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NATHAN SPIELVOGEL

by
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He delighted every teacher when, sixty years ago, Old Eko began writing for the *Victorian Teachers Journal* those wry and whimsical essays on a teacher's aspirations and misadventures. Hundreds of lonely teachers in remote rural schools drew comfort and reassurance from Old Eko's monthly recitals of troubles with work programs and wilful 'bairns', of officialese and officialdom. They grinned at his quotations from that famed but fictitious philosopher Old Epitimus, and doubtless many of them emulated the author as, with their pipes lit, they took an after-school turn in the garden where solace and peace descended gently.

Remarkable the influences Old Eko had. Director of Education Martin Hansen wrote of '... his broad sympathy and his insight into the minds of children, not necessarily those with the highest intelligence quotient, his patience with the vagaries of school committees and inspectors, his pride in his garden, the philosophic part he plays as an onlooker in the competitive struggle for promotion, not without occasional twinges of conscience over "gifts mis-spent and resolutions vain ..." James McCrae, another notable Victorian educationist, said: "You will love Old Eko ... for his steadfast faith in the real values of education, for his over-flowing love of his fellow men, and particularly of children."

Teachers way out west, far back in 1907, had laughed uproariously over one of Eko's classic 'blues'; for he told the story against himself. During a somnolent summer afternoon in a Wimmera school, while the children drowsed over their books, young Eko, exhausted by the heat, leant near the open window. Approaching the school in a jinker came one who looked like a wheat buyer. Welcoming the chance of a break, Eko strolled out to meet him.

'Driven far?' he asked in kindly fashion. For the Wimmera is a place of great distances.

'No. But there's some lovely cool beer over at the pub. I'll slip over and have a drink with you if you like. I've got an awful throat on me'.

The man smiled. 'I'd rather not.'

'Ah! Teetotaller?' Eko asked sympathetically though sadly.

'No. Inspector of schools'.

* * * * *

Of course Old Eko seemed to us all larger than life. When *Old Eko's Notebook* appeared in 1930 it sold so rapidly that, within two years, four editions had

disappeared. None of us knew who the author was — I first encountered him in print in 1931 — but he explained that Old Eko was really a fictitious character. He had not really based him on Charles Harman, one time Head Teacher at Dimboola, 'friend of all the lame dogs among teachers', but rather had made him a composite facsimile of all the 'battlers' in isolated little schools, far away from Melbourne. And, in the 1930s that meant many men who later attained high rank in education, who could look back to those years and remember they had been lightly dusted with Old Eko's golden touch.

But let's admit it. Chiefly, Old Eko reflected his creator Nathan Spielvogel. Only someone with more than a modicum of Eko's characteristics could wander nonchalantly, as 'Spiel' did in 1939, surrounded by idolising children, across Sturt Street, Ballarat, completely unheeding of all the traffic. Motorists, tram-drivers and cyclists grew accustomed to halt for this daily lunch-hour meandering as the children of Dana Street school escorted their Head Teacher back to his pedagogical labors. 'Spiel', as his colleagues called him, served as Head at Dana Street from 9 March, 1924 until he retired on 11 May, 1939. Even then he returned each Friday, his pockets bulging with bags of sweets for the 'bairns', his pipe stuck in his beard and his smile ever ready for the smallest child or the biggest.

Everyone in Ballarat knew him. Down the years he served so many organisations faithfully and founded some of them. His work as a teacher broadened out to include that of author, historian, journalist, broadcaster, lecturer and tireless honorary worker for worthwhile causes. As Teyve said in *Fiddler*, 'he was a good man'. This then was Spiel, the well-beloved. In the timebook at Dana Street, where he first attended school about 1880, he always signed with a flourish: Nathan F. Spielvogel.

The F. stood for Frederick. His father, Newman Frederick Spielvogel, of the Hebrew tribe of Levi, born at Kolomea in Galicia, had fled from the valley of the Neisse and joined a gypsy band who 'spoke a soft sweet tongue and had a stock of quaint old songs and tales'. After two years he left the gypsies and went a-wandering down the Isker River to the Danube. There followed years of misery and hardship among Bulgars and Turks before he reached Stamboul with its gilded 'towers and mighty mosques'. There, in the Lace-Makers' Bazaar, he found his uncle Shlomo who gave him a home and taught him the craft.

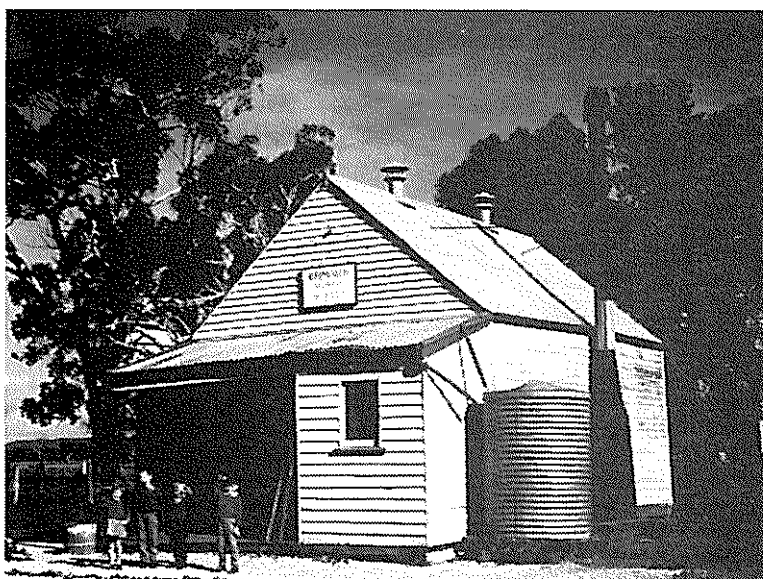
But his aunt's animosity sent him wandering again. He shipped out on a sloop to Alexandria then worked his way down the Nile to Karnak where he joined a tribe of Bedouins who dubbed him The Man of Tales. With the Bedouins he travelled to Jerusalem, thence with a band of Moslems through Hindustan to Bombay where he earned a living as a silk lace-maker in the bazaars — and where the sight of a synagogue roused memories of Kolomea and brought him back to Jewish friends and customs and time to restore the healing faith of his religious convictions.

In 1853 he sailed for Australia. After landing on Liardet Beach (Port Melbourne), he struck out for the gold fields; years later he told his children of swinging a pick at May Day Hills (Beechworth), Fiery Creek (Beaufort), Mount Alexander, Smythesdale, Pleasant Creek (Stawell) and, finally, at Ballarat. And there he found Jewish services had begun in 1854 on a gold field about to explode into a great city. He became part of that city, first as a storekeeper, later as a signpainter in Camp Street.

Nathan Spielvogel wrote this account — in much more detail — to record his father's earlier life in 'On The Road 1830-91', a story published in the *Westralian Judean*, September 1935. Samuel Herman had officiated at the marriage in the Synagogue in Barkly Street, Ballarat, on Christmas Day 1867, of Newman Spielvogel



Dana Street National School at Ballarat



The original Brimpaen School

and twenty-year-old Prussian Hanna Cohan from Choziesen. Their fourth son was Nathan Frederick, born 10 May, 1874.

In appearance he was thin and with 'not an attractive appearance' but 'volatile in spirit'. As a small boy he remembered scampering along with his parents, brothers and sisters to attend the Synagogue and a year or so after that he could recall first attending Dana Street, State School No.33; by the time he had ended his schooldays he had become a devotee of Carlyle, Ruskin and Milton. When his father died in 1891, leaving Hanna with five young children to rear, Nathan knuckled down to earn his mite to help the family. He secured appointment at Dana Street as a pupil teacher on 25 May, 1892.

Physically not strong, he tended for many years towards tubercular trouble. 'I lived in a land of unreality', he confessed, escaping whenever possible to the Mechanics Institute to read voraciously. By 1894 he had passed all his pupil teacher's exams to obtain his Certificate of Competency; also that year he became secretary of the Ballarat Chess Club and had his first short story, 'Mike Hardy's Folly', published in the *Ballarat Courier*. Forty years on he ruefully confessed to be awaiting payment still.

Time now for his stint as a country chalkie. He received instructions from the Education Department to proceed at the beginning of 1896 to take charge of part-time schools in the Wimmera, that region of great plains that stretch from the Grampian Mountains to the South Australian border and beyond. The schools were Brim Springs (later Brimpaen), twenty-six miles south of Horsham and by the foothills, and Wartook where Australia's first dam for irrigation works was being built in the heart of the Grampians. After travelling by train from Ballarat (on the western line to Adelaide) he reached Horsham where he was met by bookseller George Ryan who drove him to Brim Springs. Here accommodation had been arranged for him at the Elliott family's farm.

Next morning he found twenty children assembled in the little portable school-house in the bush, 'just as scared of me as I was of them'. His panic increased next evening when Tom Elliott explained that, come the dawn, young Eko must bestride a horse and canter off seven miles to Wartook — he had to teach two-and-a-half days at each school. Ride a horse! Impossible, the shocked young man declared, he couldn't ride a horse. *That* slight difficulty, the Elliott boys assured him, could be easily overcome; they would teach him.

'I fell off on both sides. I hugged the steed round the neck. I grabbed the mane with both hands. I bumped about in the saddle till my backside was sore. And, finally, I went over my charger's head into a puddle, to the cheers and applause of my audience'.

But he learned enough to ride to Wartook the following day. A room in a private house provided accommodation for the 'school' but before work could begin the young Head Teacher and his four pupils had to drive a large pig out of the 'school', with much yelling and beating with sticks. Back at Brim Springs, utterly exhausted that night, the young teacher-cum-mountain-horseman rolled his aching body between the blankets of his bed, only to find a large lizard sharing his leisure. Startled, and despite his muscle-weary limbs, he leapt out of bed and rushed into the kitchen in his nightshirt. The brothers, calmly playing cards by the light of a kerosene lamp, listened to his shocked voice, almost bereft of sound, and gathered that he had a lizard in his bed. 'Not to worry', they told him, 'just ignore him and he'll crawl away in the daylight'.

Having thus gleefully tormented the city youth, the Elliotts set to the task of

teaching him — how to ride properly, to hunt, to shoot, to fish and even how to play cricket with 'the feeblest team in Australia'. Never having learned to shave himself, the twenty-one year-old youth grew a great golden beard. As it lengthened and spread the Elliotts pondered the problem and found a solution; they took their hirsute young boarder down to the shed and taught him how to shear a sheep. Looking back, as an older man, Spielvogel realised how lucky he had been to have had so much fun and pleasure, for his tiny pay of thirty-five shillings a week left nothing for entertainment.

The year after the Department sent him to Lochiel Bridge, some five miles west of Dimboola which itself had developed by the Wimmera River twenty two miles down-river from Horsham and by the edge of Little Desert. At Lochiel, an old station where squatter 'Black' Cameron, famous for his whisky drinking exploits, had once lived, Spiel tried batching — 'never in the world's history was there a greater failure as a housekeeper', he concluded. Lacking books, he began writing, but lacking amusement and company, he also began tramping to Dimboola where he drank and gambled most nights. 'Dimboola was a wicked place in those days', he once said.

In 1897 the township had four hotels, Alf Warren's Dimboola Hotel being recently completed. Because the overland express from Adelaide did not reach the settlement until 2.10 am and then had to take on water for the engine, all four hotels remained open until its departure. Men played cribbage, whist and euchre in the small parlors or adjourned to the billiards rooms each pub had; they drank until their money or their thirst vanished. Single men often stayed at Dad Klow's wine shop where luscious meals cost only a shilling and the waitresses were Dad's vivacious daughters.

But despite young Eko's light sowing of wild oats at Dimb., he obtained certification as a teacher on 1 December 1897, and the following May gladly transferred to Little Snowy Creek, west of the Kiewa Valley in north-east Victoria, to escape the expensive habits he was acquiring. After the rail journey from Wodonga to Tallangatta, he pedalled his bicycle (which had no brakes), some twenty-six miles through the hills and valleys of this beautiful country to Eskdale and arrived in six hours. At James Swan's home, where he boarded in great comfort, he began writing pars., verses and yarns for the *Sydney Bulletin* and Queensland's *Steele Rudd's Magazine*, using such pen-names as N.F.S., Genung, Eko, Ato and Ahaswar. More importantly, at this stage in his life, he acquired a new outlook as a teacher.

'I had been there but a fortnight when the inspector Henry Rix called. His visit was one of the most momentous events in my life. He stayed at Swan's. After the family had gone to bed he came into my room and sat before the fire and chatted to me . . . after that talk I had a different view of my job . . . I saw how important was the work I had to do and what a crime it would be against mankind if I neglected to do my duty . . .'

He toiled not only in the school. He formed an Improvement Club which met every second Saturday night in the school where men and women of the district held debates, lectures, concerts and dances. They raised the money to begin a school and district library which possessed 500 volumes by March 1899 when young Spielvogel left. But before then Henry Rix had returned to express delight with the achievements at Little Snowy Creek and with Nathan Spielvogel as 'a skilful teacher'.

By April, Spielvogel had returned to the Wimmera to open State School No.3302, Dimboola Village Settlement, three miles up-river from the township. Seventy-eight village settlements had been opened up by the government during the mid-1890s to try to help unemployed artisans in the metropolitan area. Each man and his family had

a small block of ten acres or so on which to grow food but most men at the Dimboola Settlement also earned a meagre income by working for German settlers at nearby Kornheim or successful farmers at Dart Dart. In Dimboola, Spielvogel shunned the old gang and boarded with Mrs Collard, where also lived the Reverend Glanville Hicks, and a post office official named Comb; the three men became close friends.

During his years at Dimboola, until 1907, he also knew well and respected men such as Head Teacher Charles Harman, Robert Martindale and John Cooksley. His Jewishness, of which he never ceased to be proud, protected him from wildly patriotic young men who discovered a sudden dislike to local Germans during the Boer War. Spielvogel joined the group of young men who, with more practicality, trained every Saturday with Martini Henry rifles at the butts. One Dimboola boy, Richard Moon, a bank manager's son and later VC winner in the first world war, so admired Spiel as a teacher and as a man that he rode his horse daily from Dimboola in order to attend the Village Settlement School.

Nathan Spielvogel drew tremendous stimulus from attendance at the teachers summer school held at the University of Melbourne in 1902 at the instigation of the new driving force in Victorian education, Frank Tate. Tate's lectures on Keats and Shelley supplied great enrichment for Spielvogel's literary experience but the entire program so stirred the young bush teacher, who had never attended a training college, that he returned to the Settlement School determined to study — and succeeded. In addition to writing for the *Bulletin*, he began a series of poems published in the *School Paper*, and wrote so much for the *Dimboola Banner* that he was named as honorary sub-editor, thereby encouraging the teacher to become a writer on a much larger scale than hitherto.

Searing heat and a prolonged drought afflicted the Wimmera in 1902. Of that dreadful year, Spielvogel wrote: 'My pupils did not play at lunch time; they were too hungry. Many of them had nothing to eat but messes of pollard and treacle. If it had not been for the good work of a stout old Angel, Mrs Coffey, wife of the local policeman, many of them would have starved. For eight months no rain fell. The soil was blown from the paddocks and formed hills along the fences . . . In Horsham sheep were sold at threepence each . . .' The rain came in December and flooded out the marquee erected at the Settlement School for the Christmas concert, but the coming of the rain mattered more than the carols and gave fresh heart to the poverty stricken people. That summer Spielvogel went to stay with the Rosenthals, into which family his sister had married, and while in Melbourne, in company with fellow teacher Dugald McLachlan, met some of the writing fraternity, including Frank ('Magpie') Williamson, Ted Dyson, the Lindsays, Edward Brady and 'little Doctor Maloney'. Greatly stimulated by the medley of ideas stirred up by association with such authors and artists, Spielvogel returned to the Settlement ready to race his pen athwart thousands of pages of manuscript during 1903 — the year he gained his First Class Certificate as a teacher. But, as the deteriorating state of his health increasingly irked him and the racing pen too oft lay idle, he decided that he had no intention of dying before he had seen 'the Old World'. Resolutely, though ill, he asserted his right to his 'Wanderjahr', but The Gumsucker, as some of his local mates dubbed him, seemed unaware that, despite illness, he had a strong personal charm, his charisma in fact. Not so *les dames de Dimboola*.

One fine looking buxom lass set her cap for young Nathan and the night came when she immodestly climbed into his bed in Modesty Cottage, which he then rented. Awakened and alarmed, and his dreams of a 'wanderjahr' flashing in diminishing

strength through his turbulent mind — what use now the £125 so carefully saved? — he leapt out of bed and announced his intention of setting off to London at once.

But time and tasks to be done delayed his arrival there until mid-March 1894. He spent six ecstatic weeks in London, visiting places of literary and historical significance known previously only from books. Departing on 13 April, he spent a fortnight in Germany where he visited his mother's birthplace, Kolmar, and met her relatives and his cousins. Then to Switzerland where he fell into an argument whereby he proved that two glasses of Australian beer had more potency than twenty of the *Deutscher brew*, and ranked himself, among so many titled visitors as '*le Duc de Dimboola*'. His absurd question to an American who ceaselessly boasted of the wonders of Niagara Falls — 'But have you seen the Wimmera at Dimboola?' effectively stopped the Yank in his travelogue; one had to keep such people in their places The Gumsucker decided. He went to Rome and Naples, then found Cairo completely fascinating — some of his best writing is to be found at this part of his book. And how delighted he felt when, shown some 'extremely old manuscripts of the Scripture', he read them fluently to the guide who looked as though he could have been knocked down 'with a bit of limberger cheese'. Spielvogel arrived back in Fremantle on 1 June and made his way back to Modesty Cottage.

Throughout his journeyings he had sent long descriptive letters back to the editor of the *Dimboola Banner*, who had published them. So Wimmera folk knew what young Eko had been up to. And his endpiece, about the Village Settlement School could not fail to please: 'The little room with its fifty little folk has given me more pleasure than all the wonders I have seen. London has its Abbeys and Museums, but it has awful, grinding misery. Berlin has its palaces and galleries, but it also has its Militarism. Italy has its historic past, but also its filth and beggars. But here, the blue sky above, the spreading gums around, the innocence and the simple faith of my little people — all these have no "but" '.

The year after his return George Robertson of Melbourne published the *Banner* articles as *A Gumsucker On The Tramp*, a book by 'a backblocks State School teacher with an ambition to see the lands of the past'. In four editions, it sold more than 20,000 copies. Robertson also published, in 1907, Spielvogel's next book, *The Cocky Farmer*, which the author described as 'Sketches of School Life and farming at Sale, Stawell and the Wimmera District'. A second edition appeared in 1914. The first six chapters consist of rural tales told by 'Denny Ryan' to the author 'Fred Genung', head teacher of State School No.6754 (non-existent) near Sale. But chapters VII to XXII tell the story of people living at Wininio, a place easily identified with Pimpinio, between Horsham and Dimboola.

'It consisted . . . of an hotel, known as "the pub", a general store where everything is to be bought, and a blacksmith's shop. On the one side is the little, weather-beaten railway station and post office combined, with its pretty rows of trees and plots of flowers. On the other side is a gently sloping hill. At the foot is the wooden church that does duty for all denominations. Not far from this is the tiny hall where rural concerts and dances are held. Here, too, gather weekly the village politicians to discuss the affairs of their country. Scattered about here and there are the comfortable cottages of railway employees and wheat-buyers; while spreading to the skyline in all directions are the farm lands. On the top of the hill, at some distance from the village, yet in full view, is the little school-house'.

The story of struggling selectors is interwoven with that of the school and a young woman teacher; it includes an endearing account of Inspector William C. Johns 'ever

in his quiet way finding some good in everybody, some pleasure in everything'. Sentiment lies close to the author's pen but so does a harsh realism forced into notice by strong use of bush slang and badly expressed speech, often used for humorous effect. The book is compounded of humor and tragedy in the Rudd style. In that it also contains an unexperienced, contrived description of a charge by Australian soldiers during the Boer War, the book seems, in places, to consist of patches of earlier writings cleverly but not wholly integrated into a unified story. During 1907 Spielvogel also wrote for the Melbourne-published periodical *The Native Companion*, but this had only a brief existence. His best writing that year, the poem 'The Call of The Wandering Jew', appeared in the *Bulletin*, and in 1909 he contributed to *The Lone Hand* a story, 'Amy's Other Man'.

After leaving the Settlement, Spielvogel did relieving teaching during 1907-09 in different districts. While at Orbost late in 1908, he trained the older boys to plough, to harrow and roll the soil and assigned each of them a strip of land on which to grow vegetables. The boys' exhibit of these in the local show caused the district Agricultural Society and the Shire Council to finance Orbost's young farmers' exhibit at the Melbourne Show. Spiel himself had learnt rural techniques from the expert farmers of the Wimmera. During 1909 he moved to Spring Gully, Bendigo, thence, in 1911 to Longwood. That year, at the Great Synagogue, Sydney, he married Deniliquin-born Jessie Muriel Harris, daughter of Henry Harris who owned the *Hebrew Standard*; as the years passed they had three sons, Laurie, Bill and Phillip. Jessie's brother Phillip later became editor of *Aussie*, a periodical specialising in humor and first world war reminiscences, published in 1918-31. Jessie and Nathan Spielvogel made their first home at Longwood where Spiel taught through 1911 to 20 September 1914. During 1911, in addition to the pieces 'On The Road to Orbost' and 'The Breaking of The Chain', published in the October issue of *The Lone Hand*, the first draft of 'The Affair At Eureka' appeared, spread over the January-February issues. The year after that, *The Lone Hand* printed 'The Decoy Duck' in the April issue and 'Lieberie' in August.

When in 1912 Martin Hansen and Dugald McLachlan compiled *The Austral Garden of Verse*, they included Spielvogel's 'Our Gum Trees', which is quotable still:

We've seen the Red, like a thirsty king,
 Bend over the silent stream;
 We've seen the Mallee its tassels fling
 To steal of the sunset's gleam.
 The Blue's young shoots, with his leaves gray pearled,
 A cloud that has gone awry;
 The Ironbark with his limbs up-hurled
 As though he would win the sky.

The poem gave its title to a book of Spielvogel's poetry published in 1913 and which included verses from the *Bulletin*, *The Worker* and *The School Paper*. The Bread and Cheese Club edition of *Our Gum Trees and Other Verses*, edited by J.K. Moir, appeared in 1943. The original edition of forty-eight pages, printed by D.W. Paterson and distributed for the author by J. Main, bookseller of Euroa, was 'a tastefully printed booklet in brown and gold paper cover' and contained thirty-two short poems. In reviewing the book the *Education Gazette* commented that the poems had 'a manly sincerity, and they bear evidence of a genuine love for nature and for things Australian — always clearly expressed, sometimes crudely and occasionally with power — which entitle them to respect, and should confer on them a considerable measure of

popularity . . . the most striking of the poems . . . 'The Call of The Wandering Jew' . . . which describes a procession of Jewish forbears from the time of ancient Egypt down through the era of Mendelssohn, Heine and Marx, and on to the present'. The reviewer particularly commended the man who 'after long wandering, can return to his bush school on the bank of the Wimmera and, in all apparent sincerity, thus apostrophize the stream:

Silent river 'neath the gum trees,
Where I had my nest;
All the world I sought for pleasure,
You I seek for rest,
Beauteous Rhinelands, fertile Nilelands,
Torrents born on Gothard's crest —
Silent river 'neath the gum trees,
You I love the best!

Being happily settled at Longwood, where officialdom praised the 'Splendid educational atmosphere' at his school, Spielvogel also spent part of 1913 gathering together a series of essays and anecdotes about the places in Victoria he had visited since 1909. George Robertson published this new book, *The Gumsucker At Home*, in 1913 and had to run off a second printing before year's end. From experiences at Korrumburra, Orbost, Foster, Melbourne, Ballarat, Warrnambool, Koroit, Doncaster, Castlemaine and Beechworth, the author finds humor and historical detail mid his memories. His ability as an evocative writer is apparent, e.g., he catches the charm and background story of Koroit settlement deftly and with practised ease.

He became Head Teacher at Mitcham one month after the first world war broke out. Then a small village with a minimum of facilities except for a competing pair of wine shanties, Mitcham nevertheless had 120 children attending the school, but they came chiefly from the surrounding orchards. Although he wondered about it, Spielvogel found no anti-German feeling current in the district. Officially and deservedly Spiel won commendation for his work at Mitcham where he proved to be a teacher 'of outstanding ability' who had a 'fine influence' on the children. His 'cultural taste' also drew approval. After spending the years 1919-23 at Wangaratta, he swooped on the chance to secure the headship of Dana Street, Ballarat, which he had known as a little boy, in a bluestone building erected in 1856 as a National School. He took up duty there in April, 1924 with a clear policy — the development of character had greater importance than teaching all the requirements of a fixed curriculum.

The children came first, his own three sons and those at the school, but he soon found a host of tasks descending upon him. The synagogue needed his help; he planned a monthly article for the *Teachers Journal*, written under the pseudonym of 'Old Eko'; he wanted to explore his birthplace, discover its history and write about it. In truth, the year 1924 marked the beginning of a time of great and lasting endeavour for his native city. His *Journal* articles drew plenty of favorable comments. On 11 December Melbourne *Punch* published his whimsical piece 'The Day of His Life'. Next year he plunged into research for the Jubilee Reunion of Dana Street as a State School, 1876-1926. He and H.P. Jones were the secretaries who planned the reunion at which Sir Alexander Peacock was the speaker. Spielvogel's paper 'Fifty Years At Dana Street' appeared in the *Ballarat Courier* on 12 December 1926 and the same year his 'History of Ballarat Hebrew Congregation' based on material he had earlier supplied to the *Hebrew Standard* and the *Australian Jewish Herald* was privately circulated.

His indefatigable searching for evidence and half-forgotten memories of Ballarat's early history plus his writings in the *Courier* began to create an awareness of the need to preserve history, not neglect it. The Ballarat Old Colonists Society, active during 1886-1894, had assembled a small collection of documents and other items but Spielvogel, in emphasising their achievement, insisted that much more could be done.

He revised and updated his Eureka articles of 1911 and had these published in booklet form during 1928 by John Fraser & Son of Albert St, Ballarat. *The Affair At Eureka* sold six editions, the sixth in 1945 being issued by the Bread and Cheese Club, Melbourne. This club of writers, artists and booklovers, led by the Knight Grand Cheese, John Kinmont Moir, a successful Melbourne business executive, gave active support to Spielvogel's literary and historical interests and advised its Fellows of his work. His *History of the Ballarat Mechanics Institute* (which originated in April 1859), though completed as a 100-page handwritten document in 1929, does not appear to have ever been published, the Institute Committee being handed the single original copy. Spielvogel served as Institute President in 1931 and 1943.

Major success attended publication by Angus & Robertson in December 1930 of *Old Eko's Notebook*, a collection of his *Teachers Journal* writings. James McRae, reviewing it in the *Education Gazette* in the following January, commended the writer's 'enthusiasm for history (which) means the crowding out of the lesson that should follow, for his steadfast faith in the real values of education, for his own overflowing love of his fellow men and particularly of children'. And teachers loved 'Old Eko', a composite creation borrowing some of Spielvogel's philosophy of life and love of books and gardens but enclosing also endearing traits — both weaknesses and strengths — of some of his colleagues. The fourth edition of the *Notebook* appeared in 1931. That year, too, he wrote the story 'Flummery' for the March issue of the *Westralian Judean* and wrote his autobiography up-to-date. Typed and bound, the latter had subsequent entries pasted in and a section added in 1941-49. The first part of this manuscript was published in the *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal*, Sydney, December 1964 but the remainder has not been sighted by me, nor its whereabouts known.

On 17 July, 1933 Nathan Frederick Spielvogel was elected Foundation President of the newly formed Ballarat Historical Society which took over the collection of museum items assembled by the Ballarat Old Colonists Society. This collection formed the nucleus of the Ballarat Historical Museum which Spielvogel cared for and nurtured for the next twenty-two years. First housed in Ballarat East Town Hall, the museum had to be moved to Dana Street School, thence to the Library in Camp Street, then to Ballarat East Library in Barkly Street; by the 1980s the greatly expanded collection was being cared for at Sovereign Hill. Through a series of fifty-five talks broadcast by 3BA during 1937-38, Spielvogel created lively interest in the Society and the Museum and followed this by publishing in the *Ballarat Courier* during 1937-40, nineteen lists under the title 'Peeps Into The Museum', which literally formed a catalogue of its contents. During 1935, in association with the Ballarat Centenary Celebrations Executive, the Society, under Spielvogel's guidance, erected tablets on historic buildings and obelisks at historic sites as well as organising numerous pilgrimages on anniversary occasions. The Executive prepared for 1935 a 128-page book, chiefly chronological in its record of events but also setting forth an account of the contemporary scene. Released under the title *Ballarat Centenary Home-Coming Celebrations*, in March 1935, the book doubtless owed much to Spielvogel but is not clear which parts of it he wrote personally.

To the *Westralian Judean* he contributed in 1935 three pieces: 'Jerusalem Has Fallen—79 AD', 'In Gay Seville—1556' and 'On The Road 1830-91', his father's story as already related. The *Judean* also published his 'The Beginning of Things, A Story of Yom Kippur' in September 1938. In the following year, on 11 May, Head Teacher Nathan Spielvogel, assessed as 'outstanding in every way', retired at the age of sixty-four from the Education Department of Victoria — officially, that is, for he worked as a temporary Head Teacher to 9 October, 1940. His home at that period was 10 Exeter Street, Ballarat. Retirement from teaching school simply gave him more time for teaching the community. Somehow he acquired a kind of headquarters in a room above the Music Library in Camp Street; here he researched and wrote local history and dealt with his multifarious duties. Elected President of the Philanthropic Society in 1938, he held the post until his death. He was a long-time President of the Ballarat Chess Club and, of course, gave all the drive and impetus to the Historical Society and Museum. In 1939, with the outbreak of war, he became President of the Dad's Association. In the late 1930s he also toiled to help the Bush Fire Relief Fund and became President of the Pioneer Memorial Fund. Requests for his services as lecturer (unpaid) for the A.N.A., Rotary, the Educational Advancement Association, the Dorcas Society, Apex and other groups poured in. When Rev. Mandlebaum died in 1941, Spielvogel, assisted by others of the congregation, conducted the services at the synagogue until 1953. He also officiated, when asked, at Jewish funeral services. His poem 'The Call of the Wandering Jew' was separately printed as a leaflet souvenir of the Australian Art and Literature Exhibition in Melbourne during 1940.

Although I never met Spiel personally, he and I were Fellows of the Bread and Cheese Club which met in a variety of locations, the best known being the bookshop of Mr Australiana, Jack Moir; its large area was crammed and stacked with books and original paintings but all these comprised Jack's personal library, for the shop at No.474 Bridge Road, Richmond, sold nothing. Fellow Spielvogel had the distinction of being one who contributed to the first issue of the Club's journal, *Bohemia*, in April 1940; he was represented by a short story 'The Good Ad'.

Spiel's diaries contain numerous references to Moir who gave so much assistance to the establishment of the Adam Lindsay Gordon Cottage in the Gardens; Spiel served on the cottage committee. In 1942 he made the long journey to Melbourne to hear Peter Russo address the Fellows on the subject of Japan, for all three of the Spielvogel boys were in the services during the second world war. He noted with delight in his diary that all three were safely home and his family all together for Christmas 1945. But to return to 1942.

On 25 January he completed a paper for the Historical Society 'The Newspapers of Ballarat'; in April the *Westralian Judean* printed his story 'Mr Bronstein Earns His Lesson, A Story of the 1914-18 War'; and in September he wrote his piece 'The Streets of Ballarat' (given as a lecture to the Society on 10 February next. He visited the hospital to teach 'my four unfortunates' who were unable to attend school normally and, at home, he regularly taught Hebrew to a small group of Jewish boys. On 13 April he had lectured to the A.N.A. on 'Forty Minutes to Cairo'. Two Americans were billeted at the Spielvogel home as from 1942. The billet money usefully supplemented his small pension for practically all the tasks he carried out for the Ballarat community were in an honorary capacity. He felt honoured to conduct the Seder Service in the Hall of the Synagogue on 1 April when one hundred people, including numerous American servicemen, attended. On 22 October The City Council invited him to be a guest at a civic reception to Professor G.S. Browne of

the School of Education, University of Melbourne. Strangely, he does not mention in the diaries still existent that, in 1944, Ballarat Rotary Club had a plaque erected in the city to honor him. It read thus: 'This tablet is a tribute to Nathan F. Spielvogel Esq. in appreciation of the valuable historical information he has compiled and presented to the Citizens of Ballarat'. But his influence extended far beyond that City. Thus on 31 May, 1943 he lectured at Geelong on 'Historical Museums'. His reputation as an author, public speaker and historian spread widely and brought well-known people of the period to Ballarat to talk with him, men such as Moir, Howlett Ross, Ron Testro, Alan Marshall, poet John Thomson from the A.B.C., and writer J.K. Ewers from Western Australia. However, the extraordinary load of commitments that the aging man had accumulated finally stopped him in mid-course. On 17 August 1943, 'in much pain', he had to be taken to hospital where he underwent two operations that year. No diary entries occurred between 16 September and early April 1944. His seventieth birthday on 10 May he celebrated at a school where the Principal came 'before the class and congratulated me'. At home his nimble pen raced on again telling the story of the School of Mines; he 'fixed up' a book *Parodies for Pedagogues*, then began a history of Ballarat and 'got ready *Affair at Eureka for A. & R.*' On 8 June he enjoyed meeting Howlett Ross at the George Hotel. 'Spent afternoon with him. Had some dog's nose at Craig's' (Hotel). On 1 December he received his last pay — £6 10s — for teaching at 'College', but failed to mention which college he had been employed at. The entry on Eureka is interesting because the 1945 edition, which also contained his poem 'Eureka', emanated from the Bread and Cheese Club. It is worth noting that Spielvogel doubted the authenticity of the Eureka flag in the Ballarat Art Gallery. When the book came out he hawked copies to Ballarat booksellers.

He took Jessie to see the musical *Kismet* but felt disappointed — 'not nearly as good as Oscar Asche's show'. On 26 September he wrote: 'Spent day in bed. Not a bit ill but . . . weary of life and everything'. However, with the boys back from the war in December he brightened up again. Late in 1946 he became very involved with Harry Watt's making of the film *Eureka Stockade* — he and Watt travelled as far afield as Rokewood seeking an appropriate site for filming. Author Rex Rienits came to see him and seek information. Spielvogel lectured on the 1854 troubles and gave a talk on 3BA.

His wife went to Melbourne on 16 December to see two of her sons married but her husband did not go; the boys had married 'out' (of the Jewish faith). Then, on 20 May 1947, Phillip also married out and the old man stayed alone. Despite 'giddy turns' — 'Reminds me of days when I ate strong drink' — he continued to lecture at various service clubs, conducted regular religious services, broadcast from 3BA, and wrote for the *Courier*, where Pantou was editor, and also for the *Age*. He conducted Jewish burial services (there being no minister) and, sadly, one in August had to be for his brother Frederick. In September the Ballarat Hebrew congregation re-elected him as their President. Next month the Maryborough Odd Volumes Club entertained him royally after his address to members on Eureka.

Entries in the 1949 diary indicate a reconciliation between father and sons had taken place, as evidenced in such remarks as 'Bill's son amused us all the time', 'played with Peter all the afternoon', and the note that Phillip ('Pip') had also become a father. On 11 April Old Eko wrote: 'Thank God for 10 happy years of retirement. Went to Dana and had a fine welcome', summing up on 16 May — 'My 75th birthday. It's been a grand experience'. However, he introduced an unexpected note on 30 September,

1950: 'Life seems no good. Am longing for death. God! Give me this boon quickly'. His last story appeared in the *Jewish Herald*, 23 September, 1955. L.E. Fredman, then Secretary of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, Victorian Branch, collated a selection of Spielvogel's 'short stories dealing with Jewish life in old Ballarat, his home town, which have appeared regularly in the Jewish press and have contributed greatly to the self-expression and self respect of Australian Jewry'. John Gartner of Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, published a limited edition of *Selected Short Stories of Nathan Spielvogel* in 1956. Only 250 books were printed but Old Eko never saw them.

Early in 1956, practically house-bound as an invalid, he recorded the last months intermittently in his diary. Thus, on 21 January he wrote: 'Had a miserable day; feel that I have finished with a happy life'; and on 20 February: 'Feel myself gradually slipping. Will not be sorry to end my days'. Nevertheless, he still managed to be taken by car to meetings of the Historical Society and to the synagogue where, on 31 March, he proudly listened to his grandson Peter reading the prayers. His last diary entry of 15 April read: 'Did not get up till 5 o'clock. Felt no good. Quiet night before the fire'.

And in the flames perhaps he saw again that other fire, glowing brightly in his room at Little Snowy Creek where he began his career as an Australian author and listened excitedly to Henry Rix's quiet voice telling of the wonders education could achieve . . . He died 10 September 1956, aged eighty-two.

* * * * *

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