

THE MACCABEAN HALL: SOUL OF THE COMMUNITY; SPIRIT OF THE TIMES, 1918–1992

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*‘Architectural environments are intimately intertwined
with the cultural imperatives of the society’.¹*

This article will explore The Maccabean Hall (hereinafter referred to as ‘The Macc’ since this is what it was affectionately called) and the key role it has played in the life of the Jewish community of Sydney in light of the above proposition, assuming the meaning of ‘cultural imperatives’ to include social and political dimensions as well. The history of the Maccabean Hall will be examined during three of the most important periods of local and international Jewish history. As part of this study, the physical elements of the building along with its contents will be discussed, and how they depended on mental and philosophical concerns, born out of events in the Jewish community here and overseas, thereby making these two aspects inseparable. The periods under review are 1918 to 1925, the years in which The Macc was philosophically conceived and structurally established; 1939 to 1960, during which time its importance was concrete and pressing in providing a vital support structure for pre- and post-war refugees from their time of arrival until they felt secure enough in their integration into the community, and 1978 to 1992, the period in which the concerns and the passions of Holocaust survivors transformed The Macc into the Sydney Jewish Museum. In conclusion, it will briefly discuss the legacy of The Macc in its role in the Jewish community.

The War Memorial site on which The Macc was built on the corner of Darlinghurst Road and Burton Street in Darlinghurst, consists of numerous properties acquired in 1921, 1924 and 1949, which changed form and content, depending on the needs of the Jewish community at the time. The properties bought in 1949, num-

bers 5 and 7 Hardie Street and 142, 142a and 144 Darlinghurst Road, became the community centre which was opened in 1965, and became the central office of a number of key community organisations, some of which are still there. When The Macc struggled to attract community support, rooms and facilities were also leased to non-Jewish organisations. The foyer of the building, unchanged throughout its history, is the NSW Jewish War Memorial which honours the Jewish servicemen and women who lost their lives during times of war in defence of Australia. The War Memorial Board is the owner, developer and landlord of the properties comprising the Macc and the adjoining War Memorial Jewish Community Centre. Suzanne Rutland argues:

The history of the New South Wales Jewish War Memorial is a story of contradictions and contrasts. No project could have been conceived more enthusiastically, with such high ideals, and in an atmosphere of such optimism than this War Memorial, yet throughout its history it had to struggle for proper recognition, financial support and real acceptance.²

Before the first World War, congregational activities of the Jewish community were dominated by the established Anglo-Saxon Jews, although there were also a significant but much lesser number of German and Eastern European Jews who had settled in Sydney and its surrounds.

Although European immigration had ceased during the war there was still dissension. Suzanne Rutland points to the cleavage between the old Jewish settlers and the newcomers, stating:

This cleavage resulted from different religious and cultural backgrounds, the main conflict being the ideal of the East European ghetto with its intense, vibrant Jewish communal life and that of the English gentleman, seeking respectability and denying that Jews were a separate race.³

The psychology of these defined groups created a schism in the community particularly in the first two periods, which the creation of the Macc hoped to address. Later, the division translated intangibly into an underlying lack of support for the Museum by many members of the non-survivor Jewish community.

The domination of the Jewish community by Anglo-Saxon Jews during the Great War period meant that 'the community as a whole was more concerned with conforming to the non-Jewish way of life than with maintaining its cultural distinctiveness'⁴. Great pride was

also taken in the fact that Jewish communal leaders were also prominent in the political and commercial life of New South Wales. A large number of Jews took part in State and local politics, out of proportion to the size of the Jewish community, and they played a leading role in banking, insurance, merchandising and stock-broking. The community has been described as 'prosperous, integrated and accepted totally by the broader community. They were loyal to the British Empire and to Australia, their country'.⁵ At the same time most Sydney Jews were opposed both to Zionism because of the fear that it might make them seem unpatriotic, as well as to a large influx of non-British Jews, 'Yiddish speaking, foreign Jews who might upset the status of Australian Jewry within the broader community'.⁶

Encouraged by Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen of the Great Synagogue, many Jews volunteered for active service and enlisted in the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF). Others were encouraged to contribute to fundraising appeals for the war effort. This patriotic fervour was enhanced, in August 1918, by King George V knight-ing, in the field, Lieutenant General John Monash, Australia's most successful soldier and a highly visible Jew. 'His military ability was proof to the general community that Jews could be successful and loyal soldiers and Australian Jewry felt immense pride in his achievements'.⁷ As described in an unpublished manuscript in 1918:

Many of our fighters overseas were returning home and Sydney Jewry had reason to be proud. Of the 800 Jewish Australians from NSW who had enlisted voluntarily, 113 had been killed and many others wounded. Records show that 190 Jews held commissioned rank, and at least 95 had been honoured for bravery and outstanding service. No better time could be imagined for discussion on the question of how to honour these men who had conducted themselves so well.⁸

However, as has been argued that: 'The corollary of this successful integration was the possibility of the disintegration of the Jewish community because of the high rate of intermarriage.'⁹ The weakness of the community leadership and the lack of a communal infrastructure exacerbated its vulnerability. 'For a minority group to withstand the pressures of assimilation it needs to have strong roots and close group identification, and this was lacking in the community before 1920'.¹⁰

It was within these frames of reference that the concept of the Jewish War Memorial was conceived. The idea of a communal hall that would serve as a memorial, first proposed by Herbert I. Wolff,

the editor of the *Hebrew Standard*, 'was noble and imaginative: instead of merely erecting an obelisk, its advocates were determined to honour the memory of the dead by providing a focus and facilities for the living'.¹¹ Moreover, a war memorial coupled with a communal hall seemed ideal — it would commemorate the part that loyal Jewish soldiers had played in Australian history, and provide a social meeting place for young Jews to meet each other to try and prevent further intermarriage.

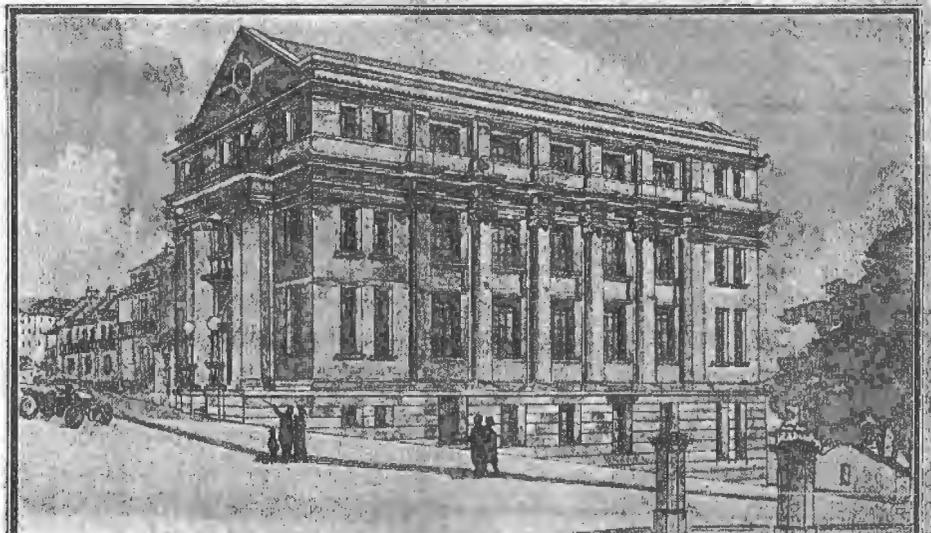
In 1919 an initial meeting of eighteen organisations discussed the project but it took the passion of one man, Ernest L. Davis, president of the New South Wales Jewish War Memorial in 1920, to make it happen by beginning the appeal to collect funds. His passion for the project was clearly evident in an emotional letter he sent to the Jewish community when he challenged its members as follows:

What have I done, what am I doing or what am I going to do for the New South Wales Jewish War Memorial? Have I enquired or given consideration to what it means, what it does, what it stands for or what it teaches? These are questions which every Jew in this State should have asked himself and still be asking.¹²

The following year, in February 1921, at a meeting of the synagogues and the newly formed Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen, a resolution was passed to erect a Jewish Memorial in the form of a Jewish Communal Hall on the land in Darlinghurst bounded by Burton Street, Hardie Street and Darlinghurst Road, which would be purchased for £3,250. A description of the proposed four storey building containing the desired Halls and numerous other rooms was included with the proviso that £25,000 would be collected from the community to finance the initial development and that afterwards, the centre would be able to sustain itself financially. Lieutenant Gordon Keesing, A.R.I.B.A. was announced as the architect.

It was not to be an easy task. After the war there were many other needy causes that the community was asked to support, but the fundraisers optimistically launched a 'Brick Appeal' in which the public was approached to buy 500,000 bricks at a cost of one shilling each. The wording of the brochure encapsulated all the values, the fears and the passions of the Jewish community. It reflected elements of great pride in the part played by loyal and patriotic Jewish soldiers in the military affairs of Australia and the British Empire, while giving voice to the fears of community leaders that

THIS IS WHAT WE WANT !



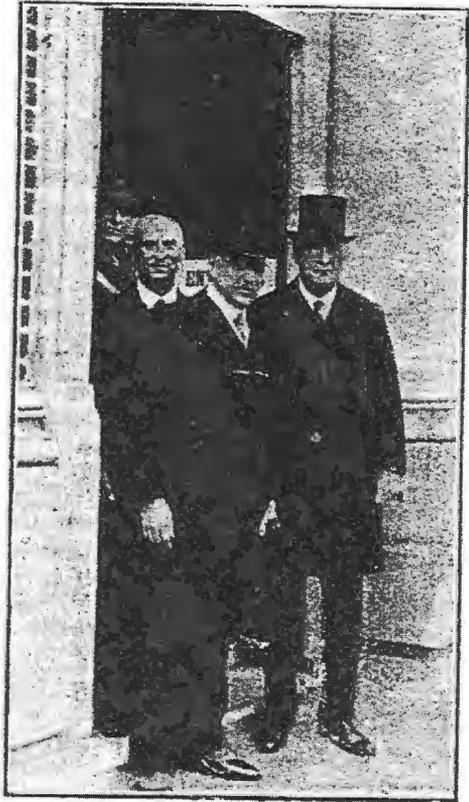
Excerpt from the 1921 Brick Appeal Brochure showing the architectural drawing of the proposed Jewish Communal Centre.

the level of intermarriage and assimilation into the general community was threatening the viability of the Jewish community in the future.¹³

The first Annual Report of the Jewish War Memorial, published in April 1922 showed that community support for the project had not reached expectations. Only £8,943 had been collected. A year later, the original plans were changed because of the financial shortfall and a tender for £14,984 for the construction was accepted. In October of the same year another appeal for £10,000, being the amount needed to finish construction, was sent to the Jews of New South Wales. Construction was completed and on 11 November 1923, coinciding intentionally with Armistice Day and the community celebrated the official opening of the memorial by Sir John Monash at a ceremony described in glowing terms by the *Hebrew Standard*. On 16 November 1923 it proclaimed:

Never in the history of Jewry in this State was there a more brilliant function than the historic occasion of the opening of The Maccabean Hall. The flower of Australian Jewry was present and all, while honouring the occasion, were especially there to do honour to Australia's greatest Jewish son, Sir John Monash.¹⁴

The establishment of The Macc was seen as such a momentous milestone in the history of the community that the issue of the *Hebrew Standard* was devoted almost entirely to all aspects of the building itself, the events of the opening ceremony and the significance of The Macc in the community. The building was described as having a foyer 'of heroic proportions'¹⁵ containing a magnificent memorial with an honour roll of the 113 fallen Jewish soldiers of the 1914-1918 War and the 800 who were on active duty. The doorways of the foyer 'gave access to the hall, the supper room and cloakrooms and its communal hall with the simple inscription 'The Path of Duty was the Way to Glory 1914-1919' written across the façade of the stage'.¹⁶ The *Hebrew Standard* went on to discuss the impressive opening ceremony, and the brilliance of the speakers.¹⁷ The mood of the speeches at the opening ceremony conveyed the importance of the day's events to Armistice Day and the sense of belonging and duty felt by Jews to the British Empire and to Australia. Major A.W. Hyams stated: 'This building is the visible expression of gratitude for all time by New South Wales Jews and a testimony to what they owe to Great Britain and its flag'.¹⁸ Monash's speech coalesced the ideals of the day:



Sir John Monash Opening Door of the Building.

It is a utilitarian memorial, but it has a symbolic purpose. It has behind it the aim of keeping the Jewish people together, preserving the creed, perpetuating the faith. I appeal to the Jews of New South Wales to set before themselves the ideal of service to the country. Nowhere in the world do we have so free and unfettered a life. Let us do loyal service to the country.¹⁹

By 1924, although plagued by financial difficulties and lack of communal support, The Macc began to fulfil the promise of a social,

religious, educational and sporting facility not only for Jewish youth but for adults as well. Some of the organisations that patronised and used the facilities were the Literary and Debating Society, the Maccabean Dramatic Section, the Jewish Social and Sports Club, the Mess Club and the Ex-servicemen's Association, which had its own clubroom, later called the Dugout. Religious services previously held in the Montefiore Home were transferred to The Macc and a communal Succah erected in the adjoining property which had been bought in 1924 and which had a connection constructed between the two buildings. Some of the events and happenings of 1924 were described as follows:

Social nights on Wednesdays and Sundays organised by the entertainment committee under the chairmanship of H.I. Wolff, Captain Hatfield and his Gymnastic class, the first Seder Service, the Maccabean Queen Competition, Miss Monica Scully and her pupils, the first Jewish Athletic Carnival for amateur athletes, and the first Jewish Returned Soldiers Smoko held in the main hall.²⁰

There were also many attempts at fundraising in the following years, but by 1931 the overdraft had reached £6,593. During these years of the depression The Macc reflected Sydney's anglicised Jewish community's desire to build a communal hall/memorial in their own image — loyal Australian citizens integrated into the broader community, proud of their Jewishness but showing minimal Zionist tendencies which could be perceived as disloyalty, and trying to prevent the high rate of intermarriage which had come about through their own desire to assimilate and integrate. Rabbi Raymond Apple argues that:

In the inter-war years the Maccabean Hall gave Sydney Jewry, for the very first time, a social and sporting meeting-place of its own, and the community learnt to think of it with much affection. During World War II it enabled essential welfare services to be developed and maintained, and it expanded and grew in the post-war period to adapt to the changing needs of a diversifying community.²¹

Although the 1920s and early 1930s witnessed the increasing popularity of The Macc, Australian Jewry remained a small community with little commitment to their Judaism or Jewish education. A sense of complacency was brought about both by their isolation from world Jewry and by the feeling of acceptance within

Australian society. Their sense of loyalty was to Britain rather than to European Jews who were regarded as quite foreign and different from themselves. The small but more traditional European migration made little impact in the dominant Anglo Jewish culture and 'the community structure remained largely isolated from events and issues in world Jewry. Australian Jewry had not succeeded in its attempts to strengthen and diversify communal institutions in order to stimulate Jewish awareness.'²² Rutland points to the fact that: 'It was the rise of Hitler and the resultant refugee migration of the late 1930s which reversed the trend of assimilation and forced the community to rethink many of its basic attitudes.'²³ The community came to realise that all Jews, no matter their origin were targets of Nazism destined for destruction and this increased their own feelings of vulnerability.

Between 1936 and 1939, over 5000 Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria came to New South Wales, and 'organisational demands were made on the community as a whole in order to assist in the rehabilitation and integration of the refugees into Australian society'.²⁴ The Maccabean Hall and the organisations and amenities it housed provided both the physical infrastructure and the psychological support for this rehabilitation and integration process to begin. Although immigration ceased during the war years, Jewish consciousness had been aroused and the migrants brought new attitudes and subsequently new dimensions to the Jewish community by encouraging the development and growth of Jewish cultural organisations and by their different perceptions of the necessity of Jewish education, religion and Zionism. In time, this period bonded the different ethnic and religious elements of the community together and the community was enriched in everyway by the refugees. The community grew, became more cohesive and more confident of its place in Australian society, yet more secure in its diversity. All this was apparent in the events that took place at The Macc.

For many of the refugees, however, there was still heartache and a lack of acceptance in their dealings with the existing community of anglicised Jewry. The Macc served as the meeting place for 'a mass meeting of migrants in 1939 when Inspector Mitchell of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch instructed the refugees to speak English, abide by Australian laws especially wage awards; not to barter; and not to dress conspicuously'²⁵ in fashions that would identify them as foreigners and refugees. 'These instructions from a non-Jew were welcomed by the established Jewish Community'²⁶ fearful that any foreign behaviour would affect their own standing in the wider community.

In October 1939, as a result of rebuilding activity by the building committee 'the annexe' was transformed into offices, with additional rooms including a gymnasium and lounge being provided. This was important extra space in view of what was to take place at the Macc. At the same time the Australian Jewish Welfare Society (AJWS), formerly the German Jewish Refugee Fund moved their offices to The Macc. Jewish Welfare was the key organisation in the rehabilitation and integration process of the refugees and survivors, and foreshadowed twenty years of incessant activity at The Macc.

Refugees and survivors remember various experiences that they had at The Macc during this period with mixed emotions. The Schneeweiss family, for example, arrived in Sydney in June 1939 on the *SS Esquilino* from Italy. Joachim turned twelve on the voyage. He recalled on his first day being taken from the ship to the Maccabean Hall. In the main hall there were various little tables, older ladies with kettles serving tea, doing charity, who were very friendly. 'I had my first confusing cultural experience there, being given tea with milk, rather than lemon. It was a traumatic experience for me as I had never seen tea served with milk before!'²⁷ More traumatic was his father's encounter with Walter Brand, the general secretary of the AJWS at their offices in the Macc. Brand only spoke English and hardly communicated with those who could not. Joachim Schneeweiss recalls: 'Nor did he exude sympathy and understanding or give my father the feeling that, as a migrant, he was going all out to help him.'²⁸ Matsdorf, a lawyer from Germany who worked with Brand and was himself a German Jewish refugee, interviewed migrants for details of their work and life experience to help them find work. Joachim recalls:

My father was a successful businessman who would not work on the Sabbath. Matsdorf told him in no uncertain terms that it was impossible to function in this country without working on Saturdays. It was substantially true because factories still worked on Saturday but my father said, thank you, that's the last time I'll have anything to do with you. This incident badly scarred my father's impressions of the Welfare Society at the time.²⁹

Despite this incident Joachim and Matsdorf later became good friends and worked together on a number of projects.

By the time of the annual meeting of the War Memorial in 1941, ninety percent of Jewish activities in Sydney were housed in the Maccabean Hall complex. This was a remarkable fulfilment of the

original intention for the building but something that would not have been possible without the influx and influence of the refugees. In 1943, the annual report stated that 222 social functions and 598 meetings had been held at the Macc. Further, the War Memorial was financially sound thanks to the £12,000 bequest by Philip Cohen — one of the few times in its existence that this was the case and due entirely to philanthropy rather than the ability of the War Memorial Board to make The Macc financially viable.

During the 1940s, key attitudinal changes in the psychology of the community were also reflected in events that took place at The Macc. The political, social and cultural organisations that began life there in this period were to be the building blocks of the future community infrastructure. Between 1943 and 1945 the Maccabean Hall witnessed countless meetings of the 40 organisations trying to create a democratic infrastructure in the community. The Board of Deputies was born and in 1945 held its first AGM there. Rutland states:

With the end of the war a new and larger influx of refugees to Australia began. Between 1947 and 1954, the Jewish population of New South Wales increased from 13,220 to 19,637, largely through migration. The Australian Jewish Welfare Society played a central role in assisting the refugees to adjust to the new conditions in Australia, to learn English and find suitable employment. Newcomers were met at the ship and taken to the reception centre at The Maccabean Hall if they were not going interstate.³⁰

The Macc in these vital years housed organisations and facilities that came about through necessity. It encapsulated the 'spirit of the times'. It was the central focus in the lives of pre- and post-war refugees, nurturing them in time of need. As refugees, almost everything they needed was available at The Macc — organising to be met at the boats, landing permits for relatives or other governmental procedures attended to, a place to find work, English classes, exercise classes, sports facilities, and occupational retraining in the sheltered workshop. More than that, it provided social activities enabling newcomers to meet other refugees and members of the existing community as well as learning about the political and religious organisations of the community and the opportunity to start their own.

Tom Keleman, who was the first young person to be brought out by the Welfare Guardian Scheme, a sub-committee of the AJWS, arrived in Australia in July 1947.³¹ He described The Macc as a jum-



The office of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society in 1947.

ble of rooms and offices, housing everything necessary for the immigration, rehabilitation and the integration of the survivors. Rooms were rented out by the War Memorial to many organisations and private people. The large Jewish Welfare office was very basic space, divided by partitions.

Keleman commented that 'The War Memorial always complained about not getting enough rent to improve conditions.'³² The basement contained the dugout. Upstairs was a room used for teaching English to Jewish refugees who wanted lessons. Classes were given by Mr Savage and his son, who were not Jewish. The AJWS arranged the classes which were initially free, but later cost a token amount. Other rooms were rented to a Viennese migrant who was a singing teacher, and a club of alumni of Sydney Boys' High. The Board of Deputies met regularly at The Macc although they did not have an office as such and Dr Hans Kimmel held lectures there at one stage to discuss the Kimberley project.

The Macc as a social and communal centre played a pivotal role, with weddings and barmitzvahs a weekly occurrence. The main social event was the weekly Sunday dance, which always had a band. Many young people patronised the dances and this included not only refugees but also members of the established anglicised community. It was an opportunity for the refugees to meet the

young locals and many marriages resulted from those dances. Tom recalled some incidents of friction as well:

I remember meeting the daughters of a prominent doctor there. They were an established family, Australian Jews of a few generations back. I wanted to take out one of the daughters but sensed that he was not keen to allow his daughter out with a refugee.³³

Other actions caused tension, when staff were told to tell refugees who wanted to find work to use duffer bags rather than European style briefcases, not wear their coats too long or their trousers too flared as you could 'pick a European a mile away. The conservative Jewish element said they should fit in if they wanted to get on in this country.'³⁴ Many refugees felt great resentment at this critical reaction from their fellow Jews.

Another organisation of fundamental importance to the community, which was set up at The Macc in that period, was the Jewish Welfare's sheltered workshop. It was established in the basement next to the garage shortly after the influx of Hungarian refugees in the 1950s. It helped provide refugees who had no other skills with useful work, and involved those who were getting older in activity. Thirty to forty people were trained in simple trades and did assembly work there. Sewing was taught as clothing manufacturers were desperate for workers. The workers received pocket money for their work. The Macc was central and focal to the lives of many refugees as they travelled there on a daily basis to do something pertaining to their new life. The hall was used extensively for large gatherings as much as for small gatherings. It was easy to access because of the tram that came from the city, ran down Burton Street and went to Bondi. People could get to it easily and quickly from the outer suburbs of Sydney. Dalia Stanley recalls:

We lived in Canterbury in the South West, and every week my mother took my brother and I, by tram, to exercise classes at the Macc. It was an anchor for those of us who lived away from the centre of the city, a place where Jews could reassert their identity.³⁵

This feeling of reasserting identity was crucial to some of the events that took place at The Macc in 1947/8 during the period of the creation of the State of Israel, and with other gatherings that took place during the 1950s.

Reasserting an identity that included being Jewish, and regarding Israel as the Jewish homeland, developed from the dramatic growth in the awareness of Zionism and its importance to Jews and their future, from liberation in 1945 to the United Nations Partition Resolution in November 1947. There were meetings and rallies at The Macc throughout this period. Joachim Schneeweiss recalls that defining moment in Jewish history as it was announced to an enormous crowd in the main hall of The Macc. as follows:

When the UN passed its Partition Resolution, Dr. Herbert Evatt, Australia's Minister for External Affairs, who had a close relationship with leaders of the Zionist community in Sydney, was there. He was also President of the 1947 UN General Assembly session which passed the resolution, so the jubilation had a personal element here. A rally was called on a Sunday night. Max Freilich, who spoke from the heart, got up and shouted 'mazel tov [congratulations]' three times into the microphone on the stage. The audience erupted into shouting and clapping. It was a truly emotional simcha [celebration].³⁶

It was the first community outpouring of support for Zionism, part of the healing process between English and European Jews, and a turning point for the uniting of community ideals. The creation of the State removed the feeling of conflicting loyalties for many Jews of English origin particularly because of 'the role played by Dr Herbert Evatt in the making of that crucial recommendation'³⁷ and the 'Australian government's firm endorsement of Israel's existence.'³⁸

The reassertion of a political identity as a Jewish community without fear of being regarded as disloyal to Australia was apparent in September 1950, when The Macc hosted a protest meeting, under the auspices of the Board of Deputies, at the government's plan to allow mass German migration to Australia. At the meeting the following resolution was passed:

Having regard to the widely acknowledged failure of the denazification program and to the survival of militant Nazi groups in Germany, this meeting believes that the admission into this country of German migrants and 'Volksdeutsche' who are still indoctrinated with Nazi ideology would be the gravest menace to the Australian way of life.³⁹

The following year, the evidence of an assertion of a cohesive social identity became clear when The Macc was packed for the

annual Warsaw Ghetto Memorial Service. The whole community, including pre- and post- war refugees, now came together to mourn and remember the Holocaust.

The latter part of the 1950s saw the refugees begin to integrate and assimilate into the community. This led to changes in the demography of the Jewish population as people moved away from the traditional Jewish areas. Once they found jobs, married and had families and began integrating into the fabric of Sydney society, they spread out into the Eastern Suburbs, the North Shore and other areas of Sydney and New South Wales. 'The peak came in the 50s with the establishment of new congregations and the construction of synagogues'⁴⁰ in areas such as Parramatta, the Eastern Suburbs, the North Shore, and Strathfield. New function rooms, new meeting rooms sprung up wherever Jews moved, community organisations were formed and moved to their own premises, and an era of irrelevance was ushered in for the Macc.

By 1959, a committee was set up by the Board of Deputies to investigate whether the War Memorial should be retained as a communal centre and modernised or sold. In 1960 this committee, chaired by Justice Bernard Sugerman, recommended that the Jewish War Memorial be retained as it was and continue benefiting the community as a War Memorial and community centre, which, as discussed, was built next door to the Macc and opened in 1965.

This did not happen and the next three decades saw The Macc fall into a state of disrepair and disuse. In 1983, at the sixtieth anniversary tribute to The Macc, its position was described as follows:

In many ways the building has justified the hopes entertained for it: in others the reality has fallen short of the vision. The community at large has not sufficiently appreciated the Centre, and over and above the geographical problems there have been controversies occasioned by failures in communal consciousness by individuals and organisations. But, all in all, Sydney Jewry is fortunate in its War Memorial. The Macc has indeed often served the community better than the community has served The Macc.⁴¹

This situation of highs and lows for The Macc existed throughout its history until its present reincarnation as the Jewish Museum. In exploring the reason why the community considered this transformation, the composition of the Jewish population needs to be taken into account. Between 1933 and 1961, 27,000 Holocaust survivors arrived in Australia, increasing the Jewish population

three-fold, from 23,553 to 59,343. The number of survivors now equalled or outnumbered the members of the existing community. 'This high proportion of Holocaust survivors is very important in understanding the nature of Australian Jewry and the intensity of the development of Holocaust remembrance activities after 1978'.⁴²

Forty years passed from the end of the Holocaust during which time the community matured, healed its divisions, and put in place the infrastructure of Jewish dayschools, aged homes, facilities to care for less fortunate members of Jewish society, and the general organisational infrastructure that exists today. The change of purpose of the Sheltered Workshop in this period is one example that illustrates the different concerns of the maturing community, changing from helping refugees acquire new skills in order to find work, to training and giving work to disabled members of the community. Survivors recreated their lives, married and had families, found work and started businesses. In the process of recreating their lives most of them did not talk about their experiences during the Holocaust. These emotional and psychological memories were repressed, deliberately or otherwise, as they were confronted with a public who did not want to hear, and often their own families whom they did want to tell.

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw great changes in community attitudes as the Holocaust became integral to the consciousness of western society. Survivors of the Holocaust 'increasingly realised that silence could betray the victims, sustain ignorance and bring with it the danger of recurrence'.⁴³ Their determination to tell the world the truth about the Holocaust germinated towards the end of the 1970s. It was intensified by international and local occurrences in the 1980s⁴⁴ and, as survivors grew older, by their desire to talk about what had happened to them personally. Most important, the worldwide upsurge of neo-Nazi and Holocaust denial literature added to the concern survivors felt about general community attitudes to the Holocaust and Holocaust denial. All these happenings influenced survivors to actively take steps to perpetuate the knowledge and memory of the Holocaust. Their determination to create a museum documenting the historical truth, that the broader community could visit and be educated by, became an imperative. By the early 1990s, this led to the third reincarnation of The Macc as the Sydney Jewish Museum.

The ideas and discussions leading up to the creation of the Sydney Jewish Museum over that decade were focused on three different committees: the Holocaust Remembrance Committee, the Australian Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors (AAJHS) and the Institute for Holocaust Studies. However, influential individu-

als, either in key community positions or with vested interests took the actions that made it come to fruition. Potential sponsors for the Museum project were Aaron Kleinlehrer, and John Saunders, a Hungarian survivor and co-founder of the Westfield shopping centre chain who had recently left Westfields and started his own property group, which is now called Terrace Towers. The properties under discussion to house such a museum were the B'nai B'rith property in Yurong Street, East Sydney and the Maccabean Hall. At the start of negotiations these two high profile survivors acted together but that situation did not last. Between 1987 and 1989 negotiations for two museums were underway creating tension between Saunders, Kleinlehrer, the AAJHS, the Board of Deputies and other interested parties, with adverse press reviews fuelling the arguments. By 1989, a declaration was made giving total support of the AAJHS only to the Saunders' project. As this support was seen as a key condition for any Holocaust remembrance activity in New South Wales, this project now had official blessing from the AAJHS and the community. The Saunders project on the Maccabean Hall site was, therefore, revived in November 1989. Saunders connection with The Macc went back to the 1960s when he funded the refurbishment of the Hall in honour of his first wife Eta who had recently passed away.

Soon after this Kleinlehrer funded, designed and opened his own museum in some terrace houses in Cleveland Street, Surry Hills. His son, Robert, became the director of the museum. Konrad Kwiet described this centre:

It was spectacular and theatrical in design, resembling a modern art gallery, almost voyeuristic in atmosphere with massive blow-ups of some of the most horrific Holocaust photos, for example, showing the naked bodies of Latvian Jewish women and their children being liquidated. In the backyard an artificial Concentration Camp watchtower was set up with burning candles.⁴⁵

The museum also contained authentic artefacts, which Kleinlehrer had collected over the years from various sources, like Zyklon B and soil from the camps, which were sent to the Holocaust Museum in London when the museum closed after a few years. Whether this was his protest against the Jewish community because he was forced to go it alone, the fact was that his museum 'never existed for the Jewish community.'⁴⁶

The significance of the Maccabean Hall site as a Jewish Museum lay in its sense of Jewish continuity for the community.

The building, from its construction in the early twenties, was always part of the headquarters of Jewish community and served a communal Jewish function. Setting up a Holocaust museum in an existing Jewish building reinforced the tradition of Jewish life there. Kwiet has compared this with overseas museums, commenting that:

Most other Holocaust museums have no Jewish tradition in terms of landscape and architecture. They have been constructed outside Jewish communities and are new buildings with new architecture which sometimes causes enormous debate, for example, the design of the Holocaust Museum in Berlin created by Daniel Libeskind.⁴⁷

In addition, the War Memorial in the foyer was central to the concept because it highlighted the significance of the relationship between Australia and the Jews who have migrated here at various periods of its history. The symbolism was overwhelming of the juxtaposition, on the same site, of the War Memorial, which represented Jews who had given their lives out of love and loyalty for Australia, and the museum, which represented the many Holocaust survivors who had been given the opportunity of a new life in Australia. There were some negative aspects of the site, including its location in an area with little or no parking, as well as being situated in an area infamous for problems with drugs and prostitution. Furthermore, its heritage status limited what could be done to the building without going through the roof or changing the façade. However, the overall suitability of the site and the desire to begin overrode these issues.

David Dinte coordinated the whole project from the offices of Terrace Towers in William Street. He was a fourth generation Australian Jew with a limited knowledge of the Holocaust. His first meaningful contact with survivors was with his parents-in-law. His knowledge of The Maccabean Hall was equally limited. He had heard of it but had never visited it. Two important aspects of the community were represented by the two men most responsible for building the Museum; the passion and dreams of the survivor community to create a museum represented by Saunders, and the pragmatic, well-educated, but historically uninformed and non-involved Australian Jew represented by Dinte. The impact on Dinte's empathy and attitude because of his involvement was to be life changing, just as the survivors hoped the museum would be for many in the Jewish and the broader community. He later commented:

I became aware that a Holocaust museum had been discussed many times but nothing had ever happened. The impetus for John came with John Forster, George Farkas' father, who worked at Westfields. John had assisted Raoul Wallenberg and had a large amount of memorabilia relating to that time. He had spoken to John Saunders many times about it. When he passed away, John called his widow wanting to see the memorabilia and she said she had destroyed it all. That was when he realised that if a museum was not built there would come a time when there was nothing.⁴⁸

A planning committee chaired by David Dinte was formed. It included members of the Australian Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors (AAJHS), the Institute of Holocaust Studies, the Board of Deputies, and other members of community. This committee was responsible for the initial concepts. Meetings were held with the Association and important artefacts and items looked at for display purposes. A number of meetings were held with the War Memorial Board to strike a deal on rent for The Macc, which had hardly been used during the 1980s except for the War Memorial, which was opened every year on Anzac Day. Their discussions centred on its total disuse as a reason for the War Memorial to be more generous in the terms of the lease. Once the lease issue was resolved, they moved forward, as Dinte remembered:

Everyone involved wanted the Museum to be built but there were differences of opinion on major aspects, including the funding, the building and the running of the Museum. There was talk in general perspectives but nothing was happening. Finally, John decided that he would go ahead and fund the project himself. This gave him control over all aspects of the Museum: design, construction and operation.⁴⁹

A team of individuals headed by Dinte worked on the project and went overseas visiting other Holocaust museums for broad-brush ideas. These included Bernard O'Hara, a key Saunders employee and project manager, Michael Bures, the architect of the new design, and Kylie Winkworth, a professional museum curator who drew up the original brief. On the trip she was so overwhelmed by her exposure to the Holocaust that she became ill and was forced to withdraw from the project. Dinte and Saunders then brought in Sylvia Rosenblum who was 'brilliant for transforming the concept into the museum. She pulled the whole thing together and made it happen in record time.'⁵⁰

Michael Bures' unique solution was to remove everything that had been added to The Macc in the 1960s, strip back to the old ceiling, and restore as much of the original building as possible. The basement was to contain a new library, offices and a 100 seat theatre. This architectural design was commended as follows:

Bures' central design is an inspired answer to the problem of putting various levels of exhibits into the barrel-vaulted central hall without cramping claustrophobia. This is achieved remarkably successfully with an innovative, inspirational concept based on the Magen David, the Star of David, the universal Jewish symbol. There is a sculptural staircase and platforms in the centre of the hall with a geometric spiral based on the interlocking equilateral triangles of the Star of David, with it acting as the core. This creates a central vertical space all the way up into the ceiling with visual connections to the old ceiling and all exhibit platforms.⁵¹

Professor Konrad Kwiet was invited to write and check the text but was not involved in the selection of artefacts. Individuals whom Saunders had worked with in his shopping centres created the interior displays of the Museum, including the ghetto wall, the busts of Wallenberg and Korscak and the George Street display. Dinte recalled:

It was a project, like other things we did, the thrill and excitement was in the chase and when finished and done you moved on. For John, in the construction it was a job to be done in a time frame — but as the interior came together and some of the subject matter came out (John was not involved in this aspect) he was emotionally affected when he saw people's stories up on the walls.⁵²

In November 1992, little more than eighteen months after its third reincarnation was begun the Sydney Jewish Museum, as it was named, was officially opened by Rear Admiral Peter Sinclair. The job was completed quickly and efficiently, and the museum finally created because of the passion of one man, John Saunders, as it had been with Ernest Davis in 1920.

Judith Berman argues that: 'the Holocaust became an element in the consciousness of Western societies from the late 1970s, but there has not been one single way of memorialising the destruction of European Jewry. Different societies have remembered the Holocaust in different ways'.⁵³ The Sydney Jewish Museum reinforces the significance of this comment when elements of the way in

THE SYDNEY JEWISH MUSEUM

A Museum of Australian Jewish History and the Holocaust

A publication to mark the opening of the Museum
on 18 November, 1992

by His Excellency Rear Admiral Peter Sinclair AC
Governor of New South Wales



His Excellency Rear Admiral Peter Sinclair AC,
Governor of New South Wales with Mrs Sinclair
and Mr Joshua Stender AO, Chairman and Benefactor
at the opening of the Sydney Jewish Museum

John Saunders (right) at the opening of the Sydney Jewish Museum, 1992, with Rear Admiral Peter Sinclair and Mrs Sinclair.

which it has remembered the Holocaust are analysed. The determining element is the link between the Australian Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and the Museum. Survivors conceived, funded, built and run the Museum. Kwiet noted that: 'This creates a certain kind of Museum that is personal, almost like a tour of one's home'.⁵⁴ Added to this is the fact that it is a project within the Jewish community and receives almost no government funding. Its message and purpose do not, therefore, have to reflect government policy as with the Holocaust Museum in Washington or Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Israel. The Sydney Jewish Museum, for example, sees Israel in the chronology of events post-liberation, rather than seeing the Holocaust as a justification for the creation of the State. Adding to the feeling of authenticity given to the Museum by the impact of tours given by survivors, is the authenticity of the artefacts and items displayed on the floor or kept in the archives. 'Not one item has ever been bought. They are either loaned from or donated by survivors or their families. This is crucial in terms of comparison with Washington or Berlin, both of which have bought artefacts. The Museum didn't have a budget for that purpose'.⁵⁵

At the outset it was not crucial that the content and philosophy of the Museum should extend beyond the Holocaust narrative, although there were discussions about it. The survivors wanted

Newspaper headlines at the time of the opening of the Sydney Jewish Museum.



SYDNEY JEWISH MUSEUM

MUSEUM OF AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORY AND THE HOLOCAUST

THE SYDNEY JEWISH MUSEUM NEWSLETTER
Volume 1 Number 1 Nissán 5753 - April 1993



their story told. That was the most important object at the time. 'As well there was no museum equivalent in Sydney to set a precedent. There were some Holocaust memorials but no museum type, which only comes into being once you have reached some distance from the event'.⁵⁶ The way in which the narrative panels of the Museum

are displayed reflects this particular way of remembering, with the overall effects of the exhibits on the Holocaust floors deliberately low-key. Architect Bures explained: 'We deliberately chose not to shock people. Some overseas exhibitions show much more material and have much more impact. To show the whole truth you've got to show a lot more than this museum does at present'.⁵⁷

The ground floor describes the celebration of the vitality and richness of Jewish culture and rituals. However, it is devoted in the most part to Australian Jewish history with tribute paid to those who came to Australia as survivors and refugees. This can be considered as the 'Australianisation' of the message of the Holocaust by looking at how the survivors recreated their lives here, and their post-war contribution to this country. Dinte stressed:

My involvement with the Museum made me appreciate Jewish history. I only realised how important Israel was when I got involved with the Museum. I discovered my roots for the first time and seeing that passion in the Survivors made me realise these people were fighting for something so important. It was an awakening for me. I trace it all back to John and my involvement with the Museum. It changed my life and focus on everything.⁵⁸

When the Museum was completed the intention was to hand it over to a communal body to run, but this did not happen. Alan Jacobs was appointed as director and later Rabbi Jeffrey Cohen. It became known as John's asset and few in the community supported it financially. Years of tension in the management structure persisted until 1998, a year after Saunders' death, when it became part of the Jewish Communal Appeal (JCA) under Robert Goot's chairmanship. Like many museums it struggles financially, its continued welfare dependent on generous benefactors despite being partially funded by the JCA. Another issue that has always plagued the Museum is the apathy of a major portion of the Jewish community. Little more than half have visited the Museum since it opened. Many in the community feel that it is a museum to teach non-Jews what happened and that they, as Jews, know all about it. The highest proportion of visitors are non-Jewish school groups. It remains to be seen whether these figures will change when the waves of Jewish immigrants who have come to these shores from Europe, Russia, South Africa or elsewhere in the past eighty years, have integrated with each other, and feel themselves part of the same narrative of Jewish history, rather than being mentally compartmentalised into the particular country of their birth, with little understanding of the backgrounds of other Jews in the community.

Despite these issues, the idea and the reality of the Museum is firmly fixed in the consciousness of the Sydney Jewish community. It is a major source of information and education, describing the historical events of the Holocaust, as well as Australian Jewish history and the role played by Jews in Australian history. It is, therefore, perfectly positioned to create understanding and tolerance in the wider community. In the face of increasing antisemitism and denialist activity both on the web and in print, the need to remember and memorialise the Holocaust by being able to tell the story as it happened through the last generation of survivors, makes The Macc and what it represents, in its current reincarnation as the Sydney Jewish Museum, a genuine eyewitness to history.

In conclusion it appears that the purpose of The Macc to define and encompass the most vital aspect of community needs for this particular period in history is being met, as it was shown to do in the two previous periods under review. The Macc, with its physical space and ethical dimensions, has encapsulated the ideals, the passions, the concerns and the pain of the community. It has achieved the status of an icon as the soul of the Jewish community of Sydney, reflecting the spirit of the times.

NOTES

1. Bugni Valerie, Lucchesi Galati Architects Inc., and Smith Dr Ronald, Chair UNLV Department of Sociology, *Connections*, May 2002, p.1.
2. Suzanne D Rutland 'Historical Chapters' in S. Encel and B. Buckley *The NSW Jewish Community: A Survey*, Sydney: NSW University Press, 1978, p.8.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., p.10.
5. Ibid., p.10.
6. Ibid., p.11.
7. Suzanne D. Rutland *Edge of the Diaspora, Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia*, Sydney: Brandl and Schlesinger, 1997, p.138.
8. Typescript by B.S. (whose full name is not written in the file, probably Bernard Sugarman) commenting on Dr. George Bergman's book on the history of the Jewish War Memorial, File AB 48, Australian Jewish Historical Archives, p.1.
9. Rutland 1997, *op cit.*, p.138.
10. Ibid., p.140.
11. Raymond Apple *The N.S.W. Jewish War Memorial, A Sixtieth Anniversary Tribute*, transcript from File AB48, Archives of

- the Australian Jewish Historical Society, (AJHS), Mandelbaum House, p.1.
12. Ernest L. Davis, *Open Letter to the Jewish Community*, 1920, File AB48, AJHS, Mandelbaum House. Ernest Davis was the president of the War Memorial at the time and a respected stockbroker with his offices in Pitt Street. His father was Rev. Alexander Bernard Davis, the first minister of the Great Synagogue.
 13. Some of the relevant and emotive wording of the Brick Appeal Brochure read as follows: 'The proposal to erect a Communal Hall as a War Memorial to the gallant sons of the community, who made the supreme sacrifice, is receiving the utmost encouragement from the community.' Another section includes the statement: 'The accompanying illustration will enable you to visualise the exterior of this noble structure when completed. Its chief value, however, lies within, as the Communal Hall will provide a home for every Jewish activity.'
 14. *Hebrew Standard of Australasia (HS)*, 16 November 1923.
 15. *Ibid.*
 16. *Ibid.*
 17. Other articles in that same issue examined the Charter of Opening, the role of the Maccabean in the community and the implications of such a Memorial. One of the leading articles considered the importance of the Macc in terms of the constitution of Jewish clubs which would now provide a meeting place for young Jews to 'help them go from strength to strength, and be a potent factor in the future of Jewry in Sydney' *Hebrew Standard*, 16 November 1923. There were descriptions of and gossip about the people who were there, including some snide and patronising comments from other newspapers like the *Daily Guardian*, 'How the "Goyim" did enjoy the ceremony at the Jewish War Memorial yesterday morning! It was a field day for the *Yehudim* — as the Jew is laughingly inclined to call himself. It was also a day of interest for the Christian who happened to be there', *HS*, 16 November 1923. There were also some disparaging comments about some of the political figures who attended 'It was impressive. Especially for Inspector-General Mitchell, who looked like a marrow with a green pea on it as he tried to balance the little cap'. *HS*, 16 November, 1923.
 18. Major A.W.Hyman, *HS*, 16 November 1923.
 19. *Ibid.*, 16 November 1923.
 20. Transcript by B.S., op cit., p6.
 21. Apple, op cit., p.1.

22. Rutland, op cit., p.172.
23. Ibid., p.173.
24. Rutland, 'Historical Chapters' in Encel and Buckley, op cit.,p.15.
25. Rutland, op cit., p.186.
26. Ibid.
27. Interview with Joachim Schneeweiss, Sydney, 2003
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid. Their visit to the Macc proved to be vital for their most pressing need, as they had arrived without a place to live. 'It was there that we were told about the kosher guest house in Bellevue Hill run by a Mr Oelbaum which could give us immediate accommodation'
30. Rutland, 'Historical Chapters' in Encel and Buckley,op cit., p22
31. Tom was 17 when he arrived. He found work immediately at the AJWS office in the Macc., because of his previous experience working for UNRRA and JOINT in a DP camp. He worked there full time in a period of intense activity until 1950 as assistant accountant as well as handling migrant welfare work.
32. Interview with Tom Keleman, Sydney, 2003.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Interview with Dalia Stanley, Sydney, 2003.
36. Joachim Schneeweiss, op cit.
37. Rutland, 'Historical Chapters' in Encel and Buckley, op. cit., p.24.
38. Ibid.
39. Suzanne D.Rutland, *Pages of History: A Century of the Australian Jewish Press*, Sydney: Australian Jewish Press, 1995, p.119.
40. Rutland, in Encel and Buckley, op. cit., p.25.
41. Apple, op. cit., p.1.
42. Suzanne D. Rutland and Sophie Caplan, *With One Voice, A History of The New South Wales Board of Deputies*, Sydney: Australian Jewish Historical Society, 1998, p.31.
43. Judith E. Berman *Holocaust Remembrance in Australian Jewish Communities, 1945 -2000*, Perth: University of Western Australia Press 2001, p.148.
44. 'The international context was an important stimulus for Australian Survivors in this movement of memorisation', Interview with Professor Konrad Kwiet, Judith Berman also noted particularly with the 'increased organisation and assertiveness of Holocaust Survivors in America and Israel' Berman, op cit., p.9.