

Description of the Records of The Strathfield and District Hebrew Congregation

The Strathfield and District Hebrew Congregation was founded in the early 1940s as a centre for the education of Jewish children. The centre was located at 2a The Boulevard, Strathfield. In the early 1950s, the parents of those children purchased a residential property at 19 Florence St, Strathfield. The property served both as an educational centre and as a synagogue. In 1959 a new synagogue was built on the grounds of the property and this was later followed by the erection of a minister's residence, the demolition of the original 19th century residence and the construction of a communal hall and a block of classrooms.

The records of the congregation consist mainly of minutes of Board of Management and Ladies' Auxiliary meetings, correspondence files, the constitution, newsletters, account books, annual balance sheets and membership lists. The form of these records is not consistent but their content attests to a high degree of responsibility in the management of communal affairs and public moneys.

The records provide evidence of two major features. On the one hand, the community was a tightly-knit group of people who shared a common interest in providing their children with a Jewish education, in gathering for prayer and in Zionist ideals. On the other hand, the community constantly struggled to maintain a level of membership and funding that would allow it to pursue those goals. It was this struggle which brought the members together time and again for a never-ending series of social functions and meetings.

The first generation of members was made up of Australian-born Jews and pre-WWII European immigrants. During the 1970s and 1980s many of these founders moved away from the district or died, and this ultimately led to the community's decline. However, long before the community's final demise on 31st August, 2013, many of the sons and daughters of the original members had assumed leadership roles. Similarly, many of the children enrolled in the Yolanda Kramer Kindergarten were the grandchildren of the first generation. Thus the community did succeed in attaining its primary goal, that of Jewish continuity.

Additional information about the community may be found in the Archives of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, (NSW).

Above description prepared by Geoff Toister on 18th January 2015, after refiling and cataloguing the records in preparation for their transfer to the Archives of the State Library of NSW.