



Carlton Community History Group

NEWSLETTER

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Jewish Carlton

'Yiddish Carlton was a historic necessity that lasted more than 40 years. It served its purpose, and when people were no longer newcomers, they moved away. We need not mourn its passing, but neither should we forget it.' – Julie Meadows.

There have always been Jewish people in Melbourne from the time of the earliest settlement, mainly immigrants from London and other parts of England. From an early date Carlton was often where they settled. With the arrival of large numbers of Yiddish-speaking immigrants from Eastern Europe fleeing Russian anti-Semitism in the 1880s and 1890s, Carlton and its environs became the centre of Jewish residence north of the Yarra River. There was a second concentration south of the Yarra in the St Kilda area. Around 1900 the Jewish community north of the river was concentrated south of Princes Street, but two decades later, between the wars and just after, the centre had moved to North Carlton and Princes Hill. The northern ends of Rathdowne and Drummond Streets were the residential core.

There was a difference between the Jewish communities north and south of the Yarra. Those living south of the river in the St Kilda area tended to be English speaking Anglo-Jews, while those in the north were mainly the recently arrived immigrants from persecution in Eastern Europe. South of the river



Watkin's kosher butchers shop at 338 Lygon Street, Carlton.
(Photo: Australian Jewish Herald, 28 March 1929)

Yiddish was rarely heard, but in Carlton it was the everyday language of the community.

Julie Meadows, who has written books on Jewish Carlton, summed up its significance in an interview with the Australian Jewish News (3 April 2014) in which she described Carlton as a protective life-raft for people coming from Europe. 'For 40 years it was a thriving Jewish community, but by the mid-1970s few were left there'. She notes that the second wave of Jewish

migrants who settled in Carlton after World War Two mostly spoke Yiddish, and came with stories of survival under extraordinary circumstances.

'The newcomers more than doubled the Jewish population of the *shtetl in ek velt* and despite the trauma they had endured, helped shape the vibrant social and cultural life of Yiddish Carlton. The newcomers, however poor or traumatised, did not come empty-handed. Along with their burden of painful memory, they brought hope, energy and the knowledge of a thousand years of Jewish life and culture; even their wry irrepressible humour. They energised us, became our schoolmates and our shopkeepers; our teachers, musicians and actors; in time, our marriage partners, community benefactors and professional colleagues. Apart from the Yiddish language we all spoke, everybody barracked for Carlton. Yiddish Carlton was a historic necessity that lasted more than 40 years. It served its purpose and when people were no longer newcomers, they moved away. We need not mourn its passing, but neither should we forget it.'

Walks in Historic Carlton

Presented by the Carlton Community History Group and Princes Hill Community Centre.
Bookings: phone: 9387 7740, or email: enquiries@princeshill.org.au Cost \$10.

Jewish and Italian Carlton Walk

Saturday 22 April 2017, 10am to 12 noon.

Walk through its historic streets to learn something of the two communities that, in the early and mid twentieth century, made Carlton one of Australia's first truly multi-cultural suburbs. Visit the sites of synagogues, churches and iconic businesses, and hear stories of crimes and disputes, of those who prospered and those who struggled.

Starts in Macarthur Square, Carlton, at the Rathdowne Street end.

Melbourne General Cemetery Walk

Saturday 6 May 2017, 10am to 12 noon.

Explore and learn about some of the interesting or notorious characters who are buried in the oldest and most historic of Melbourne's existing cemeteries.

Starts at Princes Hill Community Centre, rear 270 Macpherson Street, Princes Hill.

A kosher memory

By Peter Tilley

One Friday afternoon in 1985 or 1986, I was walking along Lygon Street between Grattan and Faraday Streets and noticed that the kosher butcher at 338 Lygon Street had ceased operation and that there was some demolition work proceeding inside. Next morning I was again walking by number 338, where the demolition was continuing, and saw that there were numerous shards of window-glass of various sizes strewn over the footpath, some bearing blue shapes, some blue and white, others without colour. I realised almost immediately that these were the broken pieces of the three Hebrew letters constituting the word 'kosher', which had until the day before graced the right-side front window of the kosher butcher, a business that had been at that location for some 60 years, from the mid-1920's. I asked the Italian-speaking demolition worker inside the shop whether I might collect and take possession of all of these shards, and he agreed readily, offering me a plastic bag. Thirty years later, still a Carlton boy, I treasure these pieces of our rich local history.



(Photo: Peter Tilley)

Kadimah – Yiddish cultural centre in Carlton

The Eastern European Yiddish culture that centred on North Carlton in the years between the First and Second World Wars found its home in a building on Lygon Street that used to be called 'Kadimah' (which means 'Forward' or 'Progress' in Hebrew). The original aim of the institution, when it was founded in 1911 by a coalition of Anglo and Eastern European Jews, was the 'Anglicising' of the newly arrived. But the newcomers saw it differently - as a means of preserving and perpetuating their Yiddish culture and identity in Melbourne. By 1919 the Yiddish cultural group had won control of the organization, and Anglo-Jewish involvement began to fall away. The Kadimah was originally located in the city, and then at 313 Drummond Street in south Carlton, but moved to this new building in North Carlton in 1933, where it became the centre of Yiddish cultural and social life, fostering pride in the culture and language. It became a centre for Yiddish intellectualism, providing lectures, concerts and a library; publishing the works of local writers, and underwriting a Yiddish newspaper. It fostered Yiddish theatre in Melbourne, and after the Second World War offered a haven for Eastern European artists who had survived the Holocaust. Today the Kadimah has moved to Elsternwick, and the building is now occupied by a regional Italian society.



(Photos: State Library of Victoria)

Fitzroy History Society to research history of North Fitzroy in 2017. Suggestions and offers of involvement welcome

In 2017 the Fitzroy History Society is intending to research and publish material on the history of North Fitzroy. The outcome will be a seminar and a publication similar to what was done in 2012 for the publication *'Brunswick Street Lost and Found'*. Some topics have already been researched by FHS members, but not published - including the histories of individual houses and particular streets, First World War memorials, and the Inner Circle railway.

If you have a particular interest that you would like to pursue, the committee of the Fitzroy History Society would welcome your involvement. Other topics worthy of research include St Georges Road and the earlier Yan Yean tramway of 1855, hotels in North Fitzroy, the Edinburgh Gardens, early sporting clubs, factories in North Fitzroy, and the Old Colonists Homes (Rushall Park). Additional suggestions and offers of involvement in the project are welcome. Contact: fitzroyhistorysociety@yahoo.com.au or Mike Moore at m.moore@bigpond.com

Rabbi Gurewicz – a Carlton personality

At 725 Rathdowne Street, North Carlton, there is an attractive double-fronted Victorian house that was for many years the home of Rabbi Joseph Gurewicz, a prominent but controversial figure in Melbourne's Jewish community in the mid-twentieth century. Born in Vilna, Lithuania, in 1885, Rabbi Gurewicz arrived in Australia in 1932, and became the spiritual head of the United Congregations of Carlton. He was an authority in *halachic* matters (religious law) and possessed dynamic leadership skills. He was a good Yiddish orator, which was the language in Carlton at the time, and also quickly became fluent in English. Many Carlton residents at that time made their living as 'marketniks', selling at the nearby Victoria Market. When minor disputes over money or other matters arose between them, they were often settled by presenting the case to the rabbi for a *Din-Torah* or *halachic* arbitration.

Rabbi Gurewicz was very much involved in the supervision and distribution of kosher foods. In 1937, Carlton butchers Smorgon and Co began exporting kosher meat to the Jewish community in Palestine, then a British Mandated Territory created by the League of Nations. Rabbi Gurewicz caused a great rift in the Melbourne Jewish community when, in a letter to the Chief Rabbinate in Tel Aviv, he questioned the status of kosher supervision of the meat. As a result, the Chief Rabbinate issued a ban on the Australian meat and posted notices around the city of Tel Aviv, quoting from Gurewicz's letter. The Melbourne *Beth Din*, understandably very offended that their authority had been questioned, requested the Chief Rabbi of England to vouch for the reliability of their supervision. The Smorgon family on the other hand, unwilling to let communal politics get in the way of a good business opportunity, wrote to Rabbi Gurewicz in July 1937 requesting him 'to supervise the killing and treating of all kosher meat which we are and will be exporting to Palestine and other countries of the world'.

Journalist Sam Lipski who grew up in Carlton, remembers Rabbi Gurewicz well. 'Blind for much of his later years, he would walk down Rathdowne Street every Saturday [Sabbath] morning on the arm of one of his sons, a straight-backed figure in an Edwardian coat with a wide brimmed black hat. His long grey beard framed a face which always beamed with kindness'. Rabbi Gurewicz died in 1956.

Interested in local history?

Then come and join us, bring your stories and help preserve our past for the future.

Carlton Community History Group

Dates and topics of forthcoming meetings

will be posted on our website, and advertised on the noticeboards in both of the Carlton Libraries (251 Faraday St, Carlton and 667 Rathdowne St, Carlton North).

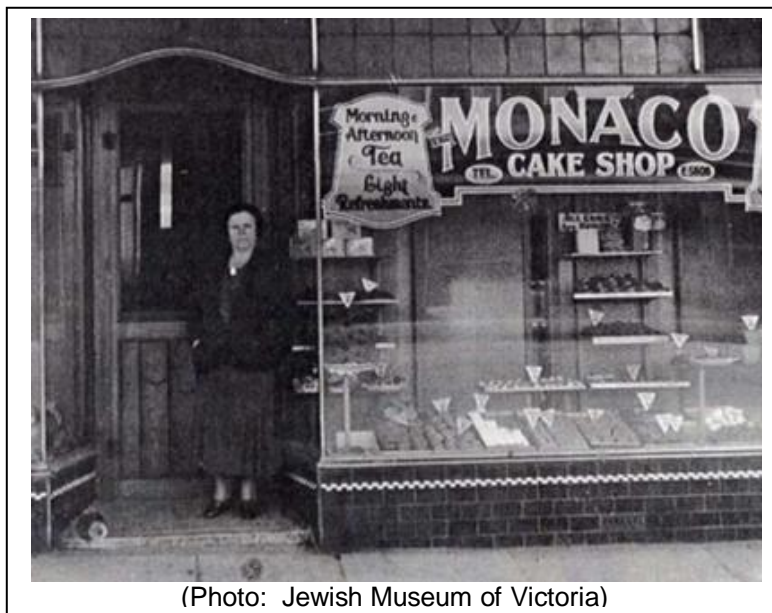
Monday evening meetings start at 7.30pm, in the Meeting Room, First Floor, Carlton Library, 667 Rathdowne St, Carlton North VIC 3054.

Carlton Community History Group, P.O. Box 148, Carlton North, 3054.

Email: carlton@cchq.asn.au. Website: www.cchq.asn.au

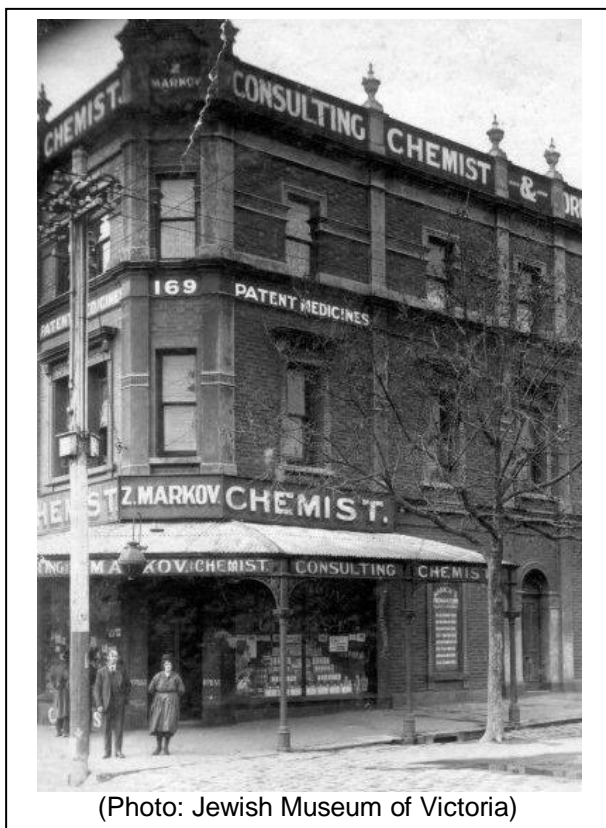
Jewish businesses in Carlton

Apart from kosher butchers Smorgons and Watkins, there were in the early twentieth century many other businesses in Carlton run by Jewish families. One of these was the Monaco Cake Shop in Lygon Street run by the Levine family (see photo right). Pastry chef Joseph Levine emigrated from Poland and, in 1928, brought his wife Pearl and their four children to Melbourne. They set about creating and selling cakes based on traditional Polish recipes, first in the Monaco Cake Shop in Lygon Street, and then following a move to St Kilda, in the Monarch cake shop in Acland Street, which survives and thrives to this day, under different owners.



(Photo: Jewish Museum of Victoria)

Another iconic Carlton business founded and run by a Jewish family was Markov's Chemist, on the corner of Elgin and Drummond Streets (see photo below). Zal Markov, a fully qualified pharmacist, fled Russia and arrived in Melbourne in 1911. In Australia he had to re-sit his exams to become registered, which he did in Latin as his English was so poor. When he finally established his pharmacy, it became the focal point for many Carlton residents, some of whom preferred his free medical advice to a doctor's consultation. The building shown in the photo below is still there, but is no longer a pharmacy.



(Photo: Jewish Museum of Victoria)

Walking Along Rathdowne Street 100 years of shopping services and stories in North Carlton.

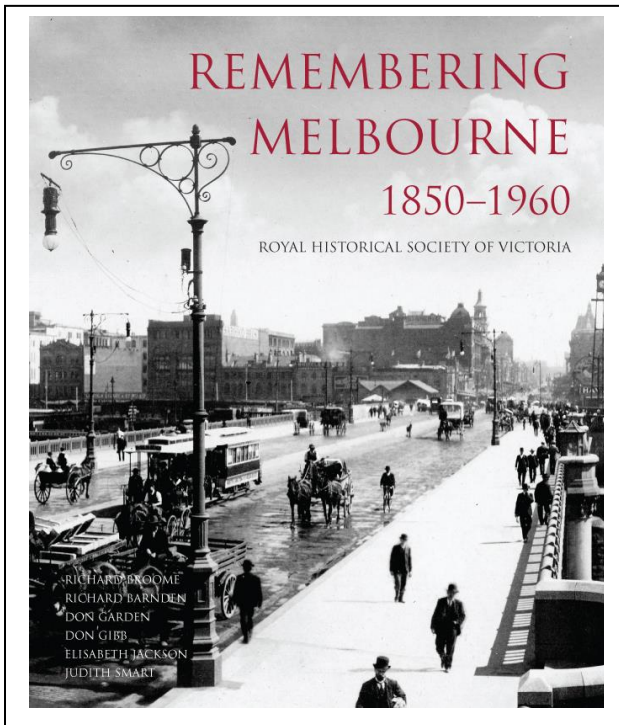
By Margaret Rich

This book is an examination of the changing use of the shops and other buildings in this North Carlton street from the early 1870s until today. It traces the gradual change in the character of the street, from a vibrant shopping strip supplying the everyday needs of people who lived nearby, through a period of commercial decline in the mid twentieth century, to the gentrified street that it is today. The study is organised by street number and a profile of some 150 buildings is provided. Stories of the lives of some of the shopkeepers are included.

This book is one of a number produced by the Carlton Community History Group. For details, see our website:

<http://www.cchq.asn.au/publications.html>

RHSV produces new book of historical photographs



This new book from the Royal Historical Society of Victoria (RHSV) on the history of the suburbs and city of Melbourne from 1850 to 1960 contains hundreds of fascinating and interesting historical photos of the city and its nearby suburbs, including Carlton. The section on Carlton was contributed by the Carlton Community History Group.

The cost is \$35 if picked up from the RHSV (239 A'Beckett Street, Melbourne 3000), or \$55 if mailed within Australia (includes postage and administration costs).

Also available for \$35 from Queensland Book Depot stores in Highpoint, Northland, Eastland and elsewhere.

Did You Know

The Smorgon empire began in Lygon Street, Carlton

Norman Smorgon and his two brothers came to Australia in the 1920s, having fled their native Ukraine to escape political upheaval and pogroms against the Jewish population. In 1927 they opened a kosher butcher in Lygon Street, Carlton. The business prospered, and later Norman's son Victor was able to expand the business. It eventually grew into an industrial empire involved in steel, plastics, paper, forestry and property. When asked to explain his success, Victor Smorgon famously said: 'If you can make sausages, you can make anything.' As the Smorgons' business empire grew, so too did their reputation for philanthropy. They eventually become one of Australia's wealthiest families.

Pro-Nazi anti-Jewish activities in Carlton

The following report appeared in *The Argus* newspaper on 6 April 1939:

'A suggestion that a local organisation which might be connected with overseas branches of the Nazi party was directing an anti-Semitic campaign in the Carlton district was made by a Jewish business man in Lygon-street Carlton yesterday. Insulting anti-Jewish slogans resembling those which had been written on the properties of Jews in Berlin were appearing regularly on walls and foot paths in the district he said. Jews were frequently insulted, several had been assaulted and windows of the properties broken. On Tuesday windows in the front of the Kadimah Jewish library, Lygon-street, Carlton, were smashed. Several weeks ago a shower of stones was thrown through a window of the building while a meeting was being held. On another occasion a woman member was struck by a missile thrown into the building.'

This Newsletter is produced and distributed four times a year. If you would like to be put on the mailing list, email the CCHG at carlton@cchg.asn.au or visit our website www.cchg.asn.au for details of how.