

A boatload that made a difference

WHILE the Victorian Jewish community dates back to the earliest years of European settlement in the colony, it is a reality that a substantial part of Melbourne's Jewish communal organisations had their origins as a result of the influx from the 1890s to the inter-war period. And it was indeed a pivotal moment for the fledgling Melbourne Jewish Community when the *Konigin Luise* sailed into the port of Melbourne on December 8, 1913, one hundred years ago. On board were the largest cohorts of two families destined to become vital in Jewish communal affairs; the Komesaroff family from Ukraine and the Feiglin family from Ottoman Palestine.

Komesaroff family members on board were Khana-Reisel and her husband and cousin Shlomo-Zalmen Komesaroff (Kaye), their children Tybel and Meyer and her brothers Louis and Pinchas. Members of the Feiglin family who arrived with them were Leah (wife of Reb Moshe Zalman) and five children, namely Avrohom, Tzipora, Judah, Joseph and Mordechai.

In a fashion of family reunion that typified much Eastern European emigration to the West in that era, both family groups came to Melbourne to reunite with earlier arrivals. The members of the Komesaroff family sought to join their siblings Tzipora and Shlomo Zalmen (Alter) who had arrived the year earlier. (Their arrival had been to enable Tzipora to marry her cousin, David Zmood who had arrived in 1910). David himself had come to Australia at the behest of his uncle, Moses Rabinov who arrived circa 1875 to escape conscription in Tsarist Russia. In fact Moses

Sichat Yosef

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Rabinov was to be the catalyst for the migration of numerous members of his family including the Komesaroff, Zmood, Grinblat, Goldenberg and Pogorelske families (arguably the largest Jewish family in Australia) and other significant families from surrounding villages in Russia including the Smorgon, Batagol and Pahoff families. The latter too all played a significant role in the Carlton Jewish community.

The Komesaroff contribution to Carlton began almost immediately on arrival when Pinchas commenced Zionist activity with Hatchiah and the Kadimah. Only his enlistment in the Australian army interrupted a communal career that would extend over four decades.

And beyond Carlton the Komesaroff descendants have made a significant contribution to the wider Australian community (especially in the fields of law and medicine) and particularly to the Melbourne Jewish community. Such certainly was also the case of a second wave of the family who arrived about 1922, including Willy (Velvel) Komesarook (later Komesaroff) and his sister Bessie. Willy was to be a key to the development of Caulfield Hebrew Congregation. Bessie married Nissen Rosenbaum, grandfather of well-known barrister Norman and his late brother Yankel (who was tragically murdered in New York).

As for the Feiglin family, their contributions to Victorian Jewry are



The matriarch and patriarch of the Feiglin family: Leah and Reb Moshe Zalman.

legion. Moshe Zalman had fled Ottoman Palestine in 1911 to escape conscription to the Ottoman army; arriving in Port Said via Beirut he decided to take advantage of a then newly instituted Australian government-assisted migration scheme, intending to bring his family to follow him as soon as practicable. After his family's arrival on the *Konigin Luise* and seeking to maintain an Orthodox lifestyle impossible when working on a job in Melbourne that required attendance on Shabbat, the Feiglins moved to Shepparton where an agricultural settlement fund facilitated settlement by those interested in and having a background in agriculture.

Moshe Zalman and Leah (together with his brother Bere and

his family) were to become keys to the development of the Jewish community that flourished in Shepparton till after the Second World War. In the interests of that community they also brought to Australia individuals such as Reverend Chaim Yoffe who with Moshe Kantor rose to communal prominence in their own right while also becoming related to the Feiglins through marriage. And the daring venture of setting up in Shepparton in isolation from the rest of the Jewish world handsomely paid off – all nine children and their families remained unwaveringly true to Torah traditions, a uniquely amazing achievement for an Australian family that arrived prior to World War I.

It is impossible to list all the contributions of Feiglin family members to the Melbourne Jewish community in the post-war period; accordingly the following list is just indicative.

Om their arrival in 1949, Moshe Zalman hosted the first Lubavitcher families at his Shepparton property and it was there that the Lubavitcher yeshivah was first established. The Feiglin family would continue to be closely associated with Chabad/Lubavitch and its institutions until the present day. For many years David Feiglin served as president of the Yeshivah.

Following his move to Melbourne, Moshe Zalman davvened at Mizrachi; his sons Judah, Joseph and David had been prominent amongst its founders and his mechutan Chaim Yoffe its first president. Judah would be a founding chairman of Yavneh College and Joseph a key to Mount Scopus College in its earlier years as well as treasurer of the Victorian Jewish Board of Deputies. Avrohom Feiglin would long be associated with Caulfield Beth Hamedrash established in 1959 and led for decades by Moshe Kantor (married to Moshe Zalman and Leah's daughter Freda). Bere's son Abe (Abraham) Feiglin would be foundation principal of Mt Scopus College. And of course so many of later generations have continued and now continue in communal roles.

Indeed Victorian and Australian Jewry have much to be grateful for regarding its communal pioneers.

Shabbat shalom,
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