagogue and the Australian Jewish Historical Society had agreed to organise the Exhibition as a combined effort, but the Rabbi continued “it was necessary to have the co-operation and the support of every Jew to make it a true representation of the Jewish heritage in Australia.” Dr. Bergman was the principal organiser, and we were fortunate indeed to have as technical advisers the professional designers, Paul Silas and Ron Robertson, under whose direction the Exhibition gradually achieved reality and artistic balance. Dr. Porush paid tribute to the workers whose tireless energy, enthusiasm and imagination had brought the Exhibition to the stage where it did represent the best of our people’s contribution to the progress and development of Australia. “This,” said Dr. Porush, “is only a small portion of the vast store-house of *Judaica Australia* in the archives of the Great Synagogue and the Australian Jewish Historical Society. It all looks so simple as you see it here, but there is much work, thought and planning behind such a display.” He thanked all those who had helped by advice, work and loans of material to make the Exhibition a success.

In officially opening the Exhibition, Sir Kenneth Street said to the gathering of perhaps 200 people that he had worked in association with many Jewish men and women of Australia and in many spheres, good citizens who were supporting causes that mattered, and he felt strongly, he said, that their contribution to the country’s development, progress and history was substantial and

needed to be recorded. He noted particularly the life and career of Sir John Monash who, he reminded his audience, had begun as a distinguished Civil Engineer, but, when it became necessary in the defence of Australia, he was capable of becoming her most eminent soldier in World War One. After he had, as he said, "pronounced the sacramental words with which to declare the Exhibition officially opened", the Lieutenant Governor was presented with a silver "Kiddush" Cup and two copies of the Australian



*WOMEN'S ACTIVITIES:
DIORAMA, PAGEANT OF ENDEAVOUR*

Jewish Historical Society's Journal, as mementos of the occasion. The presentation was made by Dr. H. M. Owen, President of the Great Synagogue, and as he received these gifts, Sir Kenneth, appearing deeply moved by the gesture, replied, "It is I who am most honoured to have been in-

vited by you to open the 'Jewish Heritage in Australia' Exhibition".

Afternoon Tea was served in the Boardroom after the opening ceremony.

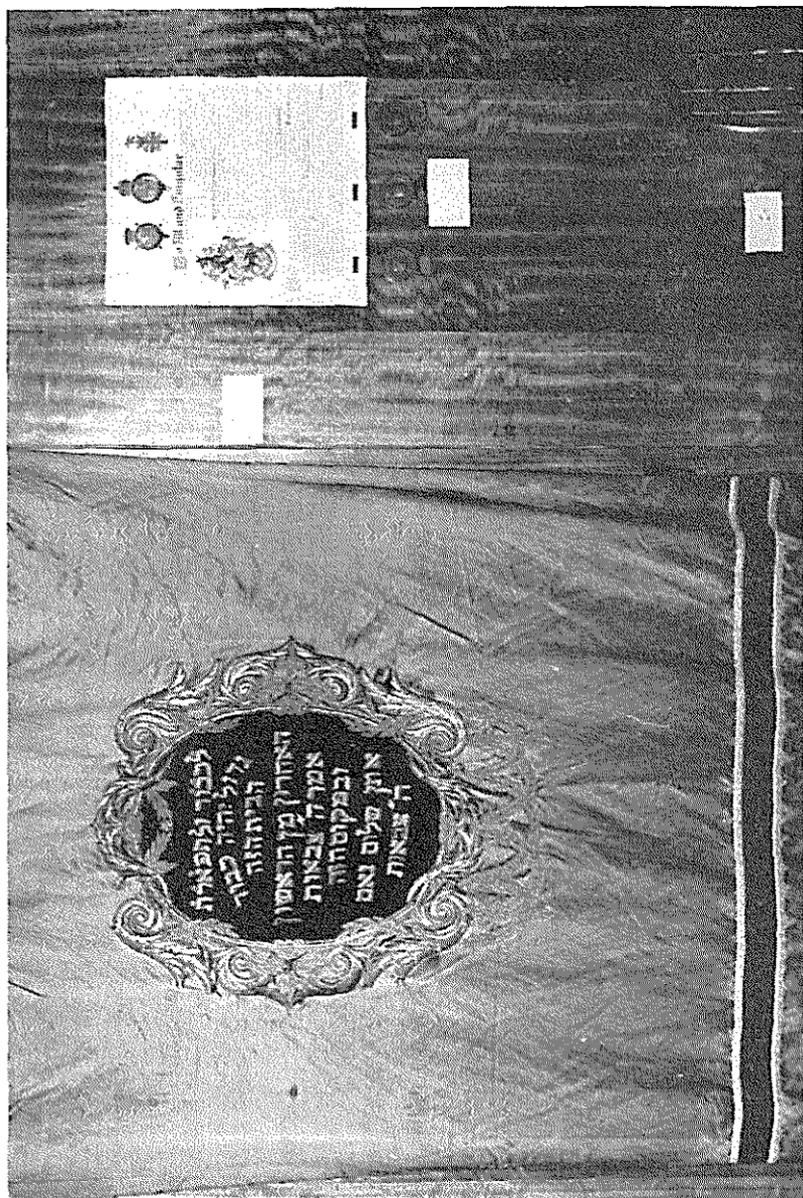
Although Exhibitions of this nature are not among the essential goals of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, it is probably a good thing occasionally to try in this manner to reassess what the Jewish Community, collectively, is able to contribute to Australia's improvement; such broad displays enable us to examine the past and the present side by side to see if we are using the past wisely to increase the quality of our life and environment, and to impart greater meaning to our activities. This particular Exhibition was intended to show what we may achieve when given the freedom to live as Jews within the Family of Man. But, our foremost consideration regarding Australian Jewish History must always be that research increases man's knowledge and understanding of himself and his environment, and that even the smallest contribution, if well planned and faithfully recorded, is of intrinsic value.

The Exhibition was laid out as a wide panorama, in chronological order on six 8' by 6' double-sided display boards standing out at right angles from the two side walls of the Auditorium, on a long table extending down the centre of the Auditorium, and on smaller tables fitted into the bays between the display boards. On the mezzanine gallery and in the foyer were special sections of the Exhibition. Upon entering, one was attracted first to the table containing simply a 368-year old English Bible, with its ancient but readable lettering, open at the first page of "Berashith": "In the beginning God created the heaven and earth . . ." and on the same table was a book of today, by an Australian author, concerning all religions and faiths in this country; it lay open at the chapter on Judaism.

The first section laid out on the first display board told the story of the first known Jews to arrive in Australia: some 10 convicts in the First Fleet, in 1788. Among these was Esther Abrahams-Julian, the little convict girl who arrived here aboard the *Lady Penryhn*, later to marry Lieutenant-Colonel George Johnston, so that when in 1808 he became the Lieutenant Governor of the Colony, she became the "First Lady". Also, here, were in 1832 the first couple to be married according to orthodox Jewish tradition, Moses Joseph and Rosetta Nathan.

Other Jewish Convicts who were among the first Jews to come to Australia were John Harris, Henry Abrams, David Jacobs, Isaac Lemon, Joseph Levy. Most of these people soon found themselves vitally involved in the broadening, expanding life of the newly formed colony, then, merging into history with the sharply contrasting personalities of men like P. J. Cohen, the now acknowledged founder of the Jewish Community in Australia in 1828 (although an attempt was made earlier when Abraham Polack unsuccessfully appealed to the Governor for a place where Jews might worship); Jacob Levi Montefiore, and a dozen other free settlers who came here under more favourable circumstances, and to whom we today owe the high regard of the general community. These were men whose lives were to determine the quality of Jewish life in Australia for many generations to come. With the advent of men like P. J. Cohen, the first man authorised to perform marriage ceremonies in the approved Jewish tradition, there began a co-ordinated development which we might well take a closer look at today. The concerted effort to establish an orthodox Jewish Community, with the provisions for conducting public worship and living as Jews have always wanted to, gained momentum both in Sydney and in the outlying country areas. We find newspaper clippings over 140 years old telling of Jewish marriages, consecrations of synagogues, the formation of communal services, etc.

By the time we reach the next section, we find that the story of the Jews in the late 19th century is gathering pace. Jews all over the country are exerting considerable influence on the growth of commerce, banking, education, the government, the press, the arts and cultures in general. Here an excellent example is Eliezer Levi Montefiore, who was one of the founders and the first Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, in 1882; and, another, Samuel Cohen, and again, Sir Julian Solomons, Daniel Levy, Barnett Levey. Statesmen and Politicians, some of whom were sitting in the Australian Parliament long before Jews could enter the English House of Commons; Jews were prominent in the medical and legal professions, in science and in agriculture, as well as in helping to develop the out-back. Jewish participation in the new colony's growth was illustrated by photographs, documents, illuminated addresses, personal relics and published histories, besides medals, regalia, insignias and commissioned portraits. Looking back upon almost 200 years of history, we are justified in our pride and gratification that Jews have



CURTAIN OF THE ARK

helped form the foundation of a nation, have exerted a powerful influence for good on and played a major part in the building of our society.

The Exhibition, which by public request, was extended from its original 7 days to 10 days, was effective and a success—within limits. There was much more which might have been said: Jewish Education for instance was only briefly touched upon, the present aspects not at all. This was a serious omission. The part played by architects and engineers and structural designers was barely touched. Harry Seidler, who designed Australia Square and the Martyr's Memorial at Rookwood as well as countless other commercial and domestic buildings during the past two decades, was not represented. Jewish philanthropists who have given freely and handsomely towards easing the lot of the weak, aged and frail were not adequately recognised. These and several other omissions are things which were noted for future correction and redress. However, the Jew in Australian Literature made a truly splendid exhibit with upwards of 50 authors' works on display; the Judiciary, with its gallery of Judges, lawyers and solicitors—even this was incomplete—made an impressive picture; and from here one proceeded to the Jew in Music and Theatre: this section attracted a great deal of interest. Some of the musicians represented were, beginning with Isaac Nathan, the Father of Musical Composition in Australia, and his grandson, Henry, who was said to have been responsible for "Waltzing Matilda". In fact, together with his picture was a facsimile of the first sheet of his score of the work. There was Arthur Benjamin, and of today's composers were Eric Gross with photo copies of some of his scores; Felix Werder with one of his scores; Larry Sitsky, George Dreyfus with the latter's score of "Reflections in a Glasshouse", especially commissioned for the Captain Cook Bi-Centenary Celebrations. The Theatre section contained Roy Rene, Owen Weingott, Paul Weingott, Louis Wishart, Frank Hauser, Valerie Newstead, Jacqueline Kott, and many others who give a further dimension to our lives, whether on the stage, films, radio or television. The section on present day personalities shows that the work began in 19th Century has continued in the 20th Century in all aspects of public life and in every sphere are Jewish people making considerable contributions.

Hanging around the walls of the Auditorium, in between the Display Boards, were the portraits of Jewish Ministers, lay leaders and other distinguished Jews who had guided and influenced Australian life within and out-

side the community over the ages, including the Reverend A. B. Davis, Minister of the York Street Synagogue and the first Minister of the Great Synagogue, Rabbi F. L. Cohen and Rabbi L. A. Falk, the Reverend A. D. Wolinski and Marcus Einfeld, and our own Rabbi Israel Porush. The formal Art Section of the Exhibition was on the mezzanine gallery. Here were hung representative works by one past, and five contemporary Jewish artists: Judy Cassab's "Moon Reflection", 1969; Desiderius Orban's "Workshop", 1969; Lori Sack's "Seven Lights", Maximillian Feuerring's "Spring"; Joe Rose's vast canvas, "To Life". The earlier work was by E. Phillips Fox, Australia's first impressionistic painter. This very beautiful painting, "The Temple of Love, Versailles" (c.1906), is an unsigned oil on canvas, and was done whilst Fox was studying in Paris between 1901 and 1913. It is a restful scene, with a gentle light playing on the Temple of Love, and "the delicacy of the colours combine with the soft light to form a rather lovely pattern where the two dimensional nature of the painting is stressed and adds to the total feeling of harmony". We are indebted to Mr. Irwin, of Clunes Galleries, Macquarie Street, for the loan of this exhibit, and for the description of the work.

Two other very beautiful and treasured items exhibited were the cream satin and velvet Curtain for the Ark of the York Street Synagogue. It is bordered with silver braid and embroidered with gold thread, and on the upper corners of the velvet panel it has the Imperial Crown as it was in the days of Queen Victoria. This curtain had been given to the York Street Synagogue in 1845 by Moses Joseph when he was the President. The Great Synagogue inherited it, but, another very beautiful Curtain of the Ark was presented to the Great Synagogue when it opened in 1878. This one holds within its fabric and design a story of human interest to enrich the history of our community. Its design is of classic simplicity and charm. Ruby red satin with darker red velvet trim, this rich two-toned, two textured Curtain, hand-embroidered by the women of the congregation, contains the prophetic text from Haggai Ch. 2: "The latter glory of this House shall be greater than the former; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts" .

Another interesting exhibit on the mezzanine gallery was the model of the first Australian Residential College for Jewish Students. It is being built on the campus of the University of New South Wales, and its total cost is estimated at \$570,000. It is also to be a centre for cultural and social activities for the Jewish Community, and, will

provide counselling services for Jewish students. It will be operated along Jewish religious lines, and will foster and maintain Jewish feeling among our students.

Also on exhibition was the Jewish women's diorama setting from the "Pageant of Endeavour", held at the Sydney Town Hall in April. It depicted the Australian Jewish women's efforts at making a better world in Australia, with the first Montefiore Homes, at Moore Park, the



**SILVER RELIGIOUS ART IN DISPLAY CASE PRESENTED TO
GREAT SYNAGOGUE BY JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

B'nei B'rith Homes, at Waitara, Meals on Wheels, the National Council of Jewish Women, W.I.Z.O., the Ex-Servicemen and Women's Associations, as well as other Jewish women's communal organisations, and, at the base, the arrival in Australia of the first Jewish woman, Esther Abrahams-Julian. This very effective exhibit, with its illuminated Star of David, paid tribute to the parts played by mostly unknown women, who, since the early days of settlement, have helped as responsible citizens to develop a cohesive pattern of life which will show following generations that kindness and selflessness are necessary to achieve peace and goodness and truth, even if this is only done by example.

A most important section of the Exhibition still to be studied is the Religious Art. It was housed in the Display Case which the Australian Jewish Historical Society presented to the Great Synagogue—now to remain a permanent feature in the Synagogue vestibule. Here were many of the Great Synagogue's treasures, items of great beauty and value. A majestic silver Crown of the Law, silver Torah Bells, Pointers, Breast Plates, "Kiddush" Cups, and two velvet Mantles designed and executed by the late Rabbi L. A. Falk and donated by Mr. Israel Green, O.B.E., in memory of his son, and the other donated many years ago in memory of L. W. Levy, M.L.C., by the family.

The Australian Jewish Historical Society had its own exhibit: a table laid out with its publications, photos of its founders and men who have helped to build it to its present strength and Membership Forms beside a Poster enumerating the aims and objects of the Society. Many people, wishing to take an active part in the work of the Society, applied for membership.

Because the Exhibition was widely publicised as being held in conjunction with the Captain Cook Bi-Centenary Celebrations, and, invitations were sent to all local historical societies and to officials of the Bi-Centenary Citizens' Committee, and, as well, there were prominent notices at all entrances to the Synagogue which attracted casual passers-by, some 1,500 people—a large percentage from outside the community—inspected the display.

Turning at the top of the stairs to the Auditorium to leave the Exhibition, one's inevitable impression, after 2 or 3 hours' study of the "Jewish Heritage in Australia", is that today's Jew, who, with the spirit of a new century around, feels that he himself is destined to reveal fresh worlds of human and scientific endeavour; he feels that he may have a more hopeful approach, in this country, at

least, to the principle of the Brotherhood of Man. This Exhibition had a broader concept than previous exhibitions held within the Community. It set out, initially, to appeal to today's generation, showing the determination and courage of the pioneers, the men and women who worked to put down our historic and cultural roots, the men and women who tended and nurtured these roots, the range and influence of Jews in every area of life in a country geographically isolated from their particular spiritual centres, good people, bad people, ethical and unethical, famous and unknown: the people who make up the Jewish Community as it has evolved today . . . It is firmly believed that today's generation, which is coming increasingly to recognise that its people is not only one of considerable consequence in Australia's History, but that it has always been an extremely important element in the fabric of the general community. It comprises a substantial section, despite the unfavourable ratio of the general community; and if the present generation is to maintain any respect for the work of its country's pioneers, for its religious heritage, or any desire to appropriate the Jewish way of life as a significant factor in their lives, it is necessary to remind them of the struggles and the achievements which brought us to this point. From the total concept of the "Jewish Heritage in Australia" Exhibition, there did emerge, clearly and sharply, the full extent of Jewish culture, Jewish commercial genius, and Jewish participation in the strivings for social justice: all of which were shown in this concentrated display to have been of tremendous value, and which speak well of our own situation as Jewish citizens of Australia, and, hopefully for the future. And more, one feels that the Jewish experience in Australia, in its early years, has gained such momentum that now it could never stop.

There have already been many expressions of the sincerest congratulations and appreciation of what the Exhibition had to say. One was from the representative of the Wagga Wagga Historical Society, who insists that it was one of the most important displays of Australian History, from the point of view of the historian and scholar, yet seen here. Another, with equal enthusiasm, was from the Society of Australian Genealogists, who before it was finished, suggested that we make the occasion also an appeal for the preservation of old documents and all historical material.

Most of the sections on display have been photographed for future reference.