

# Australian Jewish Historical Society

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CONTENTS	PAGE
<b>FOREWORD</b> (By His Excellency, the Right Honourable Sir Zelman Cowen, Governor-General of Australia, P.C., A.K., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., K.St.J., Q.C.) . . . . .	182
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> . . . . .	184
<b>THE CANBERRA JEWISH COMMUNITY</b> (By Rabbi Israel Porush, O.B.E., Ph.D.) . . . . .	186

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Australian Jewish Historical Society

JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

THE CANBERRA  
JEWISH COMMUNITY  
(1951-1981)

## THE CANBERRA JEWISH COMMUNITY (1951-1981)

*by Rabbi Israel Porush, O.B.E., Ph.D.*

### FOREWORD

*by*

*His Excellency, the Right Honourable Sir Zelman Cowen,  
Governor-General of Australia, P.C., A.K., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O.,  
K.St.J., Q.C.*

Canberra is a national capital, specially chosen and designed to serve this purpose. It has, therefore, attracted a distinctive population. Its Jewish population reflects that character; it is small, quite distinctive in its occupations, certainly in the case of many of its members. Rabbi Porush says that there were only four Jews in the Australian Capital Territory in 1933. If the census was complete, it means that the vice-regal couple, Sir Isaac and Lady Isaacs, accounted for half of the Jewish population. I think I can lay claim to another distinction in having a son young enough to have celebrated his Barmitzvah at Government House, Canberra, after a service in the Centre.

The small Jewish population in Canberra in the immediate post-war years felt the need for a community organisation, and Rabbi Porush in these pages gives an account of its establishment, thirty years ago last year, and of its subsequent history. It owes much to the commitment of men and women who have led it and served it over these years. I am pleased to see that my Official Secretary, David Smith, who has served three Governors-General in this capacity, has earned an honourable mention from Rabbi Porush for his service to the community.

Then, last year, we also celebrated the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the Canberra Community Centre. Sited as it is in the national capital, there were notions of a Centre which might serve national purposes. What has emerged has been a comparatively modest Centre to serve a variety of Canberra community needs, and it is appropriate to acknowledge the generosity of Australian Jews from outside the national capital whose support for the enterprise made it possible to build the Centre. Rabbi Porush gives an account of issues relating to the holding of religious services, which raised problems and caused delays. May I say, with my own background particularly in mind, that it is pleasing to know that Jews from an orthodox and from a liberal background come together after some services for common social activities within the Centre.

I was pleased to read Rabbi Porush's account of the late L. M. Goldman's proffering of a pound note (an ancient Australian currency measure) as payment for the first brick of a Canberra community centre. L. M. Goldman taught me my *parsha* and later led me through the steps which any Barmitzvah boy must follow when he is called to the Law on that special day. I remember him well, and I am pleased to know of his association with this community.



*Sir Zelman Cowen.*

*(Sketch by courtesy of the artist and the Friends of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra).*

Finally let me acknowledge Rabbi Porush's own contributions over the years to the Canberra Jewish community, and these he records in these pages. I also thank him for undertaking the demanding task of researching and writing these chapters in the life of the Canberra and Australian Jewish communities.

My wife, my family and I thank the members of the community for their kindness and welcome to us.

## JOURNAL OF PROCEEDINGS

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*The Society does not hold itself responsible for statements made or opinions expressed by authors of the papers published in this Journal.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Canberra Jewish Community in the year (1981) celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of its foundation and the tenth anniversary of the opening of the National Community Centre. It is a moment when it is opportune to halt for a while in order to survey the road already traversed and to contemplate the journey that still lies ahead.

Such a study has also a historical value: It perpetuates for future generations yet another heroic story of a small, remote group of Jews in the midst of a vast empty continent trying to unite in the sacred purpose of building a sanctuary to the glory of the God of Israel and a home for its ancient heritage.

The Australian Jewish Historical Society, founded in 1938, is dedicated to the study of Australian Jewish history in all its ramifications, big or small, alive or defunct, and to the recording of the events which created and sustained Jewish life in the Australian environment. The Society welcomes the not inconsiderable number of biographies and congregational histories which have appeared in recent years. They have enriched our self-knowledge and our culture.

The Society, moreover, has published in its Journal an impressive array of monographs about personalities, congregations and institutions which fill the annals of our communities, thereby keeping alive, or bringing to life, a history which would otherwise have sunk into oblivion.

Among such monographs we find the histories of smaller communities which have disappeared from the map after a flash of life with little more than dilapidated gravestones, or written-up memories, having survived. To name but a few: Ballarat, Bendigo, Goulburn, Kalgoorlie, Launceston, Maitland, Shepparton, Toowoomba and others. We owe it to our forebears to "remember the days of old" and to pay tribute to their work, which has set the course to our own experience.

But it is equally important to record the unfinished histories of living communities before their records and memories have disappeared, as has regrettably happened with more than one congregation.

The Society recently decided to publish the histories of three smaller congregations: Canberra, South Coast and Surfers Paradise, and it is my privilege to attempt a history of the Canberra Community to mark its thirtieth anniversary.

Thirty years is not a long time measured by the scales of Jewish history, but in our young country it is a milestone worth a pause. If the history of the Canberra Community is not exciting, it is certainly interesting and, in a

way, unique. The Community is alive and growing, even though its prognosis may be blurred.

Canberra is unique among the capital cities of Australia, and the Jewish Community of Canberra bears a character which is singular among the Jewish Communities of the Commonwealth.

It is the aim of this study to relate in brief the story of the birth and development of the Canberra Jewish Community and its National Centre, and to pay tribute to its pioneers and faithful servants who laboured heroically in difficult conditions to preserve Judaism for the present and for future generations.

I wish to acknowledge my thanks for the assistance given to me by Rev. E. Belfer, Dr. M. Doobov, Mr. W. Rieder, Mr. R. Webb and Mr. T. Whitgob.

Sources: Annual Reports, Minute Books and correspondence of the community, the monthly "Hamerkaz", "Australian Jewish Times" and interviews.

## THE CANBERRA JEWISH COMMUNITY

*by Rabbi Israel Porush, O.B.E., Ph.D.*

### CANBERRA THE CAPITAL OF AUSTRALIA

When at the end of the nineteenth century, after protracted conventions in which, in passing, several Jewish citizens — Sir Isaac Isaacs of Victoria, Sir Julian Salomons of New South Wales, Vaiben L. Solomon of South Australia, and Elias Solomon of Western Australia — played a worthy part, the six sovereign Australian States resolved to federate in a united Commonwealth, one of the major issues was the selection of a suitable site for a federal capital.

It was agreed, that the capital should be in the New South Wales zone and not far from the Victorian border. Several sites in N.S.W. were considered, and in 1908 the choice fell on the enclave, or territory, now designated as “Australian Capital Territory” (ACT) on the Molonglo River. The area, comprising some 2340 square kilometres, was ceded to the Commonwealth, and its development ever since has been a federal responsibility.

The name “Canberra” was borrowed from a small squatters’ settlement in the area called “Canberry” or “Canbury”, believed to be a derivation from an Aboriginal word meaning “meeting place”. Indeed, its destiny was to rally all Australians and forge them into one nation. Canberra was to be a planned model metropolis of beauty and dignity, a new Washington, without losing its rural landscape.

A worldwide competition for the plan of the new capital was advertised in 1911, and the winning submission was that of the well-known American town-planner Walter Burley Griffin. Construction began soon after but was interrupted by the First World War. In the meantime, the temporary seat of the Australian Government and Parliament was located in Melbourne where most of the administrative departments were situated.

In 1927 the “temporary” Australian Parliament at the base of Capital Hill was opened, and the seat of Government and, gradually, its ministries and departments were transferred to Canberra, causing an upsurge of immigration and a spectacular growth of the population. In 1921 the ACT had a population of 2572, in 1933 and in 1947 the figures were 8947 and 16905 respectively. The contingent of public servants grew rapidly and dominantly. Over a half of the working population were employed by governmental agencies.

The Griffin plan laid emphasis on spaciousness, grace and restfulness. The plan was later substantially varied to include, beside the economic and administrative foci, several satellite towns around the city separated by parks, thereby spreading out the population and retaining the garden image of the capital. Public buildings, prestigious structures, monuments, a majestic lake, parks and tourist attractions, as well as housing projects, dotted the Territory, but all were under the strict control of the planning authority.

Canberra, equipped with the generous supplies of the Federal Government, developed rapidly also as a model cultural centre with the creation of higher institutes of learning, such as the Australian National

University (ANU), the National Library, the War Memorial, the Academy of Science, Duntroon Military College, Stromlo Observatory, the Canberra Theatre Centre, and research schools in medicine and other fields. Many academics and post-graduate students from Australia and overseas, and later also undergraduates, flocked to Canberra as permanent or temporary residents. Canberra has a higher percentage of tertiary educated people than any other city; it is cosmopolitan as the diplomatic centre of the land and, at the same time, class-conscious and somewhat artificial.

As a commercial centre Canberra cannot compete with the large State metropolises, but as a focus of politics and power it has developed gracefully and impressively as befits the metropolis of a continent. In spite of its shortcomings as a national centre, it is bound to grow in numbers and in eminence.

### **THE GENESIS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY**

All this has a definite bearing on the character of the Jewish Community of Canberra. The composition of the Community reflects the general pattern of the Territory. Few are professionals or businessmen. The vast majority are public servants, academics or students. It is by no means a rich community. It is somewhat transient, like the rest of the population, although a core population is beginning to emerge. Most of the Jewish residents have come late in the day to Canberra. According to the census there were only four Jews in the ACT in 1933, but in 1947 and 1954 the numbers had grown to 26 and 54 respectively. (See Table A.)

The early Jewish settlers in the ACT — the first known Jewish couple being probably Mr. and Mrs. Nat. Lipman (1937) — were too few and too isolated to generate organised Jewish life in the city. The absence of religious and educational facilities made it difficult for observant Jews to settle in Canberra, and if settled to remain there. There were a few older, scattered Jewish families in the wider area around ACT, such as Goulburn, Yass, Queanbeyan, Cooma, and the coastal region in the south, but they



*David Smith, Earle Hoffman, Rabbi N. Schlesinger, Rabbi Porush, H.S. Goldstein, W.M. Lippmann on the site granted by the Government to the Canberra Community for a synagogue (1962).*

were mostly estranged from the synagogue and all too often had married out of their faith.

It was also clear that some of the Jews in the ACT deliberately chose to stay away from their co-religionists. They sought anonymity rather than Jewish identification. They preferred assimilation to Jewish survival. Moreover, most of the single newcomers who found work in ACT tended to move to the larger capitals after a time. In other words, it was a "fragile nucleus".

How do we explain this phenomenon? The remnants of the Holocaust may be divided into two categories: Those who concluded that the Jews had enough of persecution as a minority. They had lost faith in God and in themselves as Jews. The only solution to the perennial "Jewish problem" was to give up one's distinctive identity and submerge in the majority.

There were others, especially those who stemmed from the great centres of Jewish life in Eastern and Central Europe who, on the contrary, were determined to continue to fight with passion for the right to live as Jews, unmolested and unhampered — preferably in one's own homeland in Israel — and to try to salvage, and to recreate in their new settlements, the values, the traditions, the ideals and the way of life which their arch enemies had tried to destroy in their native lands. The answer to Hitler was not to complete his work by deserting the Jewish people, but rather by mobilising their spiritual and moral forces for the reconstruction of Jewish life and learning in the communities where they had found refuge and peace.

It was this spirit that brought about in the post-Holocaust years the remarkable revival of Jewish life, religious, cultural and social, in Australia, as is reflected, for instance, in the trebling of the number of congregations in the country, the creation of a spectacular chain of Jewish day schools in the larger communities, the establishment of Yeshivot (Talmudical Colleges) in Melbourne and Sydney, the strengthening of Jewish institutional life in every direction, the upsurge of faith in the Zionist ideal, the emergence of a virile Jewish youth movement, and the many other manifestations of the will to live. The mass immigration concentrated on Sydney and Melbourne, yet all other communities were vitally affected by this revival.

By the late 1940s Canberra had a small nucleus of conscious Jews, mostly brought up in the larger communities in Australia and abroad and unwilling to be lost in their isolated position, who needed but a gentle push to move towards organising themselves in a Jewish group. That impetus came in 1949 from Rabbi Israel Porush of the Great Synagogue, Sydney. After a conversation he had with some Canberra residents, notably Miss Dorly Schiff, a social worker of German origin who had expressed concern over the future of the Jews in the ACT, Rabbi Porush on the occasion of his next visit to the capital arranged to meet some of the Jewish residents with a view to forming a congregation in Canberra. The status of the Senior Rabbi of the mother congregation of Australian Jewry produced a helpful response.

Rabbi Porush's contacts with and interest in the Jews of Canberra stemmed from his frequent official visits to the capital as clerical

representative of the Australian Jewish Community at official functions, such as the Opening of Parliament, Royal visits, State receptions, and the annual citizenship conventions introduced by Mr. Arthur A. Calwell, Minister of Immigration, in 1947.

The War had glaringly driven home to the Australian people the dangers which a sparsely populated Australia faced in the midst of an overcrowded, under-developed region. The prejudice against non-British immigration, which had determined Australia's policy for decades, melted away in the face of the stark realities.

Mr. Calwell initiated a more liberal policy of immigration and a better deal for the newcomers, and concerned himself profoundly with the problem of the absorption of migrants into Australian society. At the Conventions "old" and "new" Australians, as well as representatives of organisations interested in the welfare of migrants, met to exchange views on, and to propose methods for, the promotion of the migrants' welfare.

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry (Mr. S. D. Einfeld), the Australian Jewish Welfare Society (Mr. Walter Brand and Mr. Walter Lippmann), and the Jewish Ministry, were regularly invited to send delegates. These delegates often took the opportunity to meet the local Jewish residents socially. Rabbi Porush, as President of the Association of Jewish Ministers in Australia and New Zealand, attended most of the Conventions and thus was able to be in touch with the small but growing band of Jews in the capital.

The Conventions continued to the late 1950s, and so did the consequent contacts. On a few occasions the group invited Rabbi Porush to conduct ad hoc services, or to deliver lectures on Jewish topics. Equally significant was, in the opposite direction, the participation of some of the Canberra leaders in the conferences and deliberations held in other capitals.

The time had come for the Jews of Canberra to organise themselves into a congregation. The informal meeting at the home of Dr. O. Beran, a migrant from Czechoslovakia, at the end of 1949, at which Rabbi Porush, after intoning the Maariv Service (probably the first of its kind in Canberra) addressed an extremely receptive few, planted the seed of the idea of creating a Jewish congregation in the capital. The atmosphere was one of "friendliness and brotherhood", and all present were united that it was imperative to try to organise the Jews of the ACT for common action.

The prime motivation was undoubtedly the preservation of the resident families from disintegration, for the danger of their dissolution was very real. The enthusiasm evinced augured well for the future, and preparatory work commenced soon after.

The inaugural meeting, the foundation meeting of the Community, was held on 1st July, 1951, in the home of Dr. Ronald and Ruth Mendelsohn, then Assistant Secretary in the Prime Minister's Department. The motion to form a congregation was unanimously adopted. Dr. Mendelsohn was elected first President of the congregation. Present were also Mr. Earle and Anne Hoffman, Mr. Kurt Gottlieb, Mr. Ernie and Nina Horton, Mr. N. Lipman and Mrs. Irma Starke, who became honorary secretary. They were possessed of the spirit of pioneers, and the immediate task was to identify

the Jews of the ACT and to organise them.

The first public Service (apart from one ad hoc Friday night Service in August) was held on Yom Kippur 1951. There was no one in Canberra competent to conduct the rather demanding Services on this the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. Rabbi Porush persuaded Mr. S. Waldberg, a refugee from Germany who had settled in Sydney, to act as Chazan (Cantor) on this occasion. He performed the same Services competently in subsequent years. A Sepher Torah (Scroll) was obtained from the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation. For some years the Services were confined to the major festivals, yet when a Minyan was required for a Yahrzeit (Anniversary of Death) to say Kaddish, the necessary quorum of ten worshippers could always be mustered. The first communal Seder (Passover Home Service) was held in 1954 at the Congregational Church Hall. It was quite an experience for the ladies — all was “ad hoc”.

An excellent spirit pervaded the worshipping community at that historic Yom Kippur. All were delighted at being together, and all were eager to go forward. The need for fellowship was great, even though, or perhaps because the numbers were small.

It was agreed that the Services of the new congregation would be conducted on traditional lines, and that the orthodox Siddur and Machzor were to be the standard prayer-books of the congregation. The contacts then were solely with the orthodox rabbinate. There were some in the congregation who came from a Liberal background, or were inclined to seek “reforms” in the Services, such as the introduction of English prayers and mixed seating, but everybody understood that the predominant will of the congregation was to follow the traditional customs, that only traditional Judaism could gather under its flag the diverse elements of the Community, and that nothing should be done which could preclude an orthodox Jew from worshipping there.

The Committee found it extremely difficult to follow up the contact established and to involve the rank and file in the affairs of the congregation the year round. Most stood aside. Some consciously estranged themselves from the community. Only few had a religious urge to assemble regularly with fellow-Jews in worship. And so for some years only festival Services were held, and on Shabbat only on special occasions, such as the celebration of a Barmitzvah. The first Barmitzvah was celebrated in May 1953, when Mr. Max Nurock, Minister of Israel, visited Canberra and addressed the congregation.

In 1952 Chief Rabbi (later Sir) Israel Brodie visited Australia as part of a pastoral tour to some of the communities of the “United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth” which formed the realm of his jurisdiction. He visited all States and came also to Canberra. He called on the Governor-General and the Prime Minister, and at the same time he met with and lectured to the Jewish Community, and was invited to consecrate the Jewish section of the new cemetery in Woden.

## **THE PIONEERS**

Dr. Ronald Mendelsohn occupied the office of President of the

congregation for four terms (1951-55) and was followed by Mr. Earle Hoffman for one year (1955-56), both holding high positions in the public service. In passing: The senior Jewish public servant in Canberra was Mr. Sam Landau C.B.E., who came from Melbourne. He held many high positions, such as Secretary of the Department of the Navy and Head of the Australian Defence Staff at the Australian Embassy in Washington. While he had less time for the affairs of the Jewish Community, Mrs. Landau, was for some time active in the National Council of Jewish Women.

The 1950s were important formative years, and the Community was fortunate in having those two gentlemen as leaders in the initial stages. They were highly respected inside and outside the Community, and they laboured faithfully for the progress of the Community. Conditions demanded of them not only to steer the Committee of Management in the forward direction, but also to perform personal services in the maintenance of the congregation. Both belong now to the Board of Founders of the Jewish Community Centre.

Dr. Mendelsohn was born in Sydney and graduated at Sydney University and at the London School of Economics. He served at Australia House in London and became in 1956 Assistant Secretary in the Prime Minister's Department. He was sent to Iran on an advisory mission, and to India and Indonesia as a member of a United Nations Aid Mission. He occupied many responsible public positions overseas and was appointed Public Service Research Fellow at the Australian National University in 1975. He is the author of several books on social welfare. In 1979 he was awarded the O.B.E. His wife, Ruth, born in Germany and educated in Sydney, was in her own right a dedicated worker for the Canberra Community. The Mendelsohns suffered a tragic loss in the untimely demise of their young daughter.

Dr. Mendelsohn expressed disappointment with many of his co-religionists in Canberra, especially the migrants, who failed to identify themselves with the nascent community but apparently tried to hide their Jewishness in their new homeland. Happily, this did not apply to all. Some of the refugees were thoroughly conscious of their Jewish identity and duty and anxious to associate with the aims of the Community, for instance, by helping to form a Minyan on Shabbat.

Dr. Mendelsohn went out of his way, as President of the Congregation and as a public servant, to find positions for the newcomers. He was in contact with the Jewish Welfare Society, and since employment conditions in Canberra were, in those days of growth, rather favourable, he was able to place quite a few newcomers in jobs. He would collect them from the trains and place them in migrant hostels. He was never again President, but he was always among the interested members, an "elder statesman", and his dedication to the Community never abated.

Mr. Earle Hoffman, born in Melbourne and educated in Brisbane, was a brilliant student at high school, and a graduate of Queensland and Iowa State Universities. He served in the Departments of Agriculture and Trade, reaching in 1971 the position of Assistant Secretary in the Department of

Primary Industry. His persistent work for the Community from its inception was for him and his active wife Anne a labour of love. He not only led the Community during difficult phases; he also made himself a true servant of the Community whenever the need arose, in the synagogue and in contacts with other organisations.

He often represented Canberra Jewry at various Jewish conferences and was a prime mover in interesting the other Australian Communities in the National Centre project. He was re-elected President in 1959 to 1962 and again in 1964 to 1967, serving in all seven terms as leader of the Community. Anne Hoffman, as the wife of the President and in her own leadership among the women, made a notable contribution to the development of the Community.

Their son-in-law, Dr. David Rosalky, now (1981) Senior Private Secretary of Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, is one of the younger generation who has served the Community.

In 1979 the Hoffmans, who were made honorary life members of the Community, left for London where Earle is serving on a three-year appointment as Agricultural Counsellor at the Australian High Commission. Mendelsohn and Hoffman may be described as the foremost leaders of Canberra Jewry of their generation.

Three more leaders in the formative phase of the Community deserve special mention by dint of their single-minded devotion to its development: Dr. Eugene Peter Graf, Mr. Kurt Gottlieb and Mr. Ernest Horton.

The man who followed Hoffman as President of the synagogue (1956-1959) was Dr. Eugene Peter Graf, a lawyer from an assimilated background in Germany, who integrated well in the traditional congregation. It was Dr. Graf who drafted the Constitution of the Community and strongly advocated its incorporation to facilitate the acquisition of property, for he was a persistent promoter of the idea of the Communal Centre. The incorporation was effected in 1958.

When at a General Meeting in 1957 pessimistic views were uttered about the viability of the Community and the advisability of proceeding with the grand project of the National Centre, Dr. Graf came out with an optimistic prognosis and an account of the progress already made. He stressed that the religious factor will always have to be the core of any place the Community may wish to build. He was highly respected for his integrity. Unfortunately, he passed away in 1965, long before the Community Centre became a reality.

Mr. Kurt Gottlieb and Mr. Ernie Horton were, like the previously mentioned leader, newcomers to Australia — from Czechoslovakia and Germany respectively — and not from particularly observant backgrounds. They came from the great centres of Jewish life which lay in ruin and considered it their sacred duty to identify with their fellow-Jews everywhere and to help lay the foundations of a rallying point in the pleasant refuge they had found.

The national ideal of Zionism and the love for Israel were in the forefront of their motivations. Mr. Gottlieb, who arrived in Australia in 1940, worked until his retirement as an astronomer at the Stromlo

Observatory. He was President of the Community in 1962-64. Supported by his Australian wife Isley, who sincerely adopted her husband's ideas, he implanted the Zionist concept into the hearts of their children both of whom were outstandingly active as disciples and later as leaders and teachers in the youth movement of the capital, Betar. Miriam eventually went on Aliyah, and has established her family in Israel.

Mr. Gottlieb was invited by the University of Tel Aviv to assist with the establishment of the first professional astronomical observatory at Mitzpeh Ramon in 1970, which he re-visited as a visiting Professor. Mr. and Mrs. Gottlieb, a most hospitable couple, were made honorary life members of the Community in 1978.

Mr. Ernest and Nina Horton, who arrived in Canberra in 1959, have been among the constant practical workers for the Centre and for Israel, whether in relation to the United Israel Appeal or to Israeli institutions which needed help. There were few Jewish business men in Canberra; Mr. Horton and Mr. Norman Stanton belonged to this category, and both became prominently and actively involved in the affairs of the Community. Mr. Stanton occupied the position of Treasurer of the Community.

Mr. Gottlieb and Mr. Horton were true stalwarts among the small band of people who in spite of much apathy and many obstacles persisted in their resolve to build a sanctuary and a meeting place for the homeless budding Community. Both occupied the position of President of the Community, the former for two years (1962-64) and the latter for three terms (1967-70). Mr. Horton was also honorary secretary for one year (1963), and in later years he took a keen interest in the Liberal group. It was natural that their wives, too, should be active in the Community, especially through the Ladies Guild of which Mrs. Horton was President in 1974.

There were others, prominent in their fields, who helped in the early years, though with less persistence, such as Dr. (later Professor) Eugene Kamenka, Head of the History of Ideas Unit of the Research School of Sciences at the Australian National University, and author of several books, who in 1957 acted as honorary secretary of the congregation; his wife Miriam who helped out as teacher at the Hebrew Classes; Mr. David Smith, now the Official Secretary to the Governor-General, who was honorary secretary of the congregation in 1958-59, a member of the Committee of Management from 1959 to 1961, and Vice-President in 1962-63. He was also Acting President for a period in 1962 during the absence of the President overseas.

The number of Jewish academics at the ANU and at Research Institutes was relatively high, and several of them took an active interest in the Community:

Dr. Harry Rosenberg, a Senior Fellow in the Research School of Political Science, and his wife Betty, were very active in many aspects of the Community, especially in the early days of the Sunday School.

Professor S. S. Crawcour, born in Melbourne, was head of the Department of Japanese at ANU, Professorial Fellow at the Department of Far Eastern Studies, and Visiting Professor at Harvard and other U.S.A. Universities. He presented the Community with a Shofar.

Professor A. L. Epstein from England, was Head of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at ANU and held academic positions in the British Commonwealth. His wife, Professor Scarlett Epstein, was an active Community worker.

Professor H. Tarlo, from Dublin, was Reader in Law at ANU and is now Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Queensland.

Dr Sidney Sax, a member of the A.C.T. Jewish Community and a senior Commonwealth Public Servant, received the C.B.E. in the 1982 New Year's Honours List. He is head of the Social Welfare Policy Secretariat in the Department of Social Security.

### **THE FORMATIVE YEARS**

The Committee from its inception strove to bring the Jewish residents of the ACT together, whatever the occasion, social, recreational as well as religious. The festivals — Passover, Chanukah, Purim, Simchat Torah and Israel's Independence Day — were organised as collective celebrations for young and old, but the communal Seder on Passover was undoubtedly the most significant of such celebrations. There were many who were not capable of conducting the Seder themselves, or of preparing for the festival according to Jewish custom. There were others who longed for Jewish company and the traditional style of the fascinating Seder Celebration, still lingering in their memories.

The Sedarim were at first very well attended. People came from as far as Cooma, Goulburn and the Snowy Mountains area, where a number of newcomers had opened their businesses. For these isolated and often estranged Jews it was a welcome opportunity to be in contact with fellow-Jews. As early as 1956, for instance, no less than 120 persons attended the Seder Service, and the National Council of Jewish Women assisted in its preparation. Passover foods were imported from Sydney.

But, as the Community grew in numbers and as more informed Jews settled in Canberra, the Seder in the middle of the 1960s reverted more and more to its original character as an intimate family celebration. Quite a few of these celebrations were held in private homes, and those who were unable to conduct the Seder themselves were invited to join one of the family celebrations in the true spirit of the Haggadah (The Story of Passover). For instance, a Seder was held in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Horton in 1967 in which over 40 people participated. A charge was made for the benefit of the Community. In more recent years the communal Seder was revived but held on the Second Night, leaving the First Night for the family. The Liberal group has organised its own Seder.

All Services and functions were held in hired halls — from the Masonic Temple to the Good Neighbour Council Hut and the Congregational Church Hall — whilst the Committee meetings were held in private homes. There was no shortage of homes or venues, but the need for a place of their own asserted itself strongly. It took many years and protracted planning to bring such a project into fruition.

In the years 1955-62 the Community enjoyed on the High Festivals the Chazanut (singing) and the preaching of Dr. S. Billigheimer of Melbourne.

Dr. Billigheimer was a teacher and scholar from Germany where during the fateful years of Nazi persecution and degradation he stood at the head of the Cultural Council (Lehrhaus) in Mannheim, a self-help organisation designed to buttress the identity and the dignity of the Jews by a return to the study of the Hebrew Heritage and of Jewish History. In Melbourne he was the headmaster of the Hebrew Classes of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation and a teacher of religion in State schools.

Dr. Billigheimer was an observant Jew of strong conviction and a representative of the principle of Torah-im-Derech-Eretz, i.e. of the harmonisation of Torah-true Judaism and the general culture of our environment. As an exponent of German literature and philosophy he received a prize from the German Government for his contribution to German literature and Honorary Doctorates from the University of Heidelberg and the Maimonides College of Toronto. He was also honoured with the Officer's Cross of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Dr. Billigheimer insisted that the High Festival Services should be conducted on traditional lines, that men and women should sit separately (though without partition, Mechitza), and that the reading of English prayers should be limited in accordance with accepted norms. On Rosh Hashanah a Shofar was provided by Rabbi Porush and a Sepher Torah was loaned by the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation. Later a second Sepher was provided by Rabbi Porush and another came from Singapore.

Dr. Billigheimer's addresses were of a high intellectual standard. In 1957 and in the following years Dr. Billigheimer's son, Dr. Claude, who was engaged as a lecturer in mathematics at Duntroon Military College and later at the Australian National University, assisted his father at the High Festival Services, and helped out at the weekly Sabbath Morning Services both in Chazanut and in the Reading of the Torah. But the main contribution of Claude, who at one stage was the honorary secretary of the Community, and particularly of his wife Rachel, was in the field of the children's Jewish education, as most dedicated teachers of the Hebrew Classes. These Classes met at first on Saturday in private homes or hired rooms, and the parents who brought the children to school helped to make the Minyan. It was a case of reaching the parents through the children. Later the school met on Sunday morning.

For several years (1958-67) the Community was fortunate in having in its midst a qualified rabbi, Dr. G. N. Schlesinger, who whilst not being a practising rabbi, had all the qualifications, and the right spirit, to volunteer his services whenever wanted, especially as preacher, lecturer and officiant on Sabbath (since 1962) and on festivals. Even before settling in Canberra, when still living in Melbourne, he was invited to conduct the Services on the High Festivals. He had willing assistants in Dr. Harry Rosenberg, who often read the Torah, Joshua Marshall, Claude Billigheimer and William Rieder. He was a friendly, accessible man, and popular in the Community. It was recorded that some 30 people then attended the Services. In 1966 Dr. Schlesinger was formally invited to regard himself as the Rabbi of Canberra Community, thus being the "first Rabbi of Canberra". He also conducted a study circle in Bible.

Dr. Schlesinger was Reader at the Australian National University, Department of Philosophy and Science, specialising in the philosophy of science, in which subject he published a book. He left Australia in 1967 to take up a professorship at the Chappel Hall University in North Carolina, U.S.A. The congregation honoured him and Mrs. Schlesinger, a native of Israel who volunteered to teach at the Hebrew Classes, with a Special Sabbath and a Farewell Reception, and a Sepher Torah was presented to the Congregation in his honour. The Sepher Torah belonged to a large consignment of Scrolls which were salvaged from the Nazis in Czechoslovakia, his country of birth.

Mr. William Rieder, a migrant from Czechoslovakia and a graduate of London University, was a strictly orthodox Jew and a learned student of the Yeshiva (Pressburg) in Europe. He was a public servant in the Patent Office, and editor of the Journal "Industrial and Intellectual Property in Australia". He was a stalwart guardian of religious observance in the otherwise somewhat indifferent community, and one of the very few who observed strict kashrut and imported regularly kosher meat from Melbourne. He was an able officiant at the Sabbath and Festival Services and a willing teacher whenever called upon. For a time he conducted a Shiur in Mishnah. Occasionally, Services, for instance on Tisha B'av, were held at his home. The holding of Selichot (Prayer of Forgiveness) Services during the Holy Season became a regular feature of congregational worship.

Soon after his marriage to an equally strictly observant lady from a rabbinic family, they established their home in the suburb of Curtin, ACT, not within walking distance of the Centre, and their services to the Community were interrupted. This was a real loss to the congregation, which owes him a debt of gratitude for the work he had done during the formative years of the Community.

There was no Mohel (a person qualified to perform a Ritual Circumcision) in Canberra to perform the Mitzvah of circumcision, and in each case a Mohel had to be brought from Sydney. Dr. H. M. Owen, at one stage President of the Great Synagogue, performed several circumcisions in Canberra and so did Dr. W. Wise of Sydney. To lighten the financial burden on the parents the Committee of Management decided that the Community should in all cases automatically carry part of the expense incurred, because it was in a way regarded as a communal responsibility.

The Sydney Chevra Kadisha and its Director, Mr. Eugene Gumpert, were always helpful when funerals occurred in Canberra by assisting or instructing the local people in the laws and customs pertaining to Jewish burials, and in particular in the performance of the Mitzvah of Tahara, the Rite of Purification. The services of the Chevra Kadisha were also available whenever the transportation of a deceased person to another place of burial was required. On a few occasions the Director, or a Rabbi, travelled to Canberra to officiate at a funeral.

It is to the credit of the small Community that volunteers were always found for the performance of Tahara, a personal service of profound piety, a "Chesed shel Emet", an act of true loving kindness and respect for the

dead. Among the volunteers were Dr. M. Doobov, Mr. K. Gottlieb, Mr. Earle Hoffman and Mr. Ernie Horton. Several women also performed this sacred duty, including Mrs. Fania Marshall, Mrs. Andrea Phillips and Mrs. Sue Doobov.

Religious questions were usually addressed to the Rabbi of the Great Synagogue or the Sydney Beth Din. When, for instance, the Canberra Community was invited to become a partner in a new Lawn Cemetery scheme in 1968, the Beth Din had to inform the Committee that such cemetery was contrary to Jewish Law.

The severity of the problem of intermarriage is, generally, in inverse proportion to the size of a community. In Canberra, the incidence of mixed marriages, contracted in the majority of cases before settling in the capital, was relatively high. The opportunities for young people to mingle and form lasting friendships were rare and the choice of partners extremely limited. No reliable and complete information concerning the extent of mixed marriages is available, but some indication may be derived from the broad data of the censuses. This data tells us, for instance, that in 1961, 28.6% of Jewish husbands in Canberra were married out (in the whole of Australia it was 12%), whilst in 1971 the figures were 18.3% and 12.8% respectively. The drop in the ACT is a reflection of the growth of the Community, numerically and otherwise.

The consequential problem of conversion to Judaism of the non-Jewish partner also manifested itself, but on a very small scale, because few of these partners sought conversion. All applications of this nature were addressed to the Sydney Beth Din which was tacitly accepted as the ecclesiastical authority of the capital. The Beth Din indeed received a number of applications from Canberra and was able to assist in this matter, especially in relation to some extraordinary cases of exceptionally sincere proselytes who were not motivated by impending marriages to Jews.

On the eve of Passover the Community circulated its members regarding the provision of kosher food articles for the Festival. A collective order was then placed in Sydney or Melbourne and distributed among the Community. The demand was limited and some joined their relatives in other cities for Passover. Since 1972 conditions have improved so that a number of grocery stores do stock kosher food, especially Passover food supplies.

There was, of course, no opportunity to obtain kosher meat in Canberra. The few, the very few, families that observed kashrut had to import their meat at great expense from Sydney or Melbourne, or refrain from eating meat. This and the absence of a Mikva were weighty reasons why orthodox people, especially young people, hesitated to settle in the capital in spite of its economic attractions. A depot has now been established in one of the stores for the sale of TV kosher dinners prepared in Sydney under rabbinic supervision.

Among the strictly observant residents was, apart from the Rieders, Dr. (later professor) A. M. Hasofer, a resident Fellow of the Australian National University (1965-66) and Mrs. Hasofer. He solved the problem of Kashruth for himself by attending in Sydney a course in Shechitat Ofot, the

kosher slaughtering of poultry, and qualifying as a Shochet Ofof. He placed his services at the disposal of others, but little advantage was taken of this offer.

Dr. Hasofer assisted the Community also as lecturer and as an officiant in the synagogue, and together with his wife Atara as teachers at the Hebrew Classes on Sundays. They were both members of the Education Committee. For a time Mrs. Hasofer organised some women as a branch of "Neshay Chabad", a women's organisation following the chasidic school of Lubavitch. As we shall see later, this was not the only contact Canberra had with the Lubavitch Movement, a movement which tries to "bring the estranged nearer to Judaism". Hasofer was a zealous guardian of orthodox principles in the public affairs of the synagogue, opposing any encroachment on Jewish tradition. The Hasofers moved to Sydney in 1969 where the Doctor took up a position as Professor of Statistics at the University of New South Wales. He was also Visiting Professor at M.I.T. and at Princeton in the U.S.A.

### **JEWISH EDUCATION**

From the start the utmost attention was paid by the Committee to the Jewish education of the children, however few in number. The parents, observant or not observant, were profoundly worried about the Jewish future of their children who were growing up in a free, un-Jewish environment without the counter-balance of a religious home life and the company of other Jewish children. The leaders were fully aware of the weakness if not hopelessness of their situation, and they tried desperately and with great sincerity to do whatever could be done educationally for the coming generation. Truly heroic efforts were made by the few to carry the burden of the many in the preservation of Judaism. The school fees were kept low, and the school always had a deficit.

The number of Jewish children was small — the school started with six pupils scattered over a vast area — and the inherent difficulties regarding regular attendance were frustrating, but there were always young men and women in the Community who, with the exception of one paid teacher, gratuitously gave up their Sunday morning, and other hours, in order to take a class or to demonstrate a festival.

The standards could never be high. The hours of instruction were very limited, mostly two hours per week. Not all teachers were trained or experienced. The composition of the staff was subject to frequent changes. Text books were not, at first, always available. But the teachers were thoroughly dedicated to their sacred vocation, and having but small classes they could achieve some success. In later years a fruitful liaison was established with the Education Boards in Sydney and Melbourne, and with the Education Department of the Zionist Federation, all trying to extend help with educational material and curricula.

The number of pupils varied greatly. The school started with one class meeting in a private home and grew to a maximum of some 50 pupils in five classes, not counting the special Batmitzvah class which functioned whenever the need arose. The first Batmitzvah Service was held in 1977.

Three girls participated after attending a special course conducted by Mrs. Sue Doobov.

The Community was fortunate in having among its frequently changing conglomerate of members, people of knowledge and dedication — academics and students, from Israel and from other Jewish centres — who were able and willing to conduct Services and to read the Torah as well as teach the children something about their religious heritage and loyalty. To mention but a few such devotees: Eddie Belfer who not only served as Chazan but also as headmaster and minister when required, Dr. Mervyn and Sue Doobov, Naomi Feiglin, Geoffrey Kolts, Naomi Kronenberg, Joshua Marshall, William Rieder, Dr. Harry Rosenberg (who was the first teacher of the school), Avner and Joan Shavitzki, Leon Sterling and others. More recent heads of the school included Rabbi Uri Themal and Mrs. Ruth Holzman, the present incumbent.

In the middle of the '70s a few enthusiastic parents came up with the idea of establishing a pre-school class at the Centre. There is no lack of accommodation at the Centre and the Department of Education approved the scheme in principle. A survey was undertaken among parents, but only nine children were found to be eligible for such a class, and the plan was abandoned.

But the interest in day school education increased with the arrival of a number of young families, and in 1981 a sub-Committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Zvi Halevy has been established to investigate the feasibility of establishing such a school in Canberra, the funds that would be required, and the attitude of the parents to such a proposal. It was considered that if the Sydney example of the Sinai Jewish Day School could be followed, an initial enrolment of 12 children could make the project viable, particularly if Government assistance was forthcoming. There is as yet a long road to the realisation of this vision.

## **JEWISH YOUTH**

The number of Jewish young people in the ACT was naturally very limited. A most pathetic complaint came from parents whose sons and daughters found it difficult to meet Jewish friends of the same age. The smaller the community, the greater the danger of inter-marriage. In Canberra this violation of the law was not a theoretical fear but a practical plight. Some of the young people went interstate for this and other reasons. Several attempts to form a club for the "twenty years and over" were made with hopeful beginnings by David Hoffman, Ron Burnie and others, but they did not prove viable in the long run. The same fate befell in 1965 the Jewish Student Society formed at ANU with Mark Marshall as President.

The younger adolescents, however, could muster enough interest to create a viable youth group, but there was no room for more than one organisation of this kind. It was a matter of chance that the Revisionist Youth Movement, "Betar", sponsored by the followers of the Revisionist Party of Jabotinsky, became the first to form a branch in Canberra. Alex Auswaks, who was an active leader in Betar in Sydney, settled in Canberra in the early '60s and gathered around him a group of young people under

the auspices of Betar. The group met regularly, and Alex with much dedication developed a programme of activities designed to strengthen the Zionist idea and Jewish identity in general. He maintained contact with other branches of Betar and encouraged his followers to join their friends in other States in holiday camps and at conferences.

Canberra Betar, having at one stage some 20 members, persisted in spite of many ups and downs according to the availability of suitable leaders. The adult community, whether agreeing with Betar ideology or not, treated this, the only Jewish youth society, with good will. Among the leaders who followed Alex were Jonathan Green, a student at the Teachers College in Wagga who regularly travelled to Canberra to lead the group, Naomi Kronenberg (daughter of Wizo Leader Hannah Kessler) who for a time conducted an Ulpan in Modern Hebrew, Miriam Gottlieb (who settled in Israel) and her brother Paul.

Unfortunately, Betar has ceased to function some years ago for lack of leaders and recruits, and no other local youth organisation has taken its place.

In more recent years the "Hineni" Youth organisation which was founded by Rabbi Michael Alony of the Central Synagogue in Sydney, has taken a more constant interest in the young people of Canberra and has sent from time to time a contingent of its members to Canberra to bolster the spirit of the youth. But its work is of necessity spasmodic and its impact limited.

All efforts to form in Canberra lasting and active youth societies encountered the stark reality of paucity in numbers, interest and scope. Canberra was never able to send a team to the annual interstate Jewish Sports Carnivals, which attracted large numbers from all communities, although in 1977 Steven Stern from Canberra was selected to represent Australia in athletics at the Maccabiah in Israel and won one gold and one bronze medal.

The isolation of Canberra was strongly felt by the Jewish residents, and persistent efforts were made to overcome it by sending children and youths to holiday camps and seminars interstate, or by encouraging Jewish organisations to hold their seminars and conferences in or near Canberra. The Canberra leaders often pleaded with the larger federal organisations to hold their federal conventions and seminars in the national capital, but apart from the National Council of Jewish Women, which held its Triennial Conference in Canberra in 1971, the Executive Council Conferences in 1971 and 1977, and the Union of Australian Jewish Students which met in the capital in 1965, the organisations found it more practical, both in regard to participation and in regard to expense, to hold their conventions in one of the large communities where the provision of hospitality and social contacts was much easier.

On the other hand, quite a number of holiday camps, seminars and fraternal meetings were held in or near Canberra. The Zionist Federation held two very successful seminars in 1966 and 1968 with participation from all over Australia under the leadership of Max Freedman and Aryeh Newman. There was no shortage of accommodation during the school

holidays and no shortage of lecturers to address the seminars.

These excellent seminars were a real boost to the local Community, and other organisations, especially youth groups, endeavoured to liven up the Canberra Community by sending some of their members on fraternal visits to Canberra. Mount Scopus College of Melbourne, Moriah College of Sydney, B'nai Akiva, Great Synagogue Youth, and North Shore Synagogue Youth, and more recently and with greater regularity the Hineni Movement of the Central Synagogue, and the Yeshivot of Melbourne and Sydney — all made special efforts to develop contact with the Canberra Community, especially the youth.

Of late, the Sydney Yeshiva has been sending regularly one of its enthusiastic Rabbis, Rabbi B. Leshes, to conduct a shiur (course) in Talmud twice a month, and with notable success. It is remarkable that over a dozen persons have shown a serious interest in this higher study circle in Talmud, which, be it noted, is preceded by a shiur for ladies in Jewish studies. The President in his Annual Report (1979) stated: "The most encouraging development during the past year has been the start of a Talmud Shiur in Canberra". After three years this discourse still attracts ten or more students.

A Gemara shiur in Canberra is indeed a wondrous thing and, one hopes, symptomatic of future developments. It is an expensive exercise. Only one quarter of the cost is defrayed by the Community, another quarter is cheerfully borne by the students themselves and one half by a sponsor from Sydney. Also other study circles are being held: Biblical Hebrew under the aegis of ANU, a monthly lesson in Bible by George Stern, and symposia on Jewish topics from time to time.

Perhaps the most important liaison was achieved by the frequent fraternal visits of Rabbis from Sydney and Melbourne. Often a Rabbi would spend a weekend with the congregation preaching and lecturing, conducting a cheerful Oneg Shabbat on Friday night, and meeting the congregation socially. The expense involved was usually borne by the Rabbi's congregation.

### **WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS**

The National Council of Jewish Women, founded in 1923 by the dynamic Dr. Fanny Reading in Sydney, always aspired to spread its wings into all the niches of the scattered community and to open branches wherever possible. The Council developed under the far-sighted leadership of Dr. Fanny into a mighty unifying force and into a social agency of manifold interests. Its range of communal service has been rather comprehensive, embracing support for Israel, assistance to newcomers, welfare work, education, patriotic and civic causes, and help for smaller communities.

The N.C.J.W. established a branch in Canberra rather early in the day, in 1955, with Ruth Mendelsohn as founding President and life-long supporter of the Council. The National Life President, Dr. Reading, and the National President and Treasurer, Mrs. Vera Cohen, and Mrs. G. de Vahl Davis came to Canberra to inaugurate the Canberra Branch. In all,

twelve women responded as members, but now the number has trebled. It was, in fact, the first Jewish organisation in ACT outside the Congregation. For many years it was the only Jewish Women's organisation in the capital performing many social and cultural functions inside and outside the Community. It received much encouragement from the headquarters of the Council and its Presidents, notably Mrs. Vera Cohen MBE, and from its branches.

Years later (1969) a branch of WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organisation), named "Yovel", was formed in Canberra, and it was perhaps inevitable that some friendly rivalry evolved between the two women's organisations whose membership of necessity overlapped in the numerically limited community. Some felt that there was no room for two societies serving more or less the same objectives. Nonetheless, both worked well under none too easy conditions, both developed worthwhile programmes, and both had their ups and downs, and interruptions, in the course of the years, but the Council (the stronger group) gave priority, and made a singular contribution, to the project of the National Community Centre in its final form. In the early days the Council women assisted in the preparations of the communal Seder. This duty was later taken over by the Ladies Guild.

The Canberra Branch of the Council was fortunate in that it had the undivided support of the National Board, and was blessed with some good and dedicated leaders, notably Mrs. Sue Doobov, Mrs. Anne Hoffman, Mrs. Ruth Mendelsohn, Mrs. June Smith and Mrs. Irma Starke. The President of the Council was, as a rule, a member of the Committee of Management of the Canberra Community. Apparently there was no problem in regard to the inclusion of ladies in the Committee of Management, a measure which was allowed only recently in some orthodox congregations. In fact, in 1976 no less than three ladies sat on the Committee.

One of the Council's important tasks was visiting hospitals, for which the Community owes a debt of gratitude to Mrs. Sadie Lipman.

The Federal Committee of the National Council of Jewish Women made the Canberra Centre its objective for the period 1961 to 1964, and throughout its branches donations were collected for the Centre. The contribution (\$13,000) was of such dimension as to justify the naming of the assembly hall on the first floor of the Centre as the "Fanny Reading Auditorium", to commemorate the name of the foremost Jewish woman in Australia. True to the concept of the Canberra Building as a national centre, the N.C.J.W. held its Australia wide 18th Triennial Conference in 1976 at the Centre. Helga Leslie was then President in Canberra. A former President of the Council, Mrs. Hannah Enders, was awarded the B.E.M. in 1981, in recognition of her social work in ACT.

Following the example of other congregations, the synagogue brought into being a third women's organisation, namely the Ladies Guild with the widest scope of membership. Every lady of the Community was regarded as "an ex-officio member" of the Guild.

The Guild's tasks were confined to the direct needs of the congregation,

such as the preparation of Kiddushim, the catering at Sedarim, celebrations and communal receptions, and the provision of funds for special equipment. The Guild was responsible for the equipment and maintenance of the kitchen.

The Jewish community throughout Australia was rather active in the cause of the Jews in Russia who were deprived of the right to uphold their religion and their culture, and were moreover refused permission to emigrate to Israel. "Let my people go" became the slogan of the Jews in the free world. From time to time demonstrations and public protest meetings were organised against the Soviet authorities, and as the Russian Embassy was located in Canberra such demonstrations were sometimes held in front of the Russian Embassy, with the participation of local Jewish residents. On a number of occasions students and others travelled to Canberra to demonstrate in favour of Russian Jewry. Rabbi E. Sultanik of Melbourne conducted such a demonstration, bringing with him some 40 young people from Melbourne. In one such demonstration 300 students assembled outside the Russian Embassy.

In July 1971 the Jewish women in Sydney and Melbourne organised a mass petition signed by 5,000 women, Jewish and non-Jewish, requesting that Jews be allowed to migrate to Israel and be granted "the right to live in accordance with their cultural and religious heritage". A delegation of women came to Canberra to present the petition, but the Russian Ambassador refused to see them. Two of the delegates, Mrs. Y. Coppersmith and Mrs. B. Porush, somehow on a pretext, managed to enter the Embassy with the signed petition, but when an attempt was made to present the petition to a high Russian official they were forced in anger to leave the Embassy.

Apart from the Women's Organisations several other groups, mostly short-lived, were formed in Canberra in the course of the years, such as the "Golden Years Group" which has proved a valuable social point of interest for the older members of the Community, the "Single Youths" circle promoting a similar focus for younger members, and the "Beyond the Pale" group, a loosely built discussion group. But the impact of these societies has been weak.

### **THE ISRAELI EMBASSY**

The constructive and decisive role which the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr. H. V. Evatt, played as President of the United Nations Assembly in 1947 when the Partition of Palestine was resolved, has been gratefully acknowledged by Australian Jewry and the Jewish people at large. It was a historic role of great consequence.

Australia was among the first countries to recognise the State of Israel and to establish diplomatic relations with it. The first diplomatic mission of Israel, a consulate-general, was established in Sydney in July 1949. It was a historic and moving moment: Jewish diplomats after 2000 years of statelessness!

The presence of Israeli diplomats made a significant impact on all sections of the community. The synagogues and the Rabbis solemnly

welcomed them, receptions were given in their honour inside and outside the community, hospitality abounded, and a wave of pride and joy engulfed Australian Jewry. A living link was created not only between Australia and the State of Israel but particularly between the restored Jewish State and the somewhat isolated Jews of Australia. Although the Israeli diplomats made it their business to visit all the Jewish communities in the country, the headquarters remained for practical reasons in the most populous city of the Commonwealth, Sydney.



*Israeli Embassy, Canberra.*

But it was inevitable that, like all other diplomatic missions, the Israel Legation would eventually move to Canberra, the seat of the Government and the meeting place of politicians and diplomats. Mr. Mordecai (Max) Nurock, Minister of Israel 1953-1958, strongly advocated the transfer of the main mission to the federal capital, but there was some opposition to this move on the part of Zionist and communal leaders in Melbourne and Sydney who felt that the impact of the Israeli diplomats upon the Jewish community would weaken if the Legation were removed to Canberra amidst a small, newly-born congregation.

Higher consideration prevailed, and with the full support of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, to which the Canberra Community has been affiliated since 1958, it was resolved, in principle, that Israel's diplomatic headquarters, in the meantime elevated to the status of Embassy, should move to Canberra. But the Government of Israel lacked

the resources to build in Canberra a worthy Embassy, and so the Australian Jewish Community undertook to provide the necessary funds.

The Foundation Stone of the Embassy was laid in 1958 on the tenth anniversary of Israel's statehood by Mr. Nurock, who returned to Israel before the Embassy building was completed to take up a post at the Foreign Office in Jerusalem. Mr. Nurock was born in Ireland and occupied high positions in the British Public Service — he was Assistant Secretary to the Mandatory Government of Palestine and Deputy Chief Secretary to the Government of Uganda — and in Israel he served as Adviser to the Government on administration before becoming Minister to Australia and New Zealand.

The first Ambassador to occupy the new Embassy was Mr. Moshe Yuval (1958-64). At one stage there was some talk (but never a serious proposition) of including a synagogue in the Embassy, but this did not materialise. Although the Israeli diplomats understandably felt, that in the first instance they were Israel's accredited representatives vis a vis the Australian Government and not emissaries to the Jewish community, some involvement in the interests and institutions of the local community was inevitable and indeed desirable. From the Community's point of view the presence of the Ambassador and his family and staff, and their dutiful association with the life of the local congregation, has always been a source of strength and a unifying factor. The Canberra Community has been rather Israel-oriented and has supported as a matter of course the cause of Israel. The proximity of the Embassy enhanced this attitude.

The Ambassadors — Moshe Yuval, David Teshler, Simcha Pratt, Moshe Erell, Michael Elizur and Abraham Kidron — and their staff played in various degrees a positive part in the life of the rather Israel-conscious Community. The degree of involvement of the Ambassador's family and staff in the activities of the Community, religious and social, varied according to the responsiveness of the incumbents. Some maintained a positive relation to our religious traditions, notably through the synagogue, others were more remote. There were times when members of the Embassy, themselves religious Jews, made a welcome contribution to the Services of the Synagogue as Chazanim and Readers of the Law, in the education of the children at the Hebrew Classes, and even in occupying the pulpit. Whenever a member of the Embassy was present in the synagogue, he was invited to read the Prayer for Israel.

Outstanding in this regard was the family of Aaron Lopez, secretary of the Embassy. Mr. Lopez and his two elder sons, Eli and Gideon, throughout their stay in Canberra (1976-80) involved themselves beyond duty in the religious and educational activities of the congregation. Mr. Lopez and his sons often read the Torah, intoned the Megilah, and acted as Chazanim. Gideon's Barmitzvah was celebrated in the Canberra Synagogue. The Lopez boys also assisted as Madrichim, youth leaders, in the Hineni Movement.

Beyond meeting the congregation at worship and at communal functions, the Ambassador was host to members of the Community on special occasions, such as Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day,

and Chanukah. When the President of Israel, Yitzchak Ben Zvi, died in 1963, and when Moshe Sharett, the former Foreign Minister of Israel, died in 1965, Memorial Services were held by the Embassy with the participation of the Community and in the presence of Government officials and foreign diplomats. In a moving ceremony the synagogue was crowded to overflowing at a special Service to mark the brutal slaying of Israeli Olympic athletes in Munich in 1972.

The importance of the visible religious bond between the representatives of Medinat Yisrael, or of Jewish National Institutions, and the worshipping Kehilah should not be under-estimated. The presence of Israel's emissaries in the synagogue, still the central institution of Jewish life everywhere, is meaningful to the rank and file of our communities. One could testify to the fact that the regular presence of Max Nurock at the Sabbath Services of the Great Synagogue and his manifest sincerity as a worshipper made a deep impression upon the congregation.

Canberra, in passing, attracted a goodly number of scholars and research students from Israel, and some of them voluntarily gave of their services to the Community. Generally, however, the Israeli population was transient and did not involve itself greatly in communal affairs.

The Embassy was, of course, an open house to prominent Jewish visitors from overseas, and members of the Community were given the opportunity of meeting them. An impressive list could be compiled of Jewish leaders who came to the Australian capital on political missions, or to participate in scientific conventions, or to bring a message to Australian Jewry, and sought at the same time contact with the local Community as well as the Embassy. Such a list, without being exhaustive, would include: Chief Rabbi S. Goren of Israel, who visited Australia twice, in 1967 when he had to hurry back home on the eve of the Six-Day-War, and in 1976; Chief Rabbi (later Sir) Israel Brodie, Chief Rabbi Dr. (later Sir) Immanuel Jakobovits, and Haham Dr. S. Gaon of the Sephardi Community, who came to this country as part of Pastoral Tours to their flock; Chief Rabbi of Ireland, Dr. Isaac Cohen; Moshe Sharett, Moshe Dayan, Pinchas Sapir, Abba Eban, Yitzchak Shamir, Dr. Joseph Burg, all Ministers in the Israeli Government at various times; Sir Barnett (later Lord) Janner, Greville Janner and Lord Fisher, Presidents of the British Board of Jewish Deputies; Phillip Klutznick, President of B'nai Brith; Dr. Abraham Harman, President of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; Mr. Justice H. H. Cohn of the Supreme Court of Israel; Dr. Gideon Hausner, prosecutor in the Eichmann Case; Chaim Potok the noted author and many, many others.

Often official receptions or dinners would be given in their honour by the Governor-General, or the Prime Minister, or the Foreign Minister, or Parliament, and in the absence of a Rabbi the lay leaders of the Community would be invited. At times the Community would hold a reception in honour of prominent Jewish visitors and invite the dignitaries of the general community. Such functions greatly enhanced the prestige of Canberra Jewry and underlined the central position of this Community.

A strange phenomenon might be mentioned in this connection:

Surprisingly few Jews were elected to the Federal Parliament in recent decades. Today, however, there are three Jewish Members of Parliament: The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Peter Baume, Dr. Moss Cass and Mr. Barry Cohen.

### **"HAMERKAZ"**

To strengthen the bonds between the congregation and its members the Committee decided in 1965 to publish a monthly congregational Newsletter for distribution throughout the Community. The main aim was to inform the scattered Jewish residents of the ACT of the facilities and activities, notably services and education, of the congregation and its affiliated societies. Social events and personal information were included, as well as references to happenings in other parts of the Jewish world. A nominal fee was charged, and the Newsletter was available also to non-members. In fact, some who for whatever reason refused to become members of the synagogue subscribed to the bulletin to keep in touch with events. The first editor was Earle Hoffman. He did not receive too much help.

After a few months, at the end of 1965, it was decided under the new editor Dr. M. Doobov to give the Newsletter, which had found a good response among the readers, the significant title "Hamerkaz", "The Centre", years before the Centre was built. The regular publication of "Hamerkaz" and the standards maintained therein were no mean achievement for a small community. Its scope was expanded gradually to include information about all organisations serving the Community — the National Council of Jewish Women provided its own column with news items from interstate sister branches, and WIZO and the Ladies Guild followed suit — news items relating to other communities inside and outside Australia, especially Israel, articles of Jewish interest, and occasionally also searching editorials. The Annual Reports of the Presidents were often printed in full, but it never developed into a forum for correspondents.

The editors served in an honorary capacity, and thanks are due to Clare Baram, Sue Doobov (the present editor), Leon Falk, Martin Indyk and Ted Whitgob for their persistent efforts in this role.

In February 1976 "Hamerkaz" issued an enlarged edition to mark the one hundredth number of the bulletin and, at the same time, the 25th anniversary of the foundation of the Community. This issue records in detail the thoughtful round-table discussion which the founders of the Community held to refresh their memories and to present their verdicts on their experiences in the past 25 years. They also tried to evaluate the progress and weaknesses of the Community, and to gauge its viability in the future. A variety of conclusions were presented, ranging from nostalgic, gratifying reminiscences to outright misgivings concerning the future. There could be no consensus of opinion, for the situation was inherently uncertain.

Today, "Hamerkaz" is an indispensable medium of the forward looking Community and a rich historical depository of information for future generations.

### THE NATIONAL COMMUNITY CENTRE

The National Capital Development Commission (NCDC), which was brought into being by Prime Minister R. G. Menzies in 1957 as the authority responsible for the development of the federal capital, informed the Canberra Jewish Community that, like other denominations, it was entitled to a grant of land free of all rents and taxes for its religious and cultural needs. The Council naturally expected the Jewish Community to erect on the land within a reasonable time a structure which would be in harmony with the prominence of the site and the character of the capital's architecture.

The land granted, or rather nominally leased at a rental of 10 cents per annum if demanded — originally covering two acres and later (1963) extended at the request of the Jewish Community to five acres as accorded to other denominations — was situated in a choice location in the heart of Canberra, viz. at the corner of Canberra Avenue and National Circuit, not far from the Parliamentary Triangle. It is one of the closest sites to the new Parliament House. That such a choice site should have been offered to the small Jewish Community was an indication of the high regard in which Australian Jewry was held in the general community, and also an expression of great expectation held in regard to the growth of the Jewish population.

It is to be noted that already in 1925 the Great Synagogue of Sydney, the Mother Congregation of Australian Jewry, was officially informed by the Federal Government that land could be made available for Jewish worship in Canberra. The Synagogue was asked for its view on this matter. The Board of Management, after consultation with other congregations, answered in the negative, because a stipulation of such grant was that building on the site must begin within a reasonable time, a condition which the Board thought could not be fulfilled. The number of Jews then in the capital could be counted on the fingers of one hand. However, the Board in its reply expressed the hope that the offer could be taken up at a later date.

The renewed offer of the authorities 35 years later, and its acceptance by the Community in anticipation of rapid growth, led to serious discussion in the Committee of Management as to whether their small and weak community could undertake a project which would have to be of considerable magnitude and cost. A minimum outlay of 50,000 pounds was stipulated. It was obvious that Canberra Jewry alone could not possibly muster the resources needed for the building of a presentable Community Centre as befits the prominent site allotted by the Government. The known Community consisted then of some 160 persons, some 40 per cent of whom being young people, out of a total population of 57,000.

Some members advocated instead the purchase of a modest existing building which could be converted into a place of worship and a communal centre. One such building was actually inspected by a member of the Board. But, in time, the view gained momentum that it would be unwise and short-sighted to discard this unique opportunity of planning with vision and optimism for the future, not only of the Canberra Community, but also of Australian Jewry as a whole. Chaplain Rabbi L. M. Goldman

of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation, on a visit to Canberra, helped to resolve the matter when at the home of Mr. Norman Stanton he dramatically pulled out a pound note from his pocket and said: "I am buying herewith the first brick of the proposed Centre".

Jewish leaders in Sydney and Melbourne, notably the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, were consulted on the offer and the response was emphatically in the affirmative. Interstate assistance was promised, and the Canberra Jewish Community intimated to the NCDC its readiness to accept the grant. This was resolved in 1961, but it took two years before the formal transfer of the land could be effected. The level of the site had to be raised so that the proposed building could be set above the new road that was built.

Although no plans had been prepared for the building to be erected, the ceremony of the Laying of the Foundation Stone was performed on 26th February 1962 by Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie, then in Australia on a Pastoral Tour of the communities under his jurisdiction, in the presence of the Prime Minister, Mr. R. G. Menzies and Mr. Moshe Yuval, Ambassador of Israel, and during the Presidency of Earle Hoffman. Rabbi Porush conducted the Service.

The Prime Minister, who made a personal donation to the Fund through Dr. Mendelsohn, in his address expressed his surprise and admiration, that so small a community (he had thought the community was much larger) had the vision to seize upon the opportunity of "building a shrine and a school and a place of meeting" in the growing capital of Australia to perpetuate therein their ancient faith for themselves and their children. He called the idea "one of the most imaginative decisions made in recent years in this place", and referred to the spirit of tolerance that happily prevailed in the country. The Chief Rabbi, too, praised the vision of the Canberra leaders and their faith in the future of the Community. He commended the spirit of unity he found in Canberra and the happy situation of its Jewish citizens.

The land was granted under the "Church Lands Leases Ordinance 1924-1932", and the agreement with the Government concerning the lease of this site was, eventually, signed in 1959 on the part of the Community by Earle Hoffman, President, Ernie Horton, Vice-President, and Mr. N. Lipman, Secretary. The signature of the Minister of the Interior, who granted the lease to the Community on behalf of the Commonwealth Government, was witnessed by Mr. David Smith, then his Private Secretary.

Some years later, the Jewish National Fund with the general support of Australian Jewry, planted a Forest in Israel in honour of Prime Minister Menzies. The Presentation of the appropriate Certificate was made in Canberra in 1965 by the then Ambassador of Israel, Mr. David Teshler.

The Laying of the Foundation Stone was a rather modest celebration, and the Community had to wait nine years before the vision had become a reality.

Every effort was made to strengthen the Community in numbers and in participation. In 1970, the total membership stood at 66 family affiliations,

26 singles and a few students. The membership fee had to be relatively low, and many residents failed to join the congregation. There were scarcely any rich Jews in Canberra. The vast majority consisted of employees with fixed incomes. The congregational budget was modest, and the prospects of being able to maintain a sizable centre, and perhaps even a Minister, were rather remote.

But the devotion of the few made up for the paucity of numbers. The Services on Sabbath Morning were regularly maintained with a Minyan, though the Friday Night Services could not always muster the requisite 10 worshippers. On the High Festivals, the attendance grew steadily, and it was reported that already in the early 1960s some 70 worshippers and more were present at the main Services which were held in various public halls.

The need for a synagogue and a social centre of its own asserted itself with growing urgency, and the encouraging support given by the sister communities promoted the idea — always alive in the minds of the leaders — of making the Canberra building a truly “National” Centre for the whole of Australian Jewry. It was also nurtured by the vision that as the City of Canberra was the focal point of the Australian nation, so the Jewish Centre therein should develop as the focus of the Australian Jewish Community, not so much as a stronghold of Jewish religious and cultural life which requires the concentration of large numbers of Jews, but at least as a visible citadel of the Jewish faith and a rallying point for the dispersed communities. It was hoped that one day a Rabbi’s residence, a library and a study room would be added to the initial building which had of necessity to be modest in dimension.

The leaders in Canberra cherished high aspirations in this regard. They envisaged a truly “National” Jewish Centre, a place for federal Jewish conventions, the headquarters of federal Jewish organisations, and the seat of Jewish contacts with Government and Parliament and with diplomatic missions, and so forth.

This imaginative concept found an echo among the wider Jewish Community of Australia. Notably the representative body of Australian Jewry, the Executive Council, through its Presidents Mr. Maurice Ashkanasy (in whose honour “Ashkanasy Crescent” was named in Evatt, ACT) and Mr. Sydney D. Einfeld (who was for a while a Member of the House of Representatives), lent its moral support to the project, as did the Federation of Jewish Ex-Servicemen Associations and the National Council of Jewish Women through its National President, Mrs. Vera Cohen.

In 1968 a joint meeting was held in Canberra of the Committee of Management of the Canberra Community and the Executive of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies, viz. Maurice Allen, Vera Cohen, Lawrence Einfeld, Gerald Falk, Ted Whitgob, Dr. H. H. Wachtell and H. S. Goldstein, to discuss communal and financial problems facing the Canberra Community. The latter was advised to affiliate with the Jewish Communal Appeal of N.S.W. (JCA) so that it could obtain regular assistance from its funds. This was done, and ever since the Canberra Community has been receiving substantial annual subsidies from the JCA, ranging from \$1,500 in 1972 to \$10,500 in 1980 and, on the other hand, has

made its contribution to the JCA by conducting annually an appeal on its behalf at a Communal Dinner. One of the Community's Presidents, Mr. Ted Whitgob, has also served as Chairman of the JCA's Council of Trustees. As might be expected, the subsidy by far exceeded the contribution and continued to grow with the years, but the contribution from Canberra has also grown proportionately. The Community was unduly burdened with heavy debts and interest payments, for the cost of the building far exceeded the estimates and reached the commanding figure of a quarter of a million dollars. The JCA subsidy formed an impressive part of the budget, but the principle that the stronger communities must help the weaker ones is a healthy sign of communal maturity.

The decision to go ahead with the building of a Centre, which the Community could call its home, was a major unifying and motivating force, a focus for communal interest and aspiration, and great hopes were entertained by the leaders. At long last, they thought, we shall be able to expand and to consolidate in dignity and confidence. "Make Me a sanctuary", said G'd to Moses, "so that I may dwell in their midst". Surely, the synagogue will bring us nearer to our Creator.

With the encouragement of the Executive Council and the State Jewish Boards of Deputies, appeals on behalf of the Canberra Centre were organised in 1964, and the following years, in Melbourne under the chairmanship of Mr. Henry Krongold and with the assistance of Norman Rockman, Walter Lippmann and Jack Sackville; in Sydney with Sidney Sinclair as chairman, and in Perth, and the response was rather good: The interstate donations over a period of several years (1964-70) amounted to \$70,000. A contribution was also received from the Claims Conference on the representation of the Executive Council.

The Canberra Community, of course, made its own contribution to the Building Fund, and the National Council of Jewish Women at its Triennial Conference in 1961 resolved to make the Canberra Centre its special objective for 1961-64, and the sum of \$13,000 was contributed by the Council. These responses are an indication that the interstate communities were ready to regard the Canberra project as a cause affecting the whole of Australian Jewry.

The prospectus prepared for the Australia-wide Appeal for 50,000 pounds on behalf of "A National Centre" reflects the high aspirations of the Canberra Community. It speaks of "the first stage" of the building and conjures up a vision of greater things to come. The Centre would contain a synagogue, would serve as a place for Jewish Conventions, for youth camps and seminars, for national religious Services, for a central library and a repository for historical documents and maybe also for a Rabbi's residence. In brief: A monument of worth and honour to Jewry and Judaism. The Prime Minister, Mr. R. G. Menzies, and Mr. Arthur A. Calwell commended the Appeal, the latter saying: "This Centre will be a manifest sign and symbol of Jewish recognition and acceptance of their enduring role within the community life of Australia".

## THE RELIGIOUS DIVISION

There was a long delay in the planning and construction of the Centre due mainly to two reasons. Firstly, because the Building Fund fell short of the requisite amount in spite of the good response. This shortcoming was substantially overcome by the munificent donation of Mr. Louis Klein in 1970. Secondly, because of the raging controversy relating to the religious character and purpose of the Centre. This problem ended in the compromise embodied in the present building, but a long time passed before reaching the solution.

With all other communities in Australia, organised Jewish life began the creation of a "Hebrew Congregation", because the prime motivation and the main purpose of the Jewish Community was to establish a Home for worship and other religious activities. It is worth mentioning, that in the early days "Hebrew" seems to have been preferred to "Jewish" in the title of congregations and societies (for instance, "Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Institution", 1844, or "Hebrew Standard", 1895), possibly because of the unfavourable application, at that time, of the word "Jewish".

The Jewish Community, especially in the British Empire, was presented as a purely religious entity, a "Denomination". The Jewish Religion was its *raison d'être*, and the core of its collective life was the synagogue, which determined its image vis a vis the general community. The synagogue was the pivot of Jewish life and architecturally prominent as the visible embodiment of the Sanctuary. As in ancient days the Tabernacle stood in the centre of the camp of the Children of Israel, with the priests and the tribes surrounding it, so also the synagogue, its successor, was the centre of all Jewish life throughout the centuries. Hence the halachic rule that a synagogue should occupy the most prominent position in town.

But Canberra Jewry called itself a "Community" and its Home was to be known as a "Centre" with emphasis on its comprehensive purposes in which divine worship might be relegated to a mere activity however vital, and the venue of the Services to a mere annexe of the wider structure. Not that this was the ideal striven for by the Canberra Community, but its priorities and appearances could have projected a false image of the nature of the Community.

The idea of building "Community Centres" for comprehensive social, cultural and recreational facilities together with the synagogue is, in its modern cloak, an innovation of American Jewry. It has become fashionable — at first in the non-orthodox camp and then extended into the orthodox Community — to build wherever new congregations were formed in the suburbs huge, magnificent complexes of buildings around the synagogue as a rallying point for the Community, especially the young, throughout the seven days of the week. The Centre became a real "place of assembly" designed to attract all, worshippers and non-worshippers, with a multitude of programmes: To strengthen Jewish fellowship and identification. In many places the synagogue was reduced to an adjunct.

The Canberra Community had to decide where the emphasis should be in the contemplated Centre, and visibly build accordingly. And here the Committee encountered the difficulty of the perennial division between the

orthodox and liberal elements in the Community.

The principle of creating a Jewish War Memorial Centre was adopted in July, 1965 at a special General Meeting of the members, but the components of the building were under discussion for a long time. The main contention related to the religious facility to be incorporated in the Centre. The discussions on this point reverberated beyond the borders of the Canberra Community for several years. One Jewish newspaper referred to the dissension as "an unholy row raging between the orthodox and liberal factions". This is grossly exaggerated.

The orthodox Rabbinate, and especially the Batei Din in Melbourne and Sydney as guardians of Torah-true Judaism, were involved in the planning in two directions. Firstly, in trying to safeguard the Centre as a wholly orthodox place of worship, and secondly, in seeking to include a Mikva in the building scheme.

The Batei Din of Melbourne and Sydney and the Rabbinate in general, wholeheartedly welcomed the idea of building yet another sanctuary in the land and were keen that the building should include a Mikva to facilitate the settlement of observant Jews in the A.C.T. The Rabbinate stressed that the provision of a Mikva was an integral part of orthodox Communities everywhere, and the two Batei Din were prepared to underwrite the additional expense involved. In fact, the more affluent Melbourne Beth Din actually made an appreciable contribution to the Building Fund earmarked for the Mikva — in passing: this Beth Din had contributed also to the High Festivals expenses in the past — and the Sydney Beth Din prepared a detailed plan for such a Mikva.

The Committee of Management of Canberra was prepared to include a Mikva in its plan — albeit in a structure outside the main complex — but stipulated that the extra cost must not come from the Communal Fund. In the attraction of orthodox young people to Canberra — after all, it is the religious type of members that the Community needed most for its very viability — the presence of a Mikva could be a decisive factor, for its absence would involve them, as indeed it did in a few cases, in considerable travelling expense to Sydney or Melbourne.

The Constitution of the Canberra Community lays down, that its services and practices shall be conducted on traditional lines. This was, moreover, confirmed in a unanimous resolution passed at the Annual General Meeting of the membership on 8th November, 1959: "The Trustees (of the A.C.T. Jewish Memorial Building Fund) shall ensure that religious services conducted in the buildings shall be in accordance with the traditional rites of Judaism". It was argued that "the organisers and supporters of the appeal accepted this as the basis of the Community's future, and the support given was on the understanding that the resolution would be implemented".

The Batei Din and the Rabbinate in general, as well as other orthodox friends of Canberra, had good reason to assume that the Community was committed to the construction of an orthodox Place of Worship, to the exclusion of non-orthodox services on the premises.

The liberal congregations, as organised in the Union of Progressive

Judaism, demanded, on the other hand, as a condition for the support they were asked to give to the Centre — Rabbi Dr. R. Brasch had shown personal interest in the Community — an assurance that the Centre would be equally available for liberal as for orthodox services. The relevant resolution also stipulated, that if national services were held both orthodox and liberal officiants should participate, that three-quarters of such services shall be in English and that a liberal Rabbi should also preach.

The Committee of Management was anxious to retain unity and to be fair to all, and in order to test the wishes of the community it advertised in the "Canberra Times" that Jews who desired to worship according to the liberal ritual should contact the office. The response was extremely poor. It seems, that the vast majority of those who were interested enough to join the congregation or to attend its services, which were all the time conducted on traditional lines, were satisfied with the status quo. It is altogether noteworthy, that throughout its history there was very little friction between the different sections within the Community. The pressure came from outside.

The interest of liberal Judaism was vigorously taken up by the Australian Union of Progressive Judaism under the leadership of Mr. Cecil A. Luber, which threatened to withhold assistance if its demands were not satisfied.

In practice, the interstate material support for the Centre came overwhelmingly from orthodox quarters, yet the Committee of Management was sincerely searching for a solution which would avoid a split. The Committee felt compelled to revise its original plan and seek a way that would embody the unity of the Community and the national character of the Centre also in regard to worship.

It was well known to all, that orthodox synagogues cannot allow the participation of liberal Rabbis in their services. Neither can an orthodox synagogue permit the holding of liberal services in its precincts. The Chief Rabbis had repeatedly given such rulings and the Association of Jewish Ministers of Australia and New Zealand at its conferences confirmed these rulings. The Rabbinate raised no objection to a division of the land between the two sections or to the erection of two separate buildings for the two sections. But the Committee opposed such visible division.

It was, therefore, necessary to find some other solution. Basically two plans were available in the view of the Committee which were hotly discussed inside and outside Canberra. Firstly, to turn the Centre into a quasi secular national meeting place, "a general-purpose building", without a synagogue but with facilities for worship, i.e., to allow its halls and rooms to be used as provisional, unconsecrated venues of worship for whosoever wished to organise services of whatever type desired, orthodox or liberal. Such plan, some thought, might avoid the inherent conflict between the religious sections in Canberra and their friends beyond.

This "neither-meat-nor-milk plan" was not acceptable to the wider Community. The orthodox Rabbinate in particular condemned this "sell-out to secularisation".

It should also be noted, that when the grant of the land to the Jewish Community was made the authorities stipulated that it "shall be used solely

for religious purposes". Even were the authorities to permit a broad interpretation of this condition, the spirit of this law obviously lays stress on the use of the land and its buildings predominantly for religious worship. Although it was argued that the above plan was only a temporary arrangement and that eventually a separate proper synagogue and possibly also a Liberal Temple, would be built, such expansion was too remote to justify the immediate scheme.

Accordingly, the second plan came to the fore, viz. to include in the building a small, properly equipped and consecrated synagogue to be used exclusively for worship. But such synagogue could only be an orthodox "shule", and no non-orthodox services could be held therein. What arrangements could be made for non-orthodox services if and when such were required?

The Melbourne Beth Din maintained a stringent view on this point insisting that since the Community as such was defined as a traditional one no non-orthodox services may be held within the precincts of the Centre to be built. Let the liberals apply for a separate grant of land to build thereon a Liberal Temple.

The leaders of the Canberra Community found themselves in a difficult position. Their foremost hope was that the National Centre, whatever its nature, would reflect the benign interests of a united Community. Earle Hoffman, the President, interviewed the Sydney Beth Din on this matter as early as 1965, but the outcome then was inconclusive.

Some years later, when a critical stage had been reached in the discussions regarding the nature of the Centre, Dr. Ron Mendelsohn, himself having a liberal background but showing understanding for the susceptibilities of the orthodox, asked for a meeting with the Sydney Beth Din. Several conferences were held in Sydney between the Beth Din and the leaders of the Canberra Community and Rabbi Porush, the Av Beth Din, with his colleague Rabbi O. Abramson, proceeded to Canberra to meet the full Committee in an attempt to find an acceptable solution to the intricate problem.

In all cases the discussions were held in the friendliest of terms, and the Beth Din explained that any place designated for orthodox worship may not be used for liberal services. On this point no compromise was possible. Dr. Mendelsohn was also told, that it was contrary to the whole spirit of Judaism to have no consecrated synagogue at all in a building of this kind. Moreover, the land was granted primarily to the religious Community of the Jews as part of an assistance scheme for Places of Worship, not for ethnic assembly halls.

The Sydney Beth Din, after many soul searching sessions and taking into consideration the specific conditions of Canberra, reluctantly agreed to the following solution, which was eventually adopted and executed: There shall be in the building only one permanent place exclusively dedicated to worship, namely a properly equipped and duly consecrated orthodox synagogue, which shall be used for orthodox services only, but permission shall be given for liberal services to be held in the Fanny Reading Auditorium on the first floor whenever such services were wanted. This

solution may not be ideal and there was much apprehension in the Rabbinate, but the situation was fraught with dilemma, and there is hope that with the growth of the Community a more satisfactory solution will be found.

The Melbourne Beth Din disapproved of this proposition and withdrew its support from the Centre. This put an end to the plan of including a Mikva in the scheme, and no Mikva has been built since.

The above plan was finally adopted at a General Meeting in 1971, and the Centre was built accordingly. Dr. Ernest Fooks was the architect, Dr. R. Mendelsohn the chairman of the Building Committee and Earle Hoffman and Ernie Horton were among its most ardent workers.

The building holds on the ground floor a small, permanent, fully equipped synagogue with a built-in Ark, a Bimah, a Ner Tamid (Perpetual Lamp) and seating, with extension, for some 150 worshippers. The front seats are reserved for men and the back seats, somewhat separate but without a Mechitza (partition), are reserved for the ladies. The services are conducted on traditional lines patterned largely on the Great Synagogue of Sydney and using the orthodox Siddur (Prayerbook) and Machzor (Festival Prayerbook).

The synagogue is separated from the classrooms by a folding partition. On the High Festivals and on special occasions the partitions are opened and the synagogue is thereby extended. A fairly large congregation can thus be accommodated.

### **THE FULFILMENT**

The construction of the Centre began early in 1971, and the properly equipped synagogue was consecrated on 5th September, 1971, in readiness for the High Festivals, by Rabbi Porush, assisted by Rabbi S. Silas of the Sephardi Synagogue in Sydney and Rev. E. Belfer, who had moved to Melbourne after many years in Canberra (1963-68) where he had served the Community as Cantor, headmaster and teacher with great devotion.

Rabbi Porush in his address brought the greetings and blessings of the orthodox Rabbinate and exhorted the congregation, that if the community was to be viable and virile, the rank and file and not only the few leaders would have to involve themselves with heart and soul and with constancy, in the religious and cultural programme of the Centre.

The Acting President Mr. S. Hartstein, Registrar of the Supreme Court in the A.C.T., also addressed the congregation. Mr. Hartstein was educated in Western Australia and came to Canberra in 1968. He was familiar with the customs of the synagogue and was able to assist at the Services. His wife Estelle equally showed active interest in the Community.

A plaque was affixed to the inside wall of the synagogue which reads:

“The first synagogue of the A.C.T. Jewish Community was here consecrated by Rabbi Dr. I. Porush OBE, 15 Elul, 5741 — 5th September, 1971 and is dedicated to the memory of Jews who laid down their lives for Australia.”

The Ner Tamid, the Perpetual Lamp symbolising the Presence of the Eternal Light of G'd in the midst of the congregation, donated by Mr. and

Mrs. Earle Hoffman, was kindled by Earle Hoffman in the presence of the Ambassador of Israel, Mr. Moshe Erell, Mr. Louis Klein, Mr. Henry Krongold, Mr. Max Mann, President of the Sydney Chevra Kadisha, and Mr. Saul Saul, President of the Federation of Synagogues in New South Wales.



*Front view of the Centre Building showing main hall and classroom and synagogue wing.*

The Centre as a whole was dedicated in the presence of Mr. Doug Anthony, Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Moshe Erell and Mr. Nathan Jacobson, President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, by the Prime Minister, Mr. (later Sir) William McMahon. It was named the



*Mona and Louis Klein.*

"Mona and Louis Klein Building" in honour of one of the most distinguished leaders of Australian Jewry who contributed munificently towards the cost of the building (which amounted to \$260,000).

The Opening Ceremony, more lavish than the consecration of the synagogue, commenced with an Invocation by Rabbi Porush in which he said that "the Centre symbolised the unity of the Jews of Australia and their will to live and to grow . . . an act of faith and vitality by a small community with great ideas".

The Prime Minister called it an historic event, "reflecting your faith in freedom of expression in religion and culture", and added, "it is to the lasting credit of the Jewish Community that they had retained their identity wherever they lived".

The President, Mr. L. Dixon, described the opening of the Centre as "a major step towards a truly national outlook in the Jewish Community".

The Centre was dedicated as the National Jewish War Memorial Centre, and the President of the Jewish Ex-Servicemen Association raised the flag in honour of fallen comrades.

The unveiling of a plaque in honour of Dr. Fanny Reading in the auditorium on the first floor named after her, was performed by Mrs. Sonia McMahon, wife of the Prime Minister.

Louis Klein was born in London in 1917, and during the Second World War he was twice wounded and mentioned in dispatches. He came to Australia with his family in 1948, and most successfully developed with his cousin Mr. Sidney Sinclair, the menswear business of Anthony Squires. He was rightly called a "self made man". A thoroughly traditional Jew and a lover of Israel, he early in life began to take an interest in the affairs of the Sydney Jewish Community, at first in Parramatta as a leader of the newly formed congregation, then at the North Shore Synagogue of which he was President in 1960-63. Beyond the synagogue he occupied some of the highest positions in the Community: President of the N.S.W. Jewish Board of Deputies, President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Chairman of the United Israel Appeal and head of the Australian Israel Chamber of Commerce, and a member of the Jewish Agency Assembly. He was a gifted public speaker addressing both Jewish and non-Jewish meetings. He acquired "The Australian Jewish Times" (formerly the "Hebrew Standard"), and contributed generously to Jewish institutions here and in Israel. His interest in and contribution to the Canberra Centre facilitated greatly its establishment. The naming of the Centre after him and his wife Mona was a well deserved tribute. He was honoured by the Queen with the OBE in 1973, and by the Community as "Jew of the Year" in 1969. The Community widely mourned his untimely death in July, 1975.

Another generous benefactor deserving mention was Mr. Henry Krongold of Melbourne who made himself responsible for the laying out of the grounds of the Centre and the entrance gates. A plaque at the entrance pays tribute to Mr. and Mrs. Krongold by naming the Grounds after them. The flagpole in front of the building was presented by the Australian Federation of Jewish Ex-Servicemen Associations.

The facade of the building is adorned with a large sculpture by the

Canberra artist Izzy Kingsberg representing the "Burning Bush" where G'd first revealed Himself to Moses in the wilderness. It was the artist's gift to the Community, a miniature replica of this symbol was embossed on sets of cuff links which were presented by the Community as a memento to its well-wishers. In the vestibule of the Centre one finds a ceramic mural produced by the Melbourne artist Trudi Fry and donated by Mr. and Mrs. F.W. Theeman, and a brass plaque commemorating the dastardly murder of the 11 Israeli athletes at the Olympics in Munich in 1972. When a group of Jewish athletes from Sydney passed through Canberra on their way to Melbourne to take part in the Jewish Sports Carnival, they made a break in Canberra and attended a brief service at the Centre in memory of the athletes murdered in Munich. The "Brith Shalom National Award", given to Dr. H.V. Evatt in June, 1949 in recognition of his part at the United Nations Assembly in the cause of the Partition of Palestine, is also deposited in the library of the Centre.

As a National Centre, which was at the same time a War Memorial, it was regarded the right place to house the model of the "Sir John Monash Recreation Hut" and "Anzac Buffet" in Hyde Park, Sydney, which were donated by the Sydney Jewish Community for the benefit of servicemen and women during World War II.

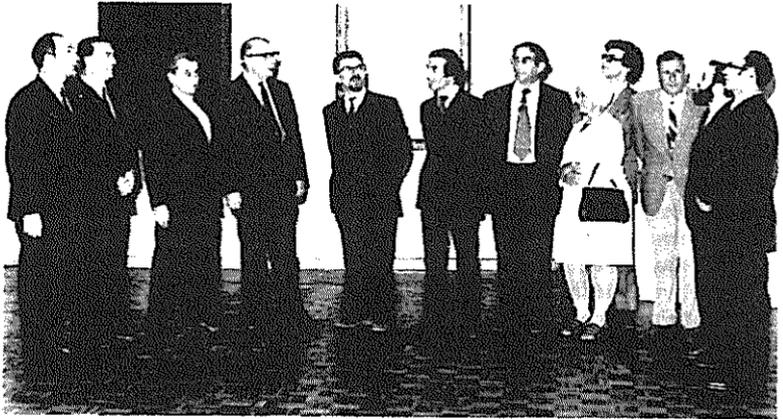
The "Parochet", Curtain of the Ark, was a present of the Government of Israel, and the lights in the auditorium were a gift of the West German Government. Silver bells and a breastplate for the Sepher Torah were a gift of Dr. Annie Bellin of Gosford and Mr. George Moses of Canberra. The Gerald Falk family of Sydney presented a brass Menorah, candelabra, which the late Rabbi L.A. Falk had made. The B'nai Brith presented the Centre with a library, and Mr. L. Dixon, President of the Community at the time of the Dedication, and Mrs. Dixon, donated a set of the Encyclopaedia Judaica in memory of their daughter Sarah.

Mr. Dixon who came from England in 1962, was Director of Computer Programming in the Department of Defence. During the War he served in the R.A.F. He was Australian Individual Bridge Champion in 1970, and International Master of the World Bridge Federation in 1973. He was President of the Community for three terms 1970-73. The Community has adopted the rule that no one can be President for more than three terms in succession.

The Opening of the Centre made an impact on the Jewish residents of Canberra resulting in more activities and greater participation. The services on Sabbath Morning showed an increased attendance, although the Friday night services were held only intermittently. To bring more worshippers to the synagogue the committee decided to send every week personal letters to some members inviting them to be called up to the Torah. A growing number of celebrations, lectures, symposia and social gatherings were held in the Centre, but the increase in members was slight: around 150 in the 1970s. The Committee decided to offer honorary membership to pensioners. Students paid a reduced fee. The communal Seder was re-introduced and youth weekends in the form of a Shabbaton — collective celebration of the Shabbat by the young people who also conducted the

services — were held with the help of the virile youth group “Hineni” of the Central Synagogue, Sydney.

The first Jewish marriage ceremony in the A.C.T., that of the Gottliebs, was performed by Rabbi Schlesinger in 1967, and the first marriage in the Centre, that of Helen Foot and Shaul Lavee, was solemnised in October 1974 by Rabbi R. Apple of the Great Synagogue, assisted by Dr. M. Doobov. The congregation acquired a new “Chuppah” (canopy) on that occasion. The number of Barmitzvah and Batmitzvah celebrations, the preparatory courses for which were conducted by Sue Doobov, also increased.



*From left to right: E. Horton, Press Secretary of the German Embassy, E.S. Hoffman, The German Ambassador, L. Dixon, Ted Whitgob, S. Hartstein, Ruth Mendelsohn, J. Wolkenburg, H. Pearlman, and Dr. M. Doobov.*

The liberal members were at first satisfied with casual services on Friday night at the Fanny Reading Auditorium, but the frequency and the attendance of the services improved with the years. The arrival in 1978 of Rabbi Uri Themal, formerly Rabbi of the Liberal Temple in Perth, in Canberra in order to work at the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, provided the Liberal Group with a leader and preacher. Themal also assisted for a while at the Community's Hebrew classes as headmaster and continues as a teacher.

There has been remarkably little friction between the orthodox and liberal sections within the Community. The delineations are not strictly drawn. Few stand fast on orthodox principles and practices as a matter of deep religious conviction, and even fewer think that a policy of compromise for the sake of good fellowship may lead to uncertainty and weakness. There is much overlapping of personnel and much ambiguity and compromise. In fact, a tradition has developed that on Rosh Hashanah a joint Kiddush is held for the two congregations on the premises, and the “breaking of the fast” on Yom Kippur is also a joint effort.

The most prominent Jew in Canberra is undoubtedly Sir Zelman Cowen, Governor-General of Australia since 1977, the second Jew to occupy this the highest position in the land, the first being Sir Isaac Isaacs (1930-1935). During the tenure of Sir Isaac Isaacs no Jewish Community was in existence in the A.C.T., but in the days of Sir Zelman and Lady Cowen the Jewish Centre was often honoured by the presence of their Excellencies.

One such memorable and historic, though private, occasion was the Barmitzvah of their youngest son, Ben, on Shabbat Parshat Matot-Massay 5739, corresponding to 20th July, 1979. He intoned the Maftir and the Haftarah, recited the Ten Commandments and the special Barmitzvah Prayer, his father, a Cohen, was called up first to the Torah and his two brothers Simon and Nick, whose orthodox religious outlook was strongly moulded by the Melbourne Yeshivah, were equally honoured with Mitzvot. Among the worshippers, a large congregation, which necessitated the opening of the partitions to the hall, were the Ambassador for Israel, Mr. Michael Elizur and Mr. David Smith, Official Secretary to His Excellency the Governor-General, who in earlier days actively identified himself with the congregation.

Sir Zelman was born in Melbourne as the son of Bernard Cowen, a communal leader who occupied the positions of President of the Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies and of Temple Beth Israel. Sir Zelman celebrated his Barmitzvah at the St. Kilda Synagogue and was a member of its choir. In 1945 he was Honorary Secretary of the Board of Deputies. He studied Law at the Universities of Melbourne and Oxford gaining major awards and was chosen Victorian Rhodes Scholar, 1940. During the Second World War he served as a Lieutenant in the Australian Navy. He qualified as a Barrister and became a Q.C. in 1971. He gained several degrees and honorary degrees in Law at Australian and overseas universities, becoming visiting professor of Harvard Law School and other USA universities.

At Oxford he was a Fellow and Tutor of Oriel College and became Professor of Public Law and Dean of the Law Faculty at Melbourne University. He was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the Universities of New England, and of Queensland, and was honoured with Fellowships at the Academy of Social Sciences, Australian College of Education and the Royal Society of Arts.

Sir Zelman published several books on Australian and international law as well as a biography of Sir Isaac Isaacs. Unlike Sir Isaac, Sir Zelman was never involved in Australian politics nor did he serve in the judiciary.

Sir Zelman has taken a keen interest in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and was appointed Academic Member of its Board of Governors. He was chosen "Jew of the Year" in 1968 and when appointed Governor-General the Canberra Jewish Community held a reception in his honour. Their Excellencies have attended the services of the Centre on the High Festivals, sharing between the orthodox and liberal congregations and have also been guests of the Seder at the homes of two of the Presidents of the Community.

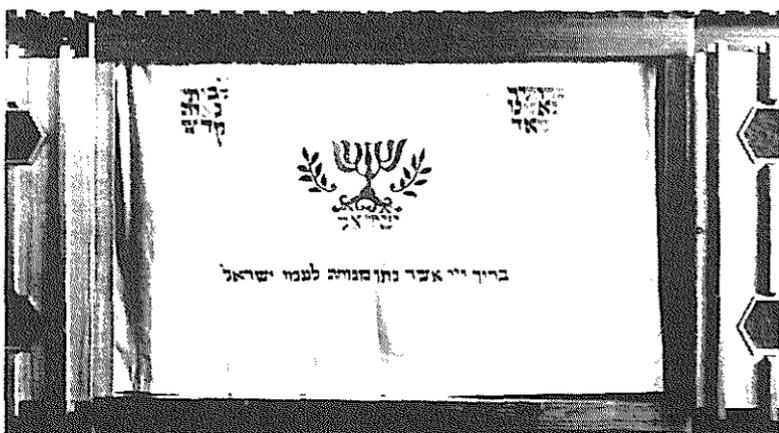
The visit of Rabbis to Canberra to conduct services, officiate at celebrations or deliver lectures, was not at all rare. The respective

congregations of the Rabbis often co-operated in making themselves responsible for the expenses involved. Rabbi Porush constantly maintained contacts with the Canberra Community with the encouragement of the Board of the Great Synagogue, and whenever official occasions brought him to Canberra he was invited to meet the Jewish residents socially or to address them. But also many other Rabbis, orthodox and liberal, deemed it their duty to come to the budding Community of Canberra and to minister to the congregation, if possible. Among them were Rabbi M. Alony of the Central Synagogue, Rabbi R. Apple of the Great Synagogue, Rabbi Dr. R. Brasch of Temple Emanuel, Rabbi Dr. A. Fabian, Chief Minister of the North Shore Synagogue and Chief Jewish Chaplain to the Australian Forces, an office which brought him often to Canberra, Rabbi Dr. H. Sanger of Temple Beth Israel, and Rabbi S.S. Silas of the Sephardi Synagogue.

In more recent years a number of scholars and students from the Yeshivot of Sydney and Melbourne volunteered to lecture and to give Shiurim in Torah and Talmud, quite successfully, to interested members of the Community, young and old.

A visit to Canberra and a communal reception in their honour were, of course, part of the agenda of all Chief Rabbis whenever they came to Australia.

The auditorium and the classrooms of the Centre were also let to outside organisations and for educational purposes in order to augment its income. Among the diverse tenants were the Japanese Embassy, the Public Service Board, the Opera Society and the Mormon Church. The kitchen was available to the lessees and its Kashruth could, therefore, not be maintained. But the Community decided to set aside under lock and key one set of kitchenware for the exclusive use of the Community. The congregational Ladies Guild was responsible for the kitchen, but the precautions are hard to maintain.



*Curtain for the Ark presented by the State of Israel.*

## **THE PRESENT STATE OF THE COMMUNITY**

The programme of congregational activities has reached its height in the last few years. The membership is more or less steady at about 160 units, including students who pay reduced fees and honorary members. It is estimated that between 400 and 500 Jews (some regard these figures as too high) now live in the A.C.T. Although some of them are short term residents, such as students and academics, there is now a hard core of people who are permanent residents of the A.C.T. and regard it as their home. Among them one may discern a few recent arrivals who are well rooted in Jewish religious life and could become, if mobilised, a source of strength to the Community. On the other hand, when a family which has been actively associated with the synagogue, such as the Lopez family, leaves Canberra it is felt by all.

The number of pupils at the Hebrew classes, which meet now for three hours on Sunday mornings, fluctuates greatly, but in 1981, 42 students enrolled in five classes, with Mrs. Ruth Holzman as headmistress. Teachers, often voluntary, are always available, educational material is satisfactory and the standards attained are fair in the circumstances. Barmitzvah and Batmitzvah classes are conducted by Mervyn and Sue Doobov and David Rosalky (until his appointment as the Prime Minister's senior private secretary), but the number of such celebrations in the synagogue has increased. In 1979 five boys celebrated their Barmitzvah and five girls their Batmitzvah in the synagogue in the presence of large congregations. These figures compare favourably in relative terms with the figures in other Communities but, we must admit, 1979 was an exceptional year. An Oneg Shabbat is held once a month on Friday night under the auspices of "Hineni".

There has been some increase in the number of students and young married people but not yet enough to form an enduring society. As late as 1980 another attempt was made to reactivate the club for young single people: six persons turned up. Still, they persisted. "Jewish Singles" now functions regularly.

On the other hand, several younger members of the second generation have come forward to serve on the Committee of Management. Two of them, each in his own way, are serving now the Canberra Community as leaders and have made outstanding contributions to its progress: Dr. Mervyn Doobov and Mr. Ted Whitgob.

Dr. Doobov, who was born in Brisbane and whose family has been closely involved with the South Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, settled with his wife Sue in Canberra in 1965. Mervyn is a graduate of the University of Queensland and gained his Ph.D. in atomic physics at A.N.U. He joined the public service and has worked in the Prime Minister's Department and at the C.S.I.R.O. Mervyn's principal work as President (1977-80) and as Vice-President has been to ensure the smooth functioning of the congregation, the maintenance of regular religious services and the management of its educational programme for young and old. He regularly officiates at the services, always observing their traditional customs. He is ably and sincerely supported by his wife Sue.

There are few communal activities in which she has not been involved and is a most dedicated member of the three women's organisations, notably the Ladies Guild which provides catering and social amenities for the congregation. She also served as editor of "Hamerkaz".

Ted Whitgob was President of the Community in 1974-77, and was re-elected in 1980 and 1981. He is a graduate of Sydney University and was President of the Jewish Students Union. He was one of the youngest executive members of the N.S.W. Jewish Board of Deputies. Settling in Canberra in 1970 he became involved in promoting the cause of the National Jewish Centre, and as President he sought to interest Jewish national organisations in the Canberra Centre which he perceived as the focus of the country's political life where Australian Jewry should establish a permanent lobby. He was also Vice-President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and member of the Council of Trustees of the N.S.W. Jewish Communal Appeal.

In professional life Ted is now Chief Ethnic Affairs Officer in the Department of Immigration, and is well known outside the Jewish Community where he has tried to promote the interests of Israel among the general population. He is also involved in Canberra's cultural life as President of the Canberra Opera Society, as Trustee of the Canberra Theatre and as Chairman of the Advisory Committee to the ABC.

Mr. Whitgob is not the only Jew to engage in civic and cultural affairs. The Community often provides speakers to address churches, schools and societies. Many members are active in organisations such as Rotary, consumer groups and so forth. Mr. Ernest Horton is currently President of his Rotary group. Ron Mendelsohn was founder of the A.C.T. Cancer Society after his daughter Carola died. Dr. Harry Rosenberg was President of the Canberra Chamber Music Society. Irma Starke has been President of the Canberra Women's Hospital Auxiliary and is active in the National Council of Women and other organisations. Hannah Enders was instrumental in setting up the Dickson Community Centre. She was honoured with the B.E.M. Earle Hoffman was very prominent in the Masonic Lodge. This is by no means an exhaustive list but an indication of the civic involvement of the Jews of Canberra.

Adult education in the form of fairly well attended study circles in Bible, Talmud and Modern Hebrew have been maintained for several years with regularity: a laudable achievement. These shiurim, conducted with dedication by Rabbi B. Leshes and Mr. George Stern, have rightly been called by a recent President of the Centre "an investment in Canberra's future".

With the arrival of Rabbi Themal from Perth the liberal group was able to hold its Sabbath Eve services, conducted by Rabbi Themal, with greater regularity, and the range of the educational programme for adults was extended. Rabbi Themal lectured on Jewish history and Jewish philosophy.

The Jewish Community is represented on the Ethnic Communities Council and a weekly Jewish session of 30 minutes, prepared by Rabbi Themal, is broadcast regularly. Some of the leaders of the Community have also engaged in public relations work by lecturing to non-Jewish

audiences on Israel and Jewish life in general. "Hamerkaz" is increasingly disseminating information on Israel and the Jewish world.

The various auxiliary organisations of the Community, the Ladies Guild, Wizo and the National Council of Jewish Women, pursue their activities with some success, and the relationship between the different sections of the congregation has continued to be friendly. Representatives of these groups have been co-opted as members of the Committee of Management.

In the middle of the 1970s it became clear that the clerical work of the office had increased to such an extent that it could no longer be attended to by voluntary workers, and the Committee, on the urging in particular of Ted Whitgob, decided to engage a part-time paid secretary. Mrs. Linda Woolfit, then Mrs. Lynne Walker, and now Mrs. Mary Gallahar have efficiently filled this post, and a wider range of tasks could now be undertaken.

Mr. and Mrs. A. Spiegel, migrants from Europe, who had lived for many years on a grazing property near the Cotter Dam, retired and came to live in Canberra in 1960. They could say with Joseph: "I am in search of my brethren". They re-discovered their people, and made generous contributions to the Centre and to charitable organisations. Mr. Spiegel was the first to be appointed a "Founder" of the Centre. The Community gave a dinner in their honour on the occasion of their Golden Wedding Anniversary in 1980 and made them honorary life members of the Community.

In 1980 the National Council of Jewish women celebrated in the presence of leaders from Sydney and Melbourne the 25th anniversary of its foundation in Canberra, and marked the occasion by presenting an electronic organ for the Fanny Reading Auditorium.

In 1979 a Jewish section in the otherwise non-denominational new general cemetery in Gungahlin was set aside on the application of the Community and consecrated by Rabbi S.S. Silas of the Sephardi congregation in Sydney in his capacity as President of the N.S.W. Association of Jewish Ministers, and the 30 odd unused graves in the Jewish Section of the old cemetery in Woden were acquired by the Community to be used as and when required. The Sydney Chevra Kadisha contributed towards the cost involved. Dr. V.J. Kronenberg has taken the place of Earle Hoffman on the Cemetery Trust of the A.C.T.

One of the tasks of the Australian Jewish Historical Society is to look after the Jewish graves in the defunct cemeteries strewn all over the country. The cemetery of Goulburn, of which Canberra is the nearest Community, still contains a number of recognisable Jewish graves. In September 1978 Earle Hoffman and Dr. M. Doobov, at the instigation of the Historical Society, visited Goulburn to inspect the Jewish section of the defunct cemetery. There they met with Mr. Terry Newman, who has collected an extensive list of Jewish graves throughout New South Wales on behalf of the Society. They reported, that the so called "Tahara House", which the Goulburn Community had built, had disappeared and that 10 out of 15 graves could still be traced, although only three of the Memorial Stones still stand. In 1981 Dr. Doobov again visited the cemetery and

reported little change.

The Canberra Community established in 1971 a "Board of Founders" in honour of the outstanding workers and donors of the Centre. It includes: Louis Klein, Albert Spiegel, Aaron Cohen, Leon Fink, Bernard Harris, Norman Stanton, Dr. Fanny Reading and Dr. E.P. Graf. A Memorial Service was held in their memory in September 1978.

The medal of the first Jewish V.C. winner of the First World War, Corporal Leonard Keysor, was purchased by the Jewish Ex-Servicemen Association together with the R.S.L. and presented to the Australian War Museum in Canberra.

As to the supreme purpose of the Centre — worship — one can scarcely speak of a religious revival, nor does one notice an upsurge of religious observance. The struggle for a Minyan still continues on Friday night; this is a source of distress to the leaders. The attendances otherwise (apart from exceptional occasions) leaves much to be desired, but the innovation of the Oneg Shabbat once a month which is designed to attract the children, and the contacts with religious youth groups from other Communities are most welcome.

This study ends with the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of the foundation of the Canberra Jewish Community and, at the same time, the 10th anniversary of the opening of the National Community Centre.

The Committee of Management prepared a programme of celebrations which began with a Communal Dinner on 26th November, 1981, at which Their Excellencies the Governor-General and Lady Cowen were guests of honour.

The dinner, chaired by the President Mr. Ted Whitgob, was held in the Dr. Fanny Reading Auditorium, and the kosher catering was provided by Shalom College, Sydney, under the supervision of Rabbi B. Leshes of the Sydney Yeshiva.

Among the guests were: the Ambassador of Israel, Mr. Abraham Kidron and Mrs. Kidron, Rabbi Porush, Rabbi Themal of the liberal group, Mr. Robert Goot, Acting President of the Jewish Communal Appeal, Mrs. Vera Cohen and Mrs. Ray Ginsberg of the National Council of Jewish Women, and the children of the late Louis Klein.

In his address Sir Zelman Cowen said: "This is a special Community; its special character is dictated by the distinctive character of Canberra . . . keeping the fires alight in such a small and special Community is not easy; it casts a heavy burden on those who take up the responsibilities of leadership . . . The conception of a national centre was an ambitious one, and there were problems in the settlement of religious issues . . . but it serves the Community well."

Dr. Mervyn Dobov thanked His Excellency for his presence and his thoughtful and humorous address.

The second function was of a religious nature: a Shabbaton during the weekend of 5th December. Rabbi and Mrs. Porush and several leaders of the "Hineni" movement in Sydney participated. Some 80 worshippers, including many children, were present at the Friday night service and the Oneg Shabbat which followed. Rabbi Porush spoke on the role of the

Shabbat in Jewish life. A group of "Hineni" youths came from Sydney for the occasion and livened up the proceedings with song and dance. On Saturday morning a full service was held followed by a Kiddush prepared by the Ladies Guild and in the afternoon a Seudah Shlishit was held with an "Ask-the-Rabbi" session. The Shabbaton ended with Havdalah.

### **WHAT OF THE FUTURE?**

Foremost in the mind of the historian, and of the friend of the Canberra Jewish Community, must be the question: What is the prognosis on the future of this singular, imaginative and striving fraternity, planted, as it is, in the glorious, promising and free setting of the capital of a huge, rich and advanced continent? The query does not refer to the physical survival of its followers or to their prosperity, but rather to their spiritual survival as faithful Jews bearing testimony to their ancient faith and the destiny of the Jewish people. Is the Community strong enough, is it on the right course, to safeguard for itself a sustaining and virile future?

The crux of the situation is: There is as yet no nucleus of committed observant Jews who could break the vicious circle which is besetting the Canberra Community. The "vicious circle" rests on the fact that, on the one hand, conditions are such that no strictly orthodox Jew would want to settle in Canberra which is so poor in religious amenities: No Rabbi, no Kashruth, little Sabbath observance, no Mikva, no adequate education for one's children, no social contact for young people; where the sense of isolation in a non-Jewish environment is so overwhelming.

On the other hand, how can Canberra ever change without the importation of a solid core, geographically united, of educated, observant Jews around which the rest of the community can gather and from which all, the religious and the not so religious, can derive strength and inspiration. The spinal cord is missing. Those who do settle in Canberra — faithful, dedicated sons and daughters of Israel who strive with heart and soul for Jewish survival and Jewish continuity — are, with few exceptions, of the type to whom the provision of the vital religious amenities and conditions alluded to are not essential or unattainable and, therefore, unattained.

I said before "geographically united" — this is a condition which not everybody appreciates, but it is a vital condition nonetheless, for history has shown us that concentration, at least for a substantial part of a Community, is essential for its durability and vitality.

To a degree the smaller Communities can lean on the larger and more durable sister Communities and draw spiritual sustenance from them. For Canberra the liaison with the other Communities and their leaders, spiritual and lay, has proved to be a most valuable source of strength and confidence and should be further developed as a matter of necessity, especially for the youth. But salvation must come from within.

Another question that naturally comes to the fore when discussing the future of the Community is: Is Canberra likely to have a full time Rabbi or Minister in the foreseeable future? That the presence of a spiritual leader would immeasurably enhance the strength and influence of the Community

is beyond dispute. But can the Community maintain a Rabbinic office? The answer will be: No, for the present. The Community is poor in members and resources and cannot afford the expense involved.

We know of Communities overseas (in the United States, England and South Africa) with even smaller memberships which have been able to keep up a Rabbinic office and other institutions. But the conditions are different. The type of people is different. Wealth combined with extraordinary sacrifice made the maintenance of a Rabbinic office possible in those Communities, and such conditions do not apply to Canberra. The only alternative would be to use the part-time services of a qualified resident or to secure substantial subsidies from the larger sister Communities on a regular basis — this, too, is not likely to happen. The absence of a Rabbi is a mighty handicap in the development of the Community. Without a spiritual leader the Community will at best “drift along”, to use the words of one of the honorary officiants.

The general impression one gains from conversation with the leaders of the Community concerning its long range prospects may be summed up in the reply of one of them: “My mood alternates between depression and optimism”. These mixed feelings reflect the inherent uncertainty and the misgivings many cherish concerning the future. The complaint of indifference is constantly heard in the congregational bulletin and at the meetings.

The pessimist argues: Why should Canberra be different from the other small Communities throughout Australia which have disappeared after a generation or two. But the optimist will retort with justification: Canberra is vastly different. It is the ever growing capital of a whole continent. It is not a goldrush township or a stagnant city, which “comes into being in a night and disappears in a night”. It is the heart of an immensely rich country which stands on the threshold of an undreamt of development. Its resources are of staggering dimensions. Its economy is among the best in the world. Its standards in science and industry place it in front of most nations. Canberra’s growth and prosperity are assured, and its economic assets are permanent: There will always be Jews in such a metropolis.

Embodied in this magnificent, virile capital city is a Jewish contingent which has already gained for itself a grand visible Centre with faithful leaders and consecrated servants who are determined to develop it into a citadel of Jewish faith and Jewish living. Surely, if we laboured hard and with all our hearts and souls, the seed planted with toil and heroism will produce a gainly tree, strong and beautiful, that will bear fruit to sustain us and our children for many generations.

The obstacles are many, the difficulties are great, but our resilience, too, is limitless. Our generation has risen from the ashes of the Holocaust in wondrous fashion to restore our Holy Homeland to the Jewish people, and to re-kindle the light of our faith in many Communities throughout the diaspora. It must be counted as a privilege and as an act of divine grace, to be placed into a position where with hope and confidence we can become instruments in keeping alive the perpetual fire of the synagogue and the glorious heritage of the Torah. Every Jew, especially in our turbulent age,

should resolve to dedicate his life to the eternal ideals, values and teachings of Judaism however heavy the sacrifice may be. United and renewed the Community can live and flourish and be blessed of the Lord: "Hear now, oh Jacob My servant, and Israel whom I have chosen . . . I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed and My Blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up among the grass, as willows by the watercourses. One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord and give for a title the name of Israel." (Isaiah 44.1).

**PRESIDENTS OF THE A.C.T. JEWISH COMMUNITY**

1951 — 1955	Dr. R. Mendelsohn
1955 — 1956	E.S. Hoffman
1956 — 1959	Dr. E.P. Graf
1959 — 1962	E.S. Hoffman
1962 — 1964	K. Gottlieb
1964 — 1967	E.S. Hoffman
1967 — 1970	E.M. Horton
1970 — 1973	L. Dixon
1973 — 1974	S. Hartstein
1974 — 1977	T.Z. Whitgob
1977 — 1980	Dr. M.H. Doobov
1980 — 1981	T.Z. Whitgob

**THE COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT 1981-82**

President	Mr. T.Z. Whitgob
Vice-President	Dr. M.H. Doobov
Hon. Treasurer	Mr. R. Webb
Hon. Secretary	Mrs. P. Lucas
Asst. Secretary	Mrs. R. Holzman
Committee	Dr. Z. Halevy, Dr. M. Rudner, Dr. A. Shroot, Rabbi U. Thernal

TABLE A — JEWS IN THE A.C.T.

Census	Population of the A.C.T.	Jews in Australia	Jews in the A.C.T.	Percentage
1911	1,714	17,289	—	—
1921	2,572	21,615	—	—
1933	8,947	23,553	4	0.02
1947	16,905	32,019	26	0.08
1954	30,315	48,436	54	0.14
1961	58,828	59,329 (65,985)	111 (122)	0.19
1966	96,013	63,271 (69,504)	203 (223)	0.32
1971	144,063	62,208 (68,022)	252 (292)	0.4
1976	197,622	53,441 (65,519)	323 (395)	0.6

NOTE. The figures mentioned in this Table and elsewhere in the article (unless otherwise defined) are of those who declared in the Census papers their religion as "Jewish" or "Hebrew". But not all citizens answered the question on "Religion". A certain percentage of the population have — increasingly so from Census to Census — declined to declare their religion by omitting to answer the question or by stating "no religion". Many Jews, no doubt, have also refused to declare their religion either for fear that this information might one day be used against them (this could well apply to refugees from Nazi oppression), or because they are non-believers or non-observant Jews, though communally or ethnically they are still regarded as Jews. Some, of course, may object as a matter of principle to being asked about one's religion, which they regard as a private matter. The real, or "adjusted", figures are thus higher than those mentioned in the Census, but by how many one can only guess. A reasonable method of the "adjustment" of the figures relating to Jews is to add the percentage of "undeclared" persons in the general population to the Census figures, i.e., by assuming that the percentage of "undeclared" Jews is the same as that of the general population. The figures in brackets are the "adjusted" numbers. Clearly, they are not fully reliable.

**TABLE B — BIRTHPLACES OF JEWS (In Percentages)**

	Australasia	U.K.	Cont. Europe	Asia	Africa	America
A.C.T.						
1961	45.1	7.2	33.3	9	4.5	0.9
1971	52.4	11.5	19.5	8.3	3.5	4.8
Australia						
1961	39.1	8.8	44.4	5	2.2	0.5
1971	42.4	9.1	39	5.7	2.6	1.2

**TABLE C — AGE DISTRIBUTION OF JEWS (In Percentages)**

	Census	0-19 years	20-49 years	Over 50 years
A.C.T.	1961	32.5	47.7	19.8
	1971	30.1	55.2	14.7
Australia	1961	30.8	39.2	30
	1971	26	37.2	35.7

This suggests that whilst the A.C.T. has many more middle-aged Jews than Australia and slightly more young Jews, there are fewer old people in the A.C.T.

## JEWISH COMMUNAL APPEAL

This Society is joined with others as a participating Organisation in the above Appeal which strives to raise adequate finance for the support of vital local Jewish institutions, whether Charitable, Educational, Cultural, or community services. All donations to the Appeal are tax deductible. (The Australian Jewish Historical Society is itself a body to which contributions are tax deductible, provided the donation is made to its Library Fund.)

It behoves all our Jewish members to support the Appeal especially as this Society has gained acceptance from the Appeal. By generously subscribing to the current campaign, our members are assisting to maintain essential services provided to the Jewish Community by the participating Organisations, including our own Society whose work will be enhanced and expanded by the additional funds that will flow from contributions made to the Appeal. The Executive and Committee of the Australian Jewish Historical Society commend this cause to its membership.

**BENEFACTIONS IN MEMORY  
OF**

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1