



Gratz Insider, July 2013 - Story Continuation

[To return to the newsletter, close this page.]

Professor Michael Steinlauf: Lecturing and Learning in Australia

While in Australia, Dr. Steinlauf spoke at both the University of Sydney and the Sydney Jewish Museum. However, he spent the bulk of his time in Melbourne, where he lectured at Monash University as the Jacob Kronhill Visiting Scholar in Yiddish Culture. There, Dr. Steinlauf shared his expertise on Y.L. Peretz, “the father of modern Yiddish literature,” and on S. Anski’s *The Dybbuk*, the most well-known play in Yiddish theatre. He also offered his observations on the Jewish memory work that is taking place in Poland.

When not lecturing, Professor Steinlauf had the opportunity to explore the small but thriving Jewish presence in Australia, which is confined primarily to Sydney and Melbourne. After World War II, the population of Jews in Australia increased dramatically through the immigration of Holocaust survivors. In fact, according to Dr. Steinlauf, “the Jewish community in Australia has really been shaped by these survivors.” The Jews in Sydney are predominantly of German and Hungarian ancestry, while those in Melbourne are largely descendants of Polish immigrants.

With eight Jewish day schools in Melbourne alone, the importance of Jewish identity in this community is clear. At a visit to one of these schools, Dr. Steinlauf was taken aback to hear classes being conducted in Yiddish, and his eyes moistened with tears at the sound of four-year-olds singing Yiddish songs.

During his trip, Dr. Steinlauf also heard Yiddish spoken at another unlikely spot: an Australian football match. Combining elements of American football, rugby and soccer, Australian football is its own unique sport, which is very popular among the locals. Dr. Steinlauf was actually invited to an Australian football match by a Yiddish-speaking Australian Jew.

In addition to sports, Professor Steinlauf also had the opportunity to discuss politics on his trip - with Bundists. The Bund was a Jewish socialist organization established in Russia at the end of the 19th century. Active for years in Poland, the Polish Bund was

ultimately wiped out by the Nazis and the Communists. Considering the Bund to be a virtually defunct organization, Dr. Steinlauf was surprised to find Bundists “alive and well in Melbourne.” Not only did he discuss politics with them, but he also got a t-shirt bearing the letters “SKiF,” which is the Yiddish acronym for the Bundist youth group.

From the impressive Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation at Monash University to the four-year-olds singing Yiddish songs to the Bundists who are very much alive, the relatively small Jewish community in Australia maintains a strong sense of Jewish identity. As a result, after going there to share his knowledge of Yiddish culture and Polish Jewry, Professor Steinlauf returned home to Gratz College with a fuller understanding of this vibrant community in Australia.