The Jewish experience in Australia

The Jewish people in Australia

The Jewish people have been part of Australian history since 1788. At least eight Jewish convicts came on the First Fleet. Over a thousand more people of Jewish descent were sent to Australia as convicts during the next 60 years. In addition, Jewish free settlers were arriving in Australia as early as the 1820s. By 1901 it is estimated there were over 15,000 Jews in Australia.

Before 1901, most Jewish emigrants to Australia were from Britain. But increasingly, prejudice and discrimination throughout mainland Europe in the early part of the 20th century led to many Polish, Russian, and German Jews migrating to Australia. The trend was heightened following the horrors of the Holocaust and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Jewish people during World War II. These events changed the Australian Jewish community. Most notably there emerged a stronger Zionist movement and a greater sense of cultural identity amongst Australian Jews.

Jewish people have made strong contributions to the Australian community. They have participated in numerous professions, including business, the law, and politics and many fields of the arts (especially theatre, music and literature).

Records held by the National Archives

The National Archives of Australia holds many records documenting the Jewish experience in Australia, particularly during the 20th century. These include:

Cabinet papers and departmental correspondence files relating to Jewish migration to and settlement in Australia

- migration selection and registration documents
- naturalisation records
- records concerning prominent Australian Jews
- records detailing Australian reactions to international events involving Jewish people.

Many key records have been identified in the research guide Safe Haven: Records of the Jewish Experience in Australia by Malcolm Turnbull, which is also available in all research centres.

You can also use the National Archives RecordSearch database to locate additional records relating to the Jewish people and Judaism. Keyword searches for items using search terms such as the names of Jewish people or references to events that might have had Jewish involvement should identify relevant records.

Examples of the types of records held by the National Archives are listed below.

Records relating to the Jewish experience in Australia

Migration and settlement

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Admission of refugee Russian and Polish Jews	1916	A1, 1916/10708
Admission of Jews to Australia	1921–38	A434, 1949/3/3196
Immigration Restrictions – Jews	1925	A458, N156/2
Alien migration – Jews from Central Europe – Central European migrants – stateless German refugee Jews	1933–46	A367, C30751
Australian Jewish Welfare Society scheme for admission of 300 refugee children, part 1	1939–46	A434, 1949/3/3
Australian Jewish Welfare Society scheme for admission of 300 refugee children, part 2	1946–52	A442, 1952/14/693
Proposed Jewish migrant settlement in WA – plan	1950	A4940, C169

Prominent Jewish personalities – Isaac Isaacs

Title or description of record	Date range	Series number
Governor-General – farewell to Sir Isaac and Lady Isaacs	1920–25	A461, G7/1/2
Governor-General Appointment of Sir Isaac Isaacs	1930–36	A461, E7/1/2
The Rt Hon. Sir Isaac Isaacs, the first Australian-born Governor-General at Admiralty House in uniform, 1930 (photograph)	1930	A1200, L8925

John Monash

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
First AIF service record – Monash, General Sir John	1914–20	B2455, Monash J
Prime Minister's Department – Sir John Monash	1923	A1606, E25/1
Memorial – late Sir John Monash	1932–33	A458, X370/6

Rene (Harry Vander Sluice)

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Roy Rene in makeup of Character 'Mo'– copyright registration and exhibit (photograph)	1933	A1861, 6443

Other issues

Title or description of record	Date range	Series, item number
Zionism	1917–35	A981, Zio 1
Jewish National Fund	1917–18	A3934, SC17/4
Treatment of Jews in Germany	1938–39	A461, R420/1
Jewish Council to Combat Fascism	1946–67	A6980, S250256

Further information

Other publications containing information about Jewish people and the Jewish experience are:

- *Fact sheet 121 - General John Monash*
- *Fact sheet 158 - The foundation of the State of Israel, 1948*
- Safe Haven: Records of the Jewish Experience in Australia.