

## BOOK REVIEWS

### THE DECKSTON LEGACY: FROM INSTITUTE TO TRUST – THE DECKSTON CONTRIBUTION TO THE WELLINGTON HEBREW CONGREGATION

*by Mike Regan, Bob Pope and Susan Isaacs, NZ Jewish Chronicle Publications, 2005.*

**T**his small booklet has been produced in recognition of Annie and Max Deckston whose vision in rescuing orphans from Nazi Europe resulted in a capital fund, which was able to respond to the changing needs of the Wellington Jewish congregation. The careful handling of that fund by its directors has seen it grow in value over 60 years. The book's publication coincides with the retirement of Bob Pope whose involvement with the Trust has spanned those years, 30 of which were spent as Secretary/Treasurer.

Annie and Max established an orphanage to receive Jewish children from Europe before and during World War II. They had begun by rescuing many of their own relatives, having themselves come from Poland and Ukraine via England. Annie's maiden name was Beder and Max's original name Darevsky. They arrived in Wellington in 1896. In 1924, Annie returned to Poland to visit her family and persuaded her brother and his family to migrate. Max went to Tashkent and persuaded his sister and her family to migrate. More relatives arrived in 1926, 1929 and 1934 forming the nucleus of the Wellington Jewish community.

In 1932 they brought their first Jewish orphan to New Zealand from England and bought a property in Rintoul Street, which was to become the Deckston Orphanage. Three years later the first group of seven arrived and a group of twelve in 1937. It continued to operate until the late 1940s caring for both orphaned and destitute children. Annie established a Deed of Trust in 1936, by using freehold properties she owned, thus ensuring continued funds to run the Orphanage. It also ensured that the children attended state schools and university if appropriate. The children were to learn Hebrew, be taught scripture and live in a kosher environment.

Annie was to die two years later and Max a year after her. After some considerable legal difficulties following their deaths, four trustees

were appointed to run what was known as the Deckston Hebrew Institute. There were a number of difficulties in providing the finance and maintenance, but the Orphanage continued to function from 1940 to 1945 with the Trustees and the Ladies Committee acting *in loco parentis*. A strong Matron on the staff from 1940 until its closure in 1949 ensured a stable influence on staff and students alike. Money was not always readily available because of difficulties with some Deckston properties, the base of the institution's financial support.

At the end of the 1940s, the orphans had grown to adulthood and financial assistance was no longer necessary, so the Trust's powers were widened to provide a charitable base while fostering capital growth. The Deckston Hebrew Trust Act was passed by parliament in 1949, incorporating the Deckston Hebrew Trust Board and clearly designating power and authority. The Board began to accumulate funds through property sale and mortgage investment. Money was occasionally granted to former orphans and by 1953 progress was being made to establish a home for Jewish aged and infirm as a stand-alone unit within an established Methodist property at Naenae. In 1955 the Wellington Jewish Care of the Aged Society was established to run the home. Grants of money were still being made to former orphans where necessary and charitable donations given to local Wellington Jewish organisations. In 1965 the Deckston Home was opened at Naenae to accommodate 26 residents with financial assistance also coming from the government, Wesley Church and businesses. The Board later provided funding towards a hospital at the Naenae complex.

In 1975 the Board provided aid to Russian immigrants and others requiring financial assistance. During the 1980s and 1990s the capital of the Trust was increased and the work of the Board was publicised in the Jewish press. In 1989 amendments were made to the Deed of Trust allowing the Board to give more assistance directly rather than channelling it through other organisations. The Board continues to increase its financial base through retaining 20% of annual income before distributing grants, and invests its capital with advice from fund managers.

While the booklet is basically a financial history of the Board through its minute books, it provides insights into the Wellington Jewish community from the late nineteenth century to the present. The names of families involved in the Trust both as orphan recipients and administrators are mentioned frequently; Annie and Max's family members are named and an 'Annex' lists the names of orphans and administrators by year. There are interesting illustrations of the early community throughout the booklet.

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