

BOOK REVIEWS

TRUE BLUE JEWS

By Louise Rosenberg, OAM.
Sydney Jewish Museum, 2011. 293pp.*

This is another fascinating *pot pourri* from Louise Rosenberg and again exhibits her brilliant command of language and her wonderful storytelling style. There are lists of family generations and even recipes among the historical details.

Mrs Rosenberg has said that she writes to encourage an interest in Australian Jewish history and the Australian Jewish Historical Society. In many stories she also emphasises her strong beliefs and pride in her religion. She has dedicated this book to her late husband and cousin, Moshe Rosenberg and has acknowledged many family and friends for assistance and encouragement. The material in the book has been taken from a number of papers Louise has written over the years and from family research she has done. The variations in style and topic reflect this. Occasionally some more recent events have overtaken information provided. One such is the permanent loan of the finial from the Maitland Synagogue to the Sydney Jewish Museum.

Her chapters cover aspects of Australian Jewish history in past centuries as well as more contemporary stories and family tales from Israel and Australia. Her first chapter on the Adult Jewish Study and Discussion Group which ran for over a 20-year period in the mid-twentieth century recalls a time where scholarship was not just the preserve of formal university teaching. Louise has also produced an untitled book containing a number of essays from the members of this amazing group. It should be mentioned, in regard to the second chapter referring to farming, that Marcelle Marks did research on Australian Jews on the Land for the 1980 Beth Hatefutsoth – the Diaspora Museum, Israel – project. The interesting ceremony mentioned in chapter 14 using corn, wine and oil in Toowoomba synagogue's foundation stone laying ceremony in 1875 is attributed

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by Louise to Biblical practice and Masonic creed. A recent celebration in Broken Hill re-enacted the same ceremony originally performed in 1901 at that location. Masons were also present in the 1840s at the inauguration of the Launceston synagogue.

In chapter 10 we get an excellent explanation of the attempt to settle Jews on the Roper River while Chapter 11 tells us about Rabbi E.M. Levy, a lesser-known member of the ministry who served at the Great Synagogue from 1935-1938. Chapter 3 includes contemporary Jewish musicians but does not mention the Sydney Musical Society, which met at the Maccabean Hall, and the well-known cantors and rabbis such as Louis Shifreen and Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen as well as composers such as Barrie Kosky, although these stories appear elsewhere.

True Blue Jews has been published by the Sydney Jewish Museum as part of its Community Stories series. While it is well edited with interesting illustrations, I would have loved one of the 'cabbage baby' described in Chapter 21. Unfortunately it lacks an index and the usual header on the right hand pages repeats the book title instead of identifying the chapter title. There are a few errors which do need to be noted. One is the caption on page 253 where obviously the rabbi in the photograph is Rabbi Apple; on page 42 the reference to Gerald Krup should, I believe, be Krug; on page 44 the correct spelling is Larry Sitsky; note 45 on page 241 - the man who cut the ribbon at the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge was Francis De Groot - he was not the leader of the League of Rights but a member of the New Guard led at the time by Eric Campbell; page 38 has a reference to the Sali Mendelsohn's song *The Ladies of Brisbane* being sung to *Champagne Charlie*. The old music hall song has an entirely different tune. *Brisbane Ladies* is known to be based on a tune called *Spanish Ladies*.

Footnotes explain terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers. While most references are in the text, there are occasional quotations without sources. One long excerpt on pages 282-4 'Reply of a Jewish Politician in America to an Anti-Semite Opponent in the Late Nineteenth Century' has no provenance or signature whereas the prior quotation of Josephus's *Reply to Apion* is fully referenced.

As with Louise's previous book, *Of Folktales and Jewish Folk in Australian History*, this one can be read cover to cover or dipped into for some fascinating tit bits. At 97 years young, she has an amazing mind and seemingly endless energy. *Kol ha kavod!*

Helen Bersten