

## The Tel Aviv Dairy of North Carlton

The sale in February 2014 of the property at 183 Macpherson Street has broken one of the last links with the Jewish era in North Carlton. In 1926 the recently-emigrated Pahoff family took over the house and dairy at this address, running it until the 1960s when such businesses were no longer viable, and the house has remained in the family ever since. Like Glickman's bakery, Polonsky's butcher shop and Gotlib's grocery, Pahoff's Tel Aviv dairy features regularly in Jewish memoirs. The sour cream, it appears, was especially good. But the family is perhaps even better remembered for its remarkable work in sponsoring and organising the emigration of no fewer than forty families from their native Ukraine.



Photo: CCHG

**183 Macpherson Street North Carlton**



Photo: CCHG

**Former Tel Aviv Dairy**

Entrenched anti-Semitism and the fear that their young sons would be conscripted into the Tsarist army drove many Jews to emigrate at the end of the nineteenth century. After the notorious Kishinev pogrom in 1903 Myer, a farmer, and his wife Chaya *nee* Chayin and their children left Ukraine to live on a Jewish farming settlement in Cyprus, but this proved to be a disappointment because the soil was very poor. Myer then contacted his brother-in-law Moshe Joel who had been in Melbourne since 1883. He and his wife Henyi sponsored the emigration of Myer and Sam, his second son aged at the time about 13. They arrived in 1912 while Chaya and her other children returned to Ukraine to farewell family members before joining Myer and Sam. The party of eight arrived on the *Otranto* in June 1913, Chaya, her eldest son Wolf, her second child Rebecca and four children including a baby, their ages but not their names listed in the shipping record. One more child was born here in 1914. The eighth member of the party on the *Otranto* is listed on the shipping record as Isaac Pahoff but was in fact Isaac Kanatopsky, Rebecca's husband, who had changed his name because the visa was cheaper if all were of the same family. Years later Mary Pahoff, who was a child on the voyage to Melbourne, married Wolf Kanatopsky, Isaac's nephew. The Kanatopsky family had also lived in Cyprus for a time and both Mary and Wolf were born there.

From 1918 to 1922 Myer is listed in Sands & McDougall's Business Directory as a farmer in Templestowe Road, Heidelberg, then from 1924 to 1927 I. (presumably Isaac) & M. Pahoff are recorded as dairy farmers in Broadmeadows. One family source believes the farm was at Berwick and it is possible that the family lived there before the years at Heidelberg. At one of these locations the farmhouse is said to have been used as a synagogue by local Jewish families. In 1926 the Pahoffs moved to Macpherson Street, North Carlton, Myer & Son taking over a dairy which had been operating since 1901. From about 1937, when there was an enormous Jewish population in North Carlton, it was known as the Tel Aviv dairy. Yiddish was the family language and was widely used with customers. The extended family was associated with a number of dairies in the area over the years including the Melton dairy at 267 Amess Street which was owned by Sam from 1949 to 1959.

As soon as they moved to Carlton, Myer and Chaya began to assist the emigration of their relatives in Ukraine. The first of these in 1926 was the family of nephew David Hain. (Their name was Chayin until the immigration officer couldn't cope with the spelling.) In 2001 Tess Schwarz *nee* Hain published a book, *The First of Forty Families*, honouring this work of the Pahoffs and outlining the fortunes of the forty families in

Melbourne. According to her, the Pahoffs were borrowing money at a high rate of interest to finance this work which continued until 1929 when the Soviet government made it impossible to continue.<sup>i</sup>

The Pahoffs met every boat on which relatives were arriving and had accommodation waiting for them. When Tess Schwartz's family arrived they were taken to the Pahoff home for a meal:

*... and then taken to a small cottage that had been rented for them nearby. It had some basic furniture in it which the Pahoffs had bought for them but which they had to pay off on time payment. My parents' only possessions were two brass candlesticks from Mum's grandmother, a child's feather mattress, and their clothes. They had no English, no education and big debts, since they had to pay back the money for their passage so the Pahoffs could borrow more money to bring over the next family.<sup>ii</sup>*

Some of the families sponsored in this way went on to make an enormous contribution to their new country. The spirit of the occasion is captured in this description of the arrival of the Smorgon clan:

*Rubin's relatives, the Pahoffs, had come with a truck from their Carlton dairy, so when the greeting and hugging was out of the way, the sum total of the Smorgon worldly possessions was thrown aboard. Then the family climbed up on the tray and the milk truck chugged and sputtered its way back to Carlton with Naum, a young Pahoff boy, bringing up the rear on a bicycle which they had bought in Marseilles but no one in the family had yet learnt to ride.<sup>iii</sup>*

Several sources refer to a family story that at one point the Australian authorities refused to accept the Pahoffs as sponsors of any more relatives, arguing that they were over-reaching themselves. So, sitting in the synagogue one day, Myer discussed his problem with a man sitting next to him who said he would be happy to sign the papers for the twenty-one people in question and promptly did so.<sup>iv</sup>

Myer and Chaya were like grandparents to Tess Schwartz, born here in 1928, and her siblings and she remembers a huge celebration to mark their golden wedding anniversary. Sue Allnutt, great-granddaughter of Myer and his wife and a generation younger than Tess, remembers Chaya as rather a forbidding old lady living in the big front room of the house with its bay window. Visiting children were required to go in and greet her, a bit of an ordeal.<sup>v</sup>

Many different members of the extended family lived in the Macpherson Street house over the years including four of Chaya and Myer's grandchildren who were cared for by their grandparents after their parents' early deaths, Rebecca's at 31 in 1936 and Isaac's at 54 in 1939. One of these four children was Phillip, born in 1923, and he inherited the dairy after the deaths of Myer in 1950 and Chaya (often called Annie) in 1958. The dairy traded until 1967 but family members continued to own and live in the house until 2013 when Phillip's daughter Esther died. The side yard with its outbuildings where carts and horses were once housed was quite unchanged at the time of sale, although this is not likely to continue much longer.

**Margaret Rich**  
**Carlton Community History Group**  
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<sup>i</sup>Tess Schwartz, *The First of Forty Families*, Makor, 2001

<sup>ii</sup>Tess Schwartz in Julie Meadows (ed.) *A Shtetl at the End of the World*, Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, 2011, p.56

<sup>iii</sup> Rod Myer, *Living the Dream: The Story of Victor Smorgon*, New Holland 2000, p. 45

<sup>iv</sup>Myer, *ibid*, has one version of this story and names the new sponsor as Mr. Gorr, a draper from Northcote.

<sup>v</sup>Interview with Margaret Rich, CCHG, 20/1/2014