



Postwar Jewish Migration and Sydney's Cityscape

Suzanne D. Rutland

Introduction

It has been said that the Jews are the most urban and cosmopolitan of people, and this is certainly true of Jewish Australia. Whilst in the nineteenth century 40% of Australia's Jewish population resided outside the main urban centres, by the second half of the twentieth century the community was centred in the largest cities, with 50% living in Melbourne, 40% in Sydney, and the remainder in the smaller capital cities of Perth, Brisbane and Adelaide. The majority of this population was first or second generation, having arrived either immediately before or after World II, when the two waves of Jewish immigrants reinforced Australia's small Jewish population of only 23,000 in 1933 by a further 37,000 refugees and Holocaust survivors from Europe so that in 1961 there were 61,000 Jews in Australia. The period between 1938 and 1961 saw Sydney's Jewish population more than double as a result of European Jewish migration. In 1966 well-known theatre director, Gordon Hayes, summed up their impact:

It would seem that Australia has much to be thankful for in the dislocation of people as a result of Hitler's war. While it was undoubtedly painful perhaps beyond measure to witness great cultures burnt with their books, yet so many Europeans were able somehow to salvage a measure of this cultural wealth, and bring it with them to their new home on this vast Pacific island. They came at a time when Australia was crying out to find itself. And coming with a fresh outlook, it was often the newcomer who saw what needed to be done, and how.¹

The contribution of the Jewish refugees was in the realm of business; the professions, particularly science and medicine; the arts, including music, theatre and painting, and general culture, including restaurants

and delicatessens. One aspect of life that changed significantly due to this 'dislocation' of the Jews from Europe was Sydney's cityscape in terms of its physical, cultural and religious environment. This article will focus on the changes made to Sydney's urban landscape in the areas of architecture and property development, with a focus on the city centre and Kings Cross, rather than suburban development. It will discuss the factors, both historical and contemporary, which led to Jews having such a significant impact, despite their small numbers.

The Jewish newcomers arrived from the trauma of Europe bringing with them new skills, innovative concepts and cosmopolitanism. One Jewish survivor who arrived in Sydney in 1950 expressed his sense of gratitude as follows:

It is a very peculiar feeling. It is almost midnight. We are in the middle of a city with two million residents. We are in Sydney. We are in Australia. You who were born here or have been living here for many years, you might not understand these feelings. Though it is midnight, though it is just our second day in Sydney, we seem to be at home. Already we start to have the same sense of security as Australian citizens. We are beginning to share the confidence in their fellow citizens and in their country.²

Arriving in what they saw as the 'lucky country', for most, they were determined to rebuild their lives in Australia and, in doing so, they contributed to Sydney's change from what they saw as a mono-cultural, Anglo-backwater into a cosmopolitan and multicultural city.³

Reasons for Jewish Urbanisation – historical factors

Jews became urbanized communities during the early middle ages due to anti-Jewish legislation in both the Christian and Muslim worlds. In the Christian world, anti-Jewish legislation during the period of the Roman Empire forbade Jews from owning land or from having Christian slaves or servants. As a result of such legislation, Jews tended to move into the cities of the ancient world, including Rome and Alexandria, and become involved in trade. In the Muslim world, both Jews and Christians were granted dhimmi or protected status, which enabled them to live in peace, even though they were considered to be subordinate to Muslims, had to wear distinctive dress and live in separate areas. They also had to pay extra

taxes – a poll tax (*jizya*) and a land tax (*khara*). This extra land tax contributed to the move of Jews into the urban areas in the Muslim world, where they lived in the traditional Jewish quarter, which was often located near the king's residence so that the Jews could have protection in case of riots. During the Crusader period, the Christians copied the Muslim concepts of distinguishing dress and separate quarters for Jews with these being enforced by the Third (1189) and Fourth (1215) Lateran Decrees. Later the law of Jews having to live in separate areas was further reinforced with the development of the ghetto in the Christian world and the mellah in Muslim North Africa. As Jews moved into Eastern Europe, they also served as the middlemen and developed their own villages, called *shtetls*.

The urbanization of Jews reinforced their position as traders from medieval times. Jews were able to move more easily between the Christian and Muslim worlds than either Christians or Muslim and from the ninth century on they developed trading routes that spread from France to China. There were a number of reasons why Jews were successful as traders. They were a literate people, they usually spoke a number of languages and there were Jewish communities that were spread along the various trading routes so that local Jews assisted the itinerant Jewish traders. The distinctive trading and business patterns that came to represent Jewish business into contemporary times can be seen clearly in the Hebrew diary of Spanish Jewish traveler, Benjamin of Tudela, known as *Massa'ot shel Rabbi Binyamin / Itinerarium Benjaminis* (The Travels of Rabbi Benjamin) from the twelfth century CE. Literacy and Jewish networking are key features of the Jewish lifestyle and also explain the key impact that Jewish refugees and survivors had on Sydney.

Reasons for Jewish Business success in Australia

Most European Jewish survivors who arrived after 1945 in Australia brought few material possessions. They did, however, bring new industrial skills, and most reacted to the challenges of a new land with hard work, drive and enterprise. As with many other immigrant groups, they encouraged their children to achieve academic success, resulting in higher educational standards for the Jewish community than for the

general Australian population. Within this pattern of general economic achievement, there have been a number of Jewish immigrants whose entrepreneurial flair and business acumen have enabled them to achieve outstanding success in the financial world. Over the last twenty years, Jews have featured in the *Business Review Weekly's* 'Rich List', the 200 wealthiest individuals and families in Australia. Between 20 and 25 per cent of these 200 names are Jewish business people, mostly immigrants or of immigrant background from Central and Eastern Europe, who 'started from scratch' in Australia. This is a remarkable contribution from a community that constitutes less than half a per cent of Australia's population.⁴ The essence of this business success is the story of refugees, and children of refugees, who were highly motivated to create a new and more secure life for themselves in a land where they had found a haven from persecution.⁵

The Jewish refugees and survivors came from differing backgrounds and cultures. Some were unskilled from the Polish *shtetls*, particularly those who migrated to Melbourne, but others were highly educated, sophisticated city dwellers with backgrounds in business, the arts, the law and other professional fields. Many of those who arrived from Austria in 1938, for example, were highly educated from the upper echelons of Viennese society.⁶ Both before and after the war, Sydney attracted the Central Europeans and many of the successful postwar entrepreneurs were Hungarian born or from Central Europe, unlike Melbourne where most of the entrepreneurs originated in Eastern Europe and arrived either as part of the Polish immigration in the late 1920s and 1930s, as did the family of Visyboard magnate, Richard Pratt, or as survivors after the Holocaust. These national differences have produced different economic patterns, since the Melbourne-based Polish Jews have, in the main, been heads of private companies, while the Hungarian Jews became heads of public ones.

There are a number of reasons why Jews in Sydney as well as Melbourne have contributed to Australian business and material culture. Most important was the willingness to work hard, 'often seven days a week and sixteen hours a day to get somewhere',⁷ usually with the assistance of their wives.

This capacity for hard work was also seen with those who had an impact on Sydney's cityscape. Architect Harry Seidler's single-minded commitment to his studies and ability to work up late contributed to his excellent academic results as a young man. The same was true of the Lowy/Saunders retail and property partnership. When he opened the Royal Coaches Exhibition at Indooroopilly, Shoppingtown, Prince Charles asked Saunders what was the secret of his success. Saunders responded that it was 'about hard work and the challenges involved in overcoming difficulties'.⁸

Imagination was another central ingredient, as 'new products must be conceived, new ways of doing things conjured up, and ways around problems found'.⁹ As a result of persecution and discrimination, Jews have tended to be innovators. This is highlighted by the Holocaust experience where, in the struggle for survival, it was often the young Jews who had the ingenuity, as well as the physical strength, to stay alive. The number of Holocaust survivors who have made it to the top is a testimony to the human spirit and an ability to fight for life and security.

Partnerships and helping one another, whether through family or friends, were also of considerable benefit. They allowed for a pooling of resources and talent, facilitated problem solving and allowed for sharing of responsibilities. The common ethnic heritage was also important, as partners could communicate easily. It is of interest to note that, in most of the successful partnerships, the two men came from the same national as well as religious background. This was true of the Lowy/Saunders partnership where, for 30 years from 1957 to 1987 Frank Lowy and John Saunders worked closely together building up their business empire.

In addition, the immigrants brought European know-how and maintained their contacts with Europe, often travelling abroad to stay abreast of the most recent developments. Harry Seidler arrived in Australia having been exposed to the Bauhaus approach of modernisation and he ensured that he travelled back to the United States and Europe regularly to remain in touch with new ideas. For example, in 1956 visited Europe and on his return, he made unfavourable comparisons with Sydney with his comments making the newspaper headlines.¹⁰

The ability to take risks is also important in terms of entrepreneurial

skills. When Lowy and Saunders decided to purchase their first shop in Blacktown, neither had any capital, yet they were prepared to take the risks involved in this first investment. The Jewish trading heritage was one factor in this risk taking, but it was also due to the impact of the Holocaust. For those who had lost everything in the past, it was easier to take the risks to fulfil their business dreams and ambitions.

Whilst some refugees and survivors were able to gain professional skills, others developed their business prowess through native ingenuity and hard work. A typical pattern of business mobility emerged, with the newcomers starting in the textile industry and later moving into property development. The textile or fashion industry, which only required a few sewing machines to begin manufacturing and so was not capital intensive, has predominated as the initial basis of wealth in many of the 'rags to riches' stories. This was particularly true for the Polish Jews of Melbourne who dominated the Flinders Lane 'rag trade', the '*shmatter*' business as it was called in Yiddish. Later, many of these manufacturers made judicious property investments or became involved in property development. Other areas of Jewish activity included soft furnishings and smallgoods. It was this pattern of economic development that was to have such an impact on Sydney's landscape.

Refugee architects: Harry Seidler

Australian architecture was challenged by the innovative approach of refugee architects, the most important of whom was Harry Seidler who became one of Australia's foremost architects and a pioneer of modern construction techniques. He was born in Vienna in 1923 and, after the Anschluss of Austria in March 1938, was sent by his parents to London. During the war years he was interned and deported to Canada where, after his release, he studied architecture at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg under Professor John Russell. After completing his two-year practical internship in Toronto, he was accepted to the Harvard MA program in design, studying under the legendary founder of Bauhaus, Walter Gropius and his partner Michael Breuer. He also studied with Josef Albers at the Black Mountain College in North Carolina at the

recommendation of Gropius. In 1948 Seidler's parents emigrated from Britain to Australia, and in 1949 his mother 'enticed' him to Sydney to design a house for her. The Rose Seidler house in Sydney's northern suburb of Turramurra had significant impact on local architecture, setting new standards, and became internationally known. It led to his receiving a number of other assignments, moving away from the conservative cultural cringe of Australian life so that by 1970 Seidler was 'changing the skyline and streetscape of Sydney'.¹¹ He firmly believed in high density living near the city rather than suburbia and he wanted to change the city and people's mode of living, which he managed to do over time with his high-rise buildings. He worked with Dutch-born developer, Gerardus Dusseldorf, who came to Australia in 1951 to work on the Snowy Mountain Scheme and developed the Lend Lease Company.¹² His creations include Ithaca House, one of the first modern apartment blocks built in Sydney in the 1950s¹³, the controversial Blues Point Tower in the northern Harbour foreshores near the Harbour Bridge in 1961¹⁴, Sydney's Australia Square complex in 1962, a fifty-floor innovation in circular design, the MLC Centre, Grosvenor Place tower in the late 1980s and The Horizon building completed in 1999.

As a child growing up in Vienna, Seidler was influenced by the new developments taking place in the German Bauhaus movement. He liked to watch Zoltan Korda's futuristic film *Things to Come*, with its sets designed by Moholy-Nagy, a teacher at the Bauhaus in Germany. He later stated: 'the film made a deep impression on me, it showed the dramatic visions of the world of tomorrow, soaring huge spaces in clear-cut, machine-made structures. Its imagery haunted me for a long time and stimulated my interest in building'.¹⁵ While studying in Winnipeg he spent time reading Siegfried Gideon's *Space, Time and Architecture* and tried to keep up with the new concepts of Gropius and Bauhaus, even though he did not receive much exposure to these modern ideas in his undergraduate studies.

When he met with Walter Gropius in person at Harvard he felt an immediate rapport and his innovative teacher had a significant impact on his career. Gropius founded the revolutionary Bauhaus movement in Weimar Germany and he headed the Bauhaus School from 1919-1928.

During this period he set out to bring all the practical arts under the one umbrella of architecture, which he believed was 'the pinnacle of design'. Gropius was also interested in prefabricated units and he wanted his students to understand machines and industrial processes. In February 1928 Gropius resigned because of his socialist approach and in 1933 the school was closed 'as a seat of "Jewish- Marxist" art and an un-German establishment full of "foreign Communist" students. Modernism was seen as decadent and against National Socialist ideology'.¹⁶ In 1934 Gropius moved to Britain and in 1937 he was invited by Dean Joseph Hudnut to Harvard to head the department in the Graduate School of Design, because Hudnut wanted to introduce modernism into American architecture. When Harry Seidler enrolled at Harvard in October 1945, he was immediately exposed to these new ideas and he came to Australia determined to introduce a more modern approach into Australian architecture.

As is often the case, Seidler's achievements were recognised more overseas than in Australia. In 1996 he was awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects. During his speech at the award ceremony, British architect Sir Norman Foster stated:

Harry put Australian architecture on the map and it's a very special kind of architecture. It is both poetic and rational. The relationship between his buildings in the city and particularly in the way they created public open space, becoming alive with cafes, terraces, urban shortcuts, which you are encouraged to enjoy, in a contemporary environment, is quite an achievement'.¹⁷

However, there were those in Sydney, including Lord Mayor Frank Sartor, who were highly critical of Seidler's creations and felt that high rises such as Blues Point Tower had had a deleterious impact on the city scape. In the 1990s, Seidler conflicted with Sartor who wrote in a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* that 'You cannot create a living city with Mr Seidler's architecture. Mr Seidler's buildings should be kept to stand-alone sites where their relationship with their surrounding buildings is unimportant. Yet, Mr Seidler believes himself to be a visionary, that in the likes of Blues Point Tower lies the architecture of fifty years hence'.¹⁸ Another critic was Hungarian Jewish refugee, architect and cartoonist, George Molnar, who was 'an early critic of urban consequences of Seidler's

many apartment projects'.¹⁹ In 1982, another cartoonist, Patrick Cook, published a highly critical caricature of Seidler's apartment buildings, which led to Harry Seidler taking action for defamation against the *National Times*, where the cartoon had been published.²⁰ By the late 1990s, opposition to his high rise building style had largely abated and when he died in 2006 the accolades poured in.

British psychologist, Kerry Bluglass, in her study of children who survived the Holocaust in hiding, researched this issue of resilience amongst the survivors.²¹ Seidler's story is another example of her findings. After his release from internment in Canada, he claimed that felt value of freedom after 18 months of internment – 'believe me, it is man's most valuable possession'.²² However, rather than allowing himself to be destroyed by his difficult experiences as a youth, he was strengthened by these and went on to make significant achievements in his life.

Property development: Frank Lowy and John Saunders – creating Westfield

In Sydney, the property company Westfield Holdings began with the business partnership of Slovakian-born Frank Lowy and Hungarian-born John Saunders. Both were penniless Holocaust survivors who met when Saunders was running a delicatessen shop at Town Hall railway station and Lowy was delivering smallgoods to him. Theirs was a rags-to-riches story of a penniless Hungarian migrant and a Slovakian migrant, both of whom rose to become one of Australia's greatest businessmen and major philanthropists. John Saunders, born Jenö Schwarcz, was a Jewish Holocaust survivor of Auschwitz and the forced labour concentration camp in Dornhau. His remarkable resourcefulness, which carried him through internment and concentration camps, was to flower after the war. Frank Lowy, who was only nine years old when the Second World War broke out, survived and migrated to Palestine after the war, fighting in the Israeli army in the 1948 war. In 1952 he moved to Sydney to join other members of his family who had migrated directly from Slovakia to Sydney. First they established their own delicatessen and later expresso café in Blacktown. Their knowledge of several European languages made their initial business

ventures a success in a largely migrant area.²³ Saunders and Lowy started Westfield with a small shopping centre opposite Blacktown station in Sydney's western suburbs. The idea of selling their successful delicatessen shop in Blacktown and starting their first shopping centre there came at the suggestion of Ervin Graf, another postwar Hungarian Holocaust survivor, to buy property, sub-divide and build. Graf also became a successful property developer in Sydney through his company Stockland.

From these small beginnings, the company grew and in 1960 Lowy and Saunders decided to float a public company. In 1961 the Hornsby Plaza was completed and in 1964 the opening of the Burwood Shopping complex proved to be another important turning point. In 1970 they purchased land in William Street near the city centre to build a high rise – Westfield Towers and then they built next-door The Boulevard Hotel, which was opened in 1972. During the 1970s they developed the Miranda and Liverpool shopping centres and moved to the centre of Sydney's population in Parramatta in the west. Despite the political and economic uncertainties of the 1970s, they continued to develop their company and by the late 1970s Westfield owned 17 shopping centres, two hotels, and the Westfield complex. In 1987, the partnership dissolved; Lowy developed Westfield into an international company with shopping malls in Australia and the United States.²⁴ Saunders developed his own company, Terrace Towers. In his foreword to John Saunders' biography, John Howard (Prime Minister, 1996-2007) wrote:

John Saunders was a passionate Australian who exemplified the massive contribution made to post-World War Two Australia by a very special group of men and women born in Europe.

The life of John Saunders can be characterised as one of rising above personal tragedy and horrible evil, of optimism in the face of desolation, and of inspirational commercial skill and generosity.²⁵

These words applied clearly to both Lowy and Saunders whose entrepreneurial skills and effective partnership certainly has had a significant impact on the city of Sydney.

As with other Jewish businessmen, Saunders was also a significant benefactor and one of his most important projects was the development of the Sydney Jewish Museum in Darlinghurst both as a memorial to tell

the story of the Holocaust and as a symbol of the renaissance of Jewish life by dealing, on the ground floor, with the story of Australian Jewry. Rather than creating a new building, the decision was made to completely reconstruct the Maccabean Hall, which was designed by Jewish architect Gordon Keesing and was opened in 1923 by General Sir John Monash as a memorial to the Jewish soldiers who died during World War I. The exterior of the building was restored and the interior was completely gutted and renovated around the Jewish Star of David. In 1992 the Sydney Jewish Museum was launched to create new internal space to both remember the tragic past and to serve as a reminder of the dangers of prejudice and racism. Similarly, Lowy has been a major donor to both general and Jewish causes, to the extent that he has been named as an 'Australian Legend' and a stamp has been created in his honour by Australian Post.

John Saunder's biographer, Professor Gabriel Kune, sought to analyse the reasons for his business success. In a sub-section entitled 'A Trader's Heritage', Kune noted that Saunders was born into a family of traders, which went back at least four generations. He stated that:

From the day of his birth he absorbed business acumen, almost by osmosis. He also had behind him the legacy of 300 or more years of trading among the Jews of north-eastern Hungary. Moreover the Jews in that part of the world had been exploited over centuries — paying heavy taxes, and conducting their trading under difficult and often unfriendly conditions. This struggle for survival in the face of much hardship toughened them up, giving them an edge and special skills when faced with changing circumstances.²⁶

This need to overcome adversity enabled them to develop their skills and also accept change and innovation. This important historic background also affected Ervin Graf, a Hungarian architect who migrated to Australia after the war and started his career as a bricklayer as Australian immigration policy favoured manual workers rather than professionals. However, Graf received a loan from his brothers Albert Scheinberg and John Hammond, who had migrated to Australia before the war, and started his own business in 1952 with 19 fibro houses in the suburb of Sefton. As with other Hungarian immigrants, he also went public in 1958 by taking over the smallest company on the stock market,

Stocks and Holdings. By the time of his death in 2002, the company was estimated to be valued at \$3.5 billion.²⁷

Harry Triguboff – Meriton

Harry Triguboff is another major property developer who has significantly impacted the face of Sydney. He was born in Darien, China in 1933 and grew up in Tientsin in the Russian Jewish community there. His parents sent him to Sydney in 1947 to finish his high school education at Scotts College and he then studied in Leeds, England. His initial training was in textiles, and he worked in this area in Israel and South Africa before settling in Australia in 1960 and moving into property development in 1963.²⁸ He developed the concept of the Meriton apartments to provide inexpensive city housing, initially focusing his efforts on 'the plebian suburbs' with his first block being built in Gladesville.²⁹ In the 1990s he moved to develop projects in the inner city area of Sydney, including the Meriton development at Moore Park and the 78 storey World Square, one of the highest buildings in Sydney.

There is significant controversy over the aesthetic qualities of Meriton buildings. Triguboff's focus was in providing cheap housing. The impact of this approach was often seen as negative in both architectural and aesthetic terms. In an article published in 2004 entitled 'Harry Triguboff: a man of property', Adam Shand wrote:

*Billionaire property developer Harry Triguboff is one of Sydney's most controversial businessmen. His company Meriton Apartments has so transformed the city, it's given rise to the term "to Meritonise" — describing the proliferation of nondescript apartment buildings that dot the cityscape.*³⁰

Shand noted that during the 1990s, when Triguboff worked to bring more people back into residences in the inner city centre, there were ongoing battles between Meriton and the Sydney City Council, led by mayor Frank Sartor, who wanted to improve the architectural standard of Meriton buildings. As a result of Council pressure, Meriton was forced to pay more attention to the aesthetic appearance of its projects and, in order to do so, has organised architectural competitions to find the best

architects with its more recent buildings. These have included Harry Seidler, Graham Jahn and Bob Nation, and have resulted in more expensive buildings that have attracted higher rents and sale prices.³¹

By 2006, the various Meriton projects had provided around 50,000 apartments in Sydney and the Gold Coast and Triguboff himself had become one of the ten wealthiest people in Australia. His loud and flamboyant personality continues to create waves. In an interview published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 2006, he stated: 'It's simple... Sydney has too much green and not enough grey, and if you want to look at trees - well, go climb a mountain'.³² In spite of the controversy, Triguboff's determination and business flair has produced significant results.

Developments in the 'Cross'

In addition to the development of the city centre, Jewish migrants have also had a significant impact on King's Cross, a story that also has its darker side. Historian Peter Spearitt noted that 'King's Cross has long been the centre of an immigrant culture',³³ and this was particularly true for Jewish immigrants. Alfred Harris, editor of the main Sydney Jewish newspaper, the *Hebrew Standard*, criticised the Jewish refugees arriving in the late 1930s, for 'congregating in and about King's Cross and Bondi, perhaps not realising that in so doing they are looked upon as forming colonies, which is positively undesirable'.³⁴ Whilst this statement was resented by the refugees and criticised by the supporters of refugee Jewish migration within the Jewish community, Harris's fears of antisemitism were not unfounded. Spearitt himself quotes from Brewster and Luther, who in 1945 wrote:

Behind Con's shop is the most cosmopolitan room in the Cross... Con is a Greek, his wife comes from Mount Lebanon. Over a game of poker... are patriots from Turkey, Syria, Arabia, France, Russia Greece, faces so representative of their countries that a casual glance will classify them... And, threading his way through all, belonging to all yet bound to a race of his own more ancient than theirs, is that intrepid international, the Jew...³⁵

The Jew's very cosmopolitanism was seen as a negative feature, and Jewish internationalism made them subjects of suspicion and criticism.

Thus, Alfred Harris and other members of the Anglo-Jewish leadership encouraged the Jewish newcomers to acculturate into Australia as quickly as possible by settling on the land, learning English and dropping their 'foreign ways'.³⁶

In the 1960s and 1970s the 'Cross' was transformed with significant property development, particularly in Victoria Street. One of the most controversial episodes in this transformation related to a first-time Jewish property developer, Frank Theeman. Born in 1913 into a wealthy Viennese family, after the German takeover of Austria in March 1938, he and his wife realised that they must leave Europe. They wanted to migrate to Australia, but before they managed to receive a landing permit, the Nazi pogrom of November 1938, known as Kristallnacht (the Night of Broken Glass) occurred and Theeman amongst thousands of Jewish men was arrested and interned in a Gestapo prison in Vienna. His only chance for immediate release was emigration, so the Theeman family decided to leave for Shanghai, the only place in the world where Jewish refugees could seek asylum without a visa.

While travelling on board the ship en route to Shanghai, Theeman was befriended by an Australian, Timothy O'Sullivan, who agreed to provide him with financial backing for his plans to introduce nylon manufacturing into Australia. When Theeman questioned such generosity, O'Sullivan replied that, as a racing man, 'he had put more money on horses than he was offering Theeman and often lost'.³⁷ The Theemans had to disembark at Shanghai, but their Australian landing permits finally came through and they arrived in Sydney shortly before the outbreak of war. With six sewing machines sent from Vienna, Theeman founded the lingerie line, Osti — a contraction of the names of his good-hearted backer, O'Sullivan and his own name.

Theeman's manufacturing business proved to be very successful and, as with other Jewish manufacturers, he moved into property development when he sold Osti in 1972 to Dunlop and decided to buy up a number of old terraces in Victoria Street and build a major new project called 'Victoria Point'. However, the Builders Labourers' Federation headed by Jack Mundy introduced Green Bans, creating a crisis for his building project.



A journalist and Mark Foy department store heiress, Juanita Neilsen, who lived in a terrace in Victoria Street and published a local newspaper, *Now*, became an urban activist using her newspaper to campaign against the project.³⁸ She went missing in July 1975 after going to attend a meeting at the Carousel nightclub to discuss advertising. Whilst her body has never been found and no one charged with the crime, Peter Rees, in his book *Killing Juanita*, argues that the police investigation after her death was a story of police and political corruption and that Theeman was involved in her death.³⁹ In the end, Theeman withdrew from the project, which had reached a stalemate.

The Carousel Club was owned by Abe Saffron, known as 'Mr Sin', 'Hard Man' of Kings Cross and 'Mr Big' of organised crime. Saffron was part of an earlier wave of immigrants, his parents being of Russian Jewish stock. He was born and raised in the Sydney suburb of Annandale and represented a different, earlier phase of Jewish migration to the New World. He owned many of the pubs and bars in the Cross and was accused of being involved with organised crime and prostitution. He was eventually arrested and imprisoned for tax evasion. Saffron never denied being Jewish and maintained his association with the Jewish community, but his migration story belongs to an earlier era.⁴⁰

Sydney City Planning

The development of the centre of Sydney was largely a haphazard affair. Paul Ashton, in his book, *The Accidental City*, argues that long-term planning for Sydney failed due to various factors and that in the end 'city planning in Sydney was to take a back seat to the needs of capital'.⁴¹ This was particularly so during the premiership of Robert Askin from 1965-1976. At that time Jewish developer, Sir Paul Strasser, of Parkes Development, enjoyed a close relationship with the Askin government. It has been argued that 'the Askin era saw both the peak of the Sydney post-war boom and the strongest reaction to it.'⁴²

Leo Port was a key person in terms of demanding better planning for Sydney, although his efforts for a longer-term approach were largely unsuccessful. Port (nee Rappaport Weiser) was born in Poland in 1922 and



moved with his parents and family to Berlin in 1928. He escaped from Nazi Germany to Prague and then family managed to gain an Australian landing permit, arriving in Sydney in 1939. He completed his schooling and then graduated as an engineer from the University of Sydney. He joined, Donohey and Carter, becoming a partner in 1953 and became active in the politics of the Sydney City Council, becoming a member of the Civic Reform Association.⁴³ Together with architect Andrew Briger, he persuaded his party of the need for urban planning and renewal. Through their influence James Coleman prepared a document on planning for Sydney, which led to Civic Reform establishing a Planning Sub-Committee in 1967 with Port as Chairman and Briger as Vice-Chairman.⁴⁴ In 1969, Port was elected an alderman for the Fitzroy Ward of the Sydney City Council; he served as Chairman of its Works Committee, then Deputy Lord Mayor, and, when Sir Nicholas Shahedie retired in September 1975, was elected Lord Mayor.

Leo Port played a vital role in many of the achievements of the Civic Reform era in Sydney, including Sydney Square, preservation of the Queen Victoria Building, and the creation of the Martin Place pedestrian mall. However, many of his efforts led to controversy, as green supporters opposed the high-rise buildings that Port was planning for the city centre, and they claimed that he was associated with a number of the development companies. Port resigned from all of the companies except two, but the controversy continued. The election of a Labor government under Neville Wran in 1976 further undermined his efforts as Civic Reform was seen as being associated with the Liberal Party. Wran saw the Council as having 'no more power than a crippled praying manits' and he ensured that this remained the situation.⁴⁵ Port died in office, in 1978, having served less than three years as Lord Mayor of Sydney, with these various stresses contributing to his death. His biographer, Shirley Fitzgerald, noted that: 'He had seen in "one drab corner of Sydney after another" the possibility of something better',⁴⁶ but his vision was not fully realised because of political opposition.

Conclusions – the "lucky country"

As a tiny minority Jews have indeed fared well in Australia. Being

the ultimate cosmopolitans, the postwar Jewish migrants settled mainly in Sydney and Melbourne. These migrants from Europe and China reinforced the innovations introduced by the pre-war Jewish refugees, helping to create a cosmopolitan milieu in Sydney. The full acceptance and the freedom which Australia offered them has enabled them to make substantial contributions in many different fields, and particularly in the areas of architecture and property development, changing the face of Sydney from a small, isolated and insular backwater to a vibrant city. As a small community, today numbering c105,000 - the Jewish community is a well adjusted part of multi-cultural Australia and the next generation, the children of the newcomers, continue to make significant contributions to Sydney's development.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

- 1 Viennese Theatre (pamphlet), Sydney, 1966, p. 12 (lent to the author by the late Karl Bittman).
- 2 *Sydney Jewish News*, 1950
- 3 Dr Seamus O'Hanlon of Monash University has noted that there is emerging evidence of a vibrant urban life in Sydney and Melbourne in both the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On Melbourne see Andrew Brown-May, *Melbourne Street Life: The Itinerary of Our Days*, Kew: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 1998, and on Sydney Peter Spearitt, *Sydney Since the Twenties*, 1978.
- 4 Ruth Ostrow, *The New Boy Network: Taking Over Corporate Australia*, (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1987).
- 5 Sam Lipski, 'Partisan', *Australian Jewish Times*, 21 August 1986.
- 6 Karl Bittman, ed., *Strauss to Matilda: Viennese in Australia, 1938-1988*, Sydney: Wenkart Foundation, 1988.
- 7 *Business Review Weekly*, 15 August 1986, p. 79.
- 8 Gabriel Kune *Nothing is Impossible: the John Saunders Story* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 1999), p.148.
- 9 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 September 1984.
- 10 Alice Spigelman *Almost Full Circle — Harry Seidler: A Biography* (Sydney: Brandt & Schelsinger, 2001), p.195.
- 11 E.G. Whitlam, foreword, Alice Spigelman *Almost Full Circle*, p.9.
- 12 Aaron Bolot was another Jewish architect who worked with Lend Lease and was prominent in apartment building design in this period. Bolot was born in Crimea in 1900, moved in 1911 with his family to Brisbane, where he completed his education, and then moved to Sydney in the 1930s. One of his best known buildings was the Wylde Street Cooperative Apartments, Potts Point. See Caroline Butler-Bowen and Charles Pickett *Homes in the Sky: Apartment Living in Australia* Sydney: The Miegunyah Press, 2007, p. 106-109.
- 13 Butler-Bowen and Pickett *Homes in the Sky*, p.105-106.

- 14 For a detailed discussion of the controversy over Blues Point Tower, described as 'the best-known building designed by Harry Seidler, see Butler-Bowen and Pickett *Homes in the Sky*, pp. 12-13, 101-103 and 106.
- 15 As quoted in Spigelman, *Almost Full Circle*, p.16.
- 16 Spigelman, *Almost Full Circle*, pp. 138-140.
- 17 As quoted in Spigelman, *Almost Full Circle*, pp.237-238.
- 18 As quoted in Spigelman, *Almost Full Circle*, p. 361.
- 19 Butler-Bowen and Pickett *Homes in the Sky*, p.14.
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- 33 Spearitt, *Sydney Since the Twenties*, p.92.
- 34 *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 27 July 1939.
- 35 As quoted in Spearitt, *Sydney Since the Twenties*, p.92-93.
- 36 Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora: Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia*, Sydney: Brandl and Schlesinger, 1997, pp.184-188.
- 37 Interview with Frank Theeman (taped), Sydney, March 1986.
- 38 Butler-Bowen and Pickett *Homes in the Sky*, p.16-17.
- 39 Peter Rees *Killing Juanita: A True Story of Murder and Corruption* Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2004, as discussed in 'Perspective, 2 March 2005, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/perspective/stories/s1314091.htm>, accessed 29 March 2008. Numerous other newspaper articles and books have been written about this story.
- 40 Robert Kaplan, 'Abraham Gilbert Saffron: the last Peruvian', unpublished manuscript.
- 41 Paul Ashton, *The Accidental City: Planning Sydney Since 1788*, Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1995, p.78.
- 42 Butler-Bowen and Pickett *Homes in the Sky*, p.119. Parkes Development did not survive the property crash of 1974.
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- 46 Fitzgerald, 'Port, Leo Weiser', p.19.