

Archive of Australian Judaica

Marianne Dacy

In July 1983, the *Archive of Australian Judaica* Project was initiated at the University of Sydney, with a grant of \$10,000 from the Australian Research Grant Scheme, and the appointment of Marianne Dacy as Librarian/Archivist/Research Assistant. The Project's directors are Dr Alan Crown, senior lecturer in the University's Department of Semitic Studies, Dr Neil Radford, the University Librarian and Jennifer Alison, also of Fisher Library. From the outset it was planned that the Project would run for at least three years.

As such, the name *Archive* is probably a misnomer for the professional archivist, as the material being collected covers a far wider range than might technically be considered as archival. The type of material being sought varies from records and minute books of Jewish societies, institutions and individuals, to journals, newspapers, annual reports and newsletters issued by the Australian Jewish community, and to books, pamphlets, memorabilia and ephemera, cassette tapes and photographs. These diverse kinds of material accurately reflect the subtle nuances of Jewish life in this country, and the Archive is destined to serve as a research repository and working tool for reference study.

The establishment of such a centralised repository has long been seen as an urgent necessity towards arresting the loss of important Jewish records occurring with every passing year. Records are deteriorating through lack of proper storage or have simply been thrown out when space has become a problem. Though the purpose of the Project is to collect, catalogue and preserve materials on Australian Jewish life, especially in New South Wales, it is hoped that funds next year will be sufficient to create a comprehensive microform collection in New South Wales of journals and newspapers issued by the Australian Jewish community. A preliminary listing demonstrates that some have been lost and others are incomplete in every collection. Further plans envisage computerised listing of materials and the copying and microfilming of materials otherwise inaccessible to researchers.

A collection of the type described is recognised as having especial importance for Australian historians, sociologists and geographers. When

the grant was originally requested, it was pointed out that though the Jewish community is one of the oldest homogenous non-Christian communities in Australia, its history of self-government has already been partially lost through the lack of a comprehensive community records policy and a professionally organised central archive. At the same time, the efforts of the Australian Jewish Historical Society should not be underestimated. The task of the researcher is made more difficult by the fact that some community records are dispersed in private collections. The consulting of a consecutive run of records of a single organisation may require a search through several widely scattered collections.

It should be noted too that the history of the Australian Jewish community reflects in microcosm, official and unofficial Australian attitudes towards minorities. The study of the community through its records adds a new and worthwhile body of evidence for historians. In addition, the growth of the Australian Jewish community and its changing settlement patterns shed light, firstly, on the general movement of migrants in response to world events of history, and secondly, on town/country population interchanges in general with regard to minorities. Such a study may reveal that the Jewish community has certain characteristics, or, on the contrary, demonstrate that patterns of migratory movements are general.

From its inception, the *Archive* has continued to receive papers from individuals who have built up collections over the years. The Max Joseph papers constitute the first donation received. These include the minutes and records of the Association of New Citizens, and a complete run of the Society's journal, *The New Citizen*. The Association (formerly called the Association of Refugees) was set up as a support system by migrants coming to Australia at the outset of World War II, and its activities lasted until 1954. Although not specifically Jewish, the Association attracted an overwhelmingly Jewish clientele.

Other personal papers in this collection provide a particularly comprehensive record of the life of a German Jewish refugee in Australia, which would be considered as the prototype of many in a similar situation. Some of these papers have been used in Holocaust research by Professor Konrad Kwiet at the University of New South Wales. Further papers in this collection detail the owner's struggle to establish compensation from West Germany for the Australian Jewish population that had emerged from this tragedy and mirror his battle to obtain abolition of Australian Government taxation on these payments. This collection alone constitutes an invaluable source for research.

Individuals are continuing to donate papers regularly and more have been promised. Included in donations have been Zionist Youth magazines and minutes, as well as minutes of several now defunct organisations. Also received are photographs and collections of newspaper-cuttings on Jewish

matters. We hope to take more photographs ourselves to add to those of synagogues in Victoria, including the historical synagogue at Ballarat.

At present the archives of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies are being sorted and listed by four trainee archivists, working under the direction of Peter Orlovich, senior lecturer at the School of Librarianship, University of New South Wales. These papers point to important activities and areas of concern vital within the Australian Jewish community. Earlier in the year, the trainee archivists completed the sorting, arranging and listing of the Zionist Federation Archives at Darlinghurst, and these were subsequently transferred to the *Archive of Australian Judaica*.

Conditions of access to the *Archive* have been formalised. Individual researchers are required to complete a standard form seeking permission from the organisation concerned to consult material lodged with the *Archive of Australian Judaica*.

Presently the copying onto microfiche of early minute books (up to 1970) of the Australian Zionist Federation, as well as those of the New South Wales and Victorian State Zionist Councils will be completed. The assembly of a consecutive run of the Federation minute books required some effort, as the archives are distributed between Sydney and Melbourne, due to the transfer of headquarters from Melbourne to Sydney every two years. There was also a lack of a clear-cut archival policy. Though some minutes of the early Plenary Sessions of the Federation are still missing, we hope that eventually they will be found in private hands.

The donation of a collection of tapes of Jewish programmes from Sydney's ethnic radio station, 2EA, was recently received. This will provide an invaluable aural register of the concerns and interests of the Jewish community since 1974, when this programme was first broadcast. We have begun recording reminiscences of personalities active in the Australian Jewish community and other tape collections have been promised.

It might well be asked, 'How does a librarian list archival material *per se*, books, tapes and single broadsheets, invitations, magazines and newspaper cuttings in the one collection? What kind of indexing should be used, and how detailed should it be?' In some cases, for example, the indexing of a newspaper-cutting collection by date will not be sufficient for the archival collection to achieve its maximum usefulness.

Archival methods differ from those practised by librarians in several respects. First, for an archivist, the order imposed by the originator of the material is important and meaningful because of its context, and must be preserved. Librarians impose order on the bibliographic material they process, whereas the archivist may be dealing with personal papers, handwritten manuscripts, letters etc. Second, librarians tend to speak

about author/title problems — the most appropriate AACR2 cataloguing rule for a problematic book — cross indexing and subject cataloguing, and the Australian Bibliographic Network. Archivists enter the near mystical realm of provenance, series description, date range, class lists, administrative history or organisations and item inventories. It can be disconcerting for a librarian to stand before a shelf catalogued by an archivist, and no doubt the contrary applies, but perhaps to a lesser extent. Since our collection includes both archival and bibliographic material, its listing must seek to combine the principles of both archivist and librarian in symbiosis.

The beginning of the *Archive of Australian Judaica* Project has been very encouraging. Unfortunately, the amount granted by the A.R.G.S. was less than had been hoped and plans for microfilming material have had to be sharply curtailed this year owing to lack of finance. The Project is being developed as a scholarly scientific tool to benefit not only the Jewish community, but also a whole range of disciplines. A planned programme of acquisition is an expensive proposition, but we look to the Jewish community and the wider community for continuing support. Further information about the *Archive* may be obtained by contacting:

Archive of Australian Judaica
C/- Rare Book & Special Collections Department
Fisher Library
University of Sydney NSW 2006
(Telephone (02) 692 2222)