

Kadimah

Hirsch Munz, Biographical Note to accompany digitisation of Australian Yiddish Almanacs

Hirsch Munz (1905-1979) Yiddishist, man of letters, research scientist and business man was the second of six children born in Krynki, an industrialised town not far from Bialystok, Lithuania, then part of the Russian empire. He was educated at a Hebrew high school and teacher training college in Lemberg (now Lviv, Ukraine) and became a school teacher before migrating to Australia in 1927. On arrival in Melbourne, he became associated with the Melbourne [Kadimah](#).

In 1934 he was appointed first lecturer in Hebrew at the University of Adelaide and published the pioneering monograph *Jews of South Australia* (Adelaide, 1936) and was a contributor to the literary pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Melbourne Age*, *Meanjin* and *The Bulletin*. He became the foreign editor of the modernist Australian quarterly journal of arts, architecture and letters, *Manuscripts*. In 1938 he was a co-founder of the *Australian Jewish Historical Society* in Sydney. A gifted linguist with a passion for literature, he tutored in contemporary European literature and taught university extension classes in Sydney and Melbourne.

He wrote the historical introduction to the first Yiddish *Australian Jewish Almanac* (1937) and with [Pinchas Goldhar](#) and [Melech Ravitch](#) co-edited the second Yiddish *Australian Jewish Almanac* (1942). He published, with his own scholarly introduction, Goldhar's Yiddish translation of *Eban Saphir*, the revealing account of Jewish life in Australia written in 1860 by a visiting rabbinical emissary from Palestine.

Munz studied wool-sorting and gained practical experience on Merungle station in New South Wales. From 1931 he was a wool researcher for the CSIR in Adelaide, then at Sydney and Melbourne Universities until he volunteered and was mobilized into the Australian Navy in 1942, serving in the Secret Intelligence Australia unit. His duties included identifying Japanese and German intelligence networks operating in the South West Pacific Area and the Dutch East Indies. Hirsch Munz married Estera Rosenblatt in 1943. They returned to Melbourne after he was demobilised in 1946, where their only child Martin was born.

He published *The Australian Wool Industry* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1950), for many years the reference on the industry, and devised the 'Munz Scale', a simple means of correlating international descriptions of wool fibres. During the 1950s, he also served as editor of the Yiddish edition of the [Australian Jewish News](#) and was a frequent speaker and contributor in Yiddish, Hebrew and English to events and publications under the auspices of the Kadimah, the Labour Zionist movement, the Bialystoker Centre, the Australian Jewish Historical Society and Friends of the Hebrew University, amongst other organisations.

In the 1960s, he was the secretary of the committee charged with erecting a monument to commemorate victims of the Holocaust. The resulting menorah-shaped monument in the Melbourne General Cemetery, Carlton, was dedicated in May 1963.

In 1965, Munz suffered a debilitating stroke. Thanks to the skill and dedication of his wife, a physiotherapist, he partly recovered and lived for another 14 years, his mind lucid as ever.

Martin Munz
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