

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

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

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

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

L.E. Fredman

PHILLIP BLASHKI — A VICTORIAN PATRIARCH

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

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

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

The writing is unpretentiously forthright and faithfully substantiated by quotes from letters, reports, personal memoirs and recollections, together with old family photos, which add visual flavour to the author's written description. Often self-consciously posed in oval frames, the family is portrayed in starched collars, morning coats and neck-ties, as stiff and formal as the Victorian respectable bourgeoisie society to which (with a few renegade exceptions) they aspired.

The story begins with Phillip Blashki (born Favel Wagczewski, in 1837) escaping before the age of 18, going to Manchester where his English employer named him Phillip Blashki. Working as a tassel maker, he met and married the elegant, high-bosomed, willow-waisted Hannah nee Immergut. Already at 23 she had borne four children, three of whom had died. She was inured to the trials and tribulations that awaited the couple when they decided to start a new life in the New World, meaning America, to which they had paid their fares, shipped ahead all their worldly belongings, then missed the boat. Accepting their fate, they took the next boat, which happened to be going to Australia.

They arrived in Melbourne in the midst of the gold rush. On borrowed capital Phillip became a "hawker", while Hannah gave birth to the first Jewish twins in Australia. Now a dealer, Phillip was trading jewellery for gold on the diggings. The family moved to Geelong to reduce the time he spent away from home. The mines were producing abundantly and he was beginning to make something of a living, which he needed, as by the age of 30 he had fathered nine children. His fortunes fluctuated when he was robbed of £700 of jewellery (all his capital), jailed for suspected collusion for the insurance, declared bankrupt, and eventually vindicated with some of his goods returned. He opened a shop in Bourke St. with residential premises above to pack in his wife and expanding family. In 1876, when Hannah was 43, there were 14 children (altogether she bore 18 of whom 15 survived). As Aaron, the second-eldest son, wrote, "Mother slaved from early morning till late at night and this went on until my sisters were old enough to lend a hand". Apparently, money was still too short to provide much outside help, but by 1889 Phillip could afford to send the two youngest girls to the Presbyterian Ladies' College. Their climb to middle class prosperity and respectability in the community was complete. The firm of P. Blashki and Sons achieved recognition and prestige when they won the tender to manufacture the coveted Sheffield Shield for cricket, which is still competed for.

Throughout all the vagaries of time and place in his life, Phillip Blashki retained with tenacity and unquestionable faith his commitment to the tenets of Judaism, and saw to it that the rest of his tribe followed suit. In business and civil life he was both shrewd and determined and at home he was the complete authoritarian. When his daughters attempted to teach Hannah English (she was illiterate), Phillip objected, saying she didn't need it.

The family was badly hit by the Depression in 1893, and after that Phillip left the problems of the firm to his eldest sons, while he retired to carry on the voluntary charitable activities in which he had become involved. He became a man of some standing in the general community, in the Freemasons, on the Magistrates' Bench and in business, founding the Victorian Chamber of Manufactures and the Victorian Employers Federation. In the Jewish community he was on various charitable boards, pioneered Jewish education in schools and founded the Jewish Aid Society (with Hannah's encouragement) and the Chevra Kadisha.

Their two characters, his strong, principled and benevolently autocratic, hers more gentle, seem to be confirmed in the family photos, such as those reproduced on the lid of the chocolate boxes given to each member of the family who attended

their Golden Wedding Anniversary in 1907. To this event the prodigal son, Myer (now established as the artist Miles Evergood), sent a beautifully framed sepia photo of one of his acclaimed paintings from New York. However, as he had married out of the faith, this gesture did not melt his father's heart. He was still considered an embarrassment to the family and disinherited.

From the day Phillip and Hannah Blashki arrived in Australia to the present day, there have been about 500 descendants who have made their mark in commerce, professions, academic posts, and generally contributed to the economic and cultural growth of Australia, U.S.A., Europe, South Africa and Israel. The firm of P. Blashki and Sons, which is still in operation, has existed for 128 of Victoria's 151 years, thus making it, indeed, one of the oldest firms in Australia.

The book includes a Roll of Honour of those who have served or died for their country in war. Those who perished in the Holocaust appear in independent genealogical charts that punctuate the narrative.

Ruth Faerber