Documentation of Jewish Records World Wide (DoJR): Australian Experience

by Helen Gardner

Documentation of Jewish Records Worldwide Project (DoJR) is a long-term, visionary program. Its aim is to capture and catalogue every source of Jewish genealogical information throughout the world. The catalogue, known as JCAT, will collect and store details of what information is available and where to find it, as well as what media it is stored on, its condition (good or fragile), and its general availability. JCat data consists of a one-line entry per record set. The base data, that is, the collection of individual records that constitute the record set, will not be held in the catalogue.

The premise of the project, now backed up by an extensive pilot study, is that, notwithstanding the millions of Jewish genealogical records held by JewishGen, Family Search et al., only about 15 percent of available Jewish records actu-

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ally are catalogued and known; 85 percent remain to be discovered and recorded.

Our Australian Jewish Genealogical Society (Victoria branch) [Melbourne] committee thinks this is an exciting and innovative project and one that gives us an opportunity to look at what records we have in our state, where they are, how to access them, and to identify any available, but. uncatalogued record sets. It also gives us an opportunity to transfer information into the public domain and to put Australia on the world's Jewish genealogical map.

We decided to concentrate on records from our state (Victoria), enter data from other states where we have it, and encourage other Australian Jewish genealogical societies to enter their data after the database is operative. First, we entered the data we have from the Australian Jewish Historical Society (Vic), held in the State Library of Victoria, which is the largest collection. That gave us more than 4,500 Australian records, previously known to only a few of us.

We are now entering the data held by the AJGS (Vic) and also data on Jewish communal organizations such as several Jewish Homes for the Aged, WIZO Victoria, Maccabi Victoria, Jewish Community Council of Victoria, B'nai B'rith and many, many more.

After that, we will process information from non-Jewish organizations that have data on Jewish people, such as school and university alumni associations, newspapers, both major and local, professional organizations, The Australian National Archives and others. In addition to our digitized vital records, we also have data on (to name a few of many):

- 12,000 World War II Jewish refugees who arrived In Australia between 1945 and 1955 (digitized)
- Paperwork from 10,000 Jews living in the former Soviet Union who applied for entry into Australia in the 1990s (currently being digitized)
- Family tree data on prominent Jewish families living in Australia–with 67,000 names. (digitized)
- A list of 500 books with data of Australian genealogical interest in our Lamm Jewish Library (digitized)
- Military records of 6,500 Australian Jewish servicemen in World Wars I and II, the Boer War and the Vietnamese war (digitized)
- The Journal of the Australian Jewish Historical Society from 1939 to present, which includes many articles detailing Jewish life in urban and regional Victoria from early colonial times in the 1800s continuing to the present (digitized)
- Newsletters of the Australian Jewish Genealogical Society–Victoria, from 1999 to 2013 (digitized)
- Synagogue marriage records and *ketubot* (marriage contracts) from 1832 to 1940 (digitized)
- Audio tapes, newspapers, publications, photographs, maps, artefacts and archives (index digitized)

These records were sourced from the Lamm Jewish Library in Victoria, the genealogical resource room within that library, the State Library of Victoria and the Australian Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) website managed by the AJHS in New South Wales (Sydney).

We found some surprises. Some were collections we had forgotten and some were collections that would be good to digitize and make more readily accessible. Among the undiscovered records we found, were three worthy of mention:

- The first Minute Book of the Melbourne Jewish Philanthropic Society whose initial meeting was held on November 19, 1848, noted that "The purpose of the society was to assist the poor and distressed in cases of sickness with medical aid, medicine and a weekly stipend to maintain themselves while unable to attend to their usual vocations."
- Applications for gravestone inscriptions at the Melbourne General Cemetery submitted by members of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation. This was an especially important discovery as these applications from 1860 onwards are still intact, but the condition of the graves has deteriorated, with many tombstones now smashed or completely unreadable.
- Punishment Book of the Melbourne Hebrew School–1876. The book lists the date, pupil, cause, number of lashings and who administered them. "Crimes" included telling a malicious falsehood; bringing cigarettes to school and smoking them, and also enticing others to smoke them; biting the girls; singing in class; laughing in class; hitting a boy on

Custodial Organization Name – carried over from the Custodial Organization tab	Major divisions of the Archive Holdings at the Archive Branch. Sometimes called: Fond, Zespol, Level 1 Sub-group or Archival Group. For the purposes of this information gathering it is called the Archival Group(s)				
1.a.i. Name (in native language) – Name in native language of the Custodial Organization	2.b.i. Title (in native language) – Title of the Archival Group in native language	2.b.iv. Date Range or Date List – List of date ranges and/or individual dates of the information within the Archival Group. NOTE: if the date(s) of the Archival Group is not known, enter text **unknown**	2.b.v. Number of Record Collections in Archive Group – Number of Record Collections within the Archival Group. NOTE: for the simplified Opus-Dela this entry would be the digit **1**	2.b.vi. General description of the Archive Group – Description of the Archival Group and the types of record collections held within it.	2.d.v. Author / Source – The author or source of the original File
Lamm Jewish Library of Australia	Lamm Library Book collection		46000	As of 2021, the LJLA has over 46,000 books, not all of which are genealogical. A list of categories with books of genealogical interest, can be found at...	
Lamm Jewish Library of Australia	first Minute Book of the Melbourne Jewish Philanthropic Society	1848 – ?	?	The purpose of the society was to assist the poor and distressed in cases of sickness with medical aid, medicine and a weekly stipend to maintain themselves while unable to attend to their usual avocations, and secondly to afford temporary aid to deserving cases'. Lists people being assisted	Melbourne Jewish Philanthropic Society
Lamm Jewish Library of Australia	Applications for gravestone inscriptions at the 'Melbourne General Cemetery	1860 onwards			Melbourne Hebrew Congregation
Lamm Jewish Library of Australia	Punishment Book of the Melbourne Hebrew School	1876		The book lists the date, pupil, cause, amount of lashings and who administered them	Melbourne Hebrew School

the head with a brick; setting off fireworks in the schoolyard, and other such misdemeanors. The one we like best:

Names; Myer Fryberg, Solomon Hyams, Mark Davis and Joshua Abrahams

Crime: Stealing oysters from a shop in Swanston Street and running up Little Bourke Street to eat them

Punishment: They each received a whipping.

Our team consists of Liz James, Bubbles Segall and this author. We meet weekly for two hours when we are not in lockdown because of COVID. We have weekly Zoom sessions with Marlis Humphrey and Helen Stein who assist us with queries and navigating entry of data into the Excel template. The task has been challenging. At first we found working with the template confusing, complex, and frustrating, but as the initial response team, our task has been to work with the complexity, to figure out what different types of records we have, and what sorts of data can be collected from them, so that Helen Stein can build a database that makes it easy for other Jewish genealogical societies to enter their data.

One of the main challenges has been determining the custodial organization. For us, the task is complicated because we have data owned by organizations, managed by the Historical Society and stored in the State Library of Victoria. After much discussion, we concluded that the custodian is determined by where the data are stored. Thus, the State Library is the custodial organization for records stored there. The decision also clarifies the custodial organization for other record sets we hold, and for other JGSs as they enter their data. I encourage other JGSs to consider adding their data to the project. Although the proposed database is not yet operational, some of the preparation can be done now.

I would start by brainstorming what records might be available in your community, both Jewish and non-Jewish. Think about what types of data you have for different types of records, e.g., if you have digitized vital statistics records for your community, you will know things like how many records, how many people, and so forth, but you don't need to consider whether or not they are fragile. On the other hand, if the records are on paper, you may not know as much detail on numbers of people, but whether they are in good condition or are moldering and fragile will become important information. You also need to consider whether the data will be open access, by providing a clickable link, or whether a researcher will need to contact a designated person to ask about records of interest.

Once the database is operative, look at it and evaluate how to fit your records and where they don't fit, what might need to be different. You might also think about any Jewish community organizations and whether you need to approach them to find out if they hold any data you don't know about. In particular, you need to emphasize that the JCat record will only indicate what record sets are held by the organization. It will not hold the individual records that constitute the record set. Each organization will determine if the data from a given record set will be available on open access by a clickable link, or whether a researcher will need to contact a designated person to inquire about particular records of interest.

As we enter our data, we keep finding new sources. By

the time we have completed data entry we will have a documented understanding of what records are available for our community, which should be of use to people who are searching our locality. Knowing what is where and the richness of collections will also help prioritize future digitization and indexing projects for our society.

Finally, we will have made a contribution to a valuable and worthwhile project to unearth our Jewish knowledge as a legacy for future generations. We especially want to express our immense gratitude to Marlis Humphrey and Helen Stein for their patience, perseverance and their help in guiding us through the process.

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Dr Helen Gardner, has been a research biochemist, computer programmer, community development officer, psychologist and academic. Her interest in genealogy dates from 1997, when she discovered a branch of her family living in the USSR. She is a member of the AJGS (Vic) committee and was the initiator of the society's involvement in the DoJR project.