



AUSTRALIAN RAILWAY
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MELBOURNE BRANCH

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ARHS Melbourne Luncheon Outing Group, Melbourne Holocaust Museum Elsternwick & Lunch at the Caulfield RSL Tuesday 12th August 2025

The Melbourne Holocaust Museum is currently Australia's largest institution dedicated to Holocaust education, research & remembrance. It was founded in Elsternwick, Melbourne, Australia, in 1984 by Holocaust survivors.

The museum is dedicated to the memory of the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945.

We consider the finest memorial to all victims of racist policies to be an educational program which aims to combat antisemitism, racism and prejudice in the community and fosters understanding between people.

Within these walls: Our history, our journey

The MHM story began when a group of Melbourne Holocaust survivors came together. They had a simple but monumental purpose: to honour the millions of Jewish people who were murdered, to preserve their legacy, and to ensure the world did not forget.

Voices that can't be silenced

After World War II, many Holocaust survivors made their way to Australia to rebuild their lives. All they wanted to do was to leave the past behind. The events of the Holocaust were deeply traumatic and too difficult to talk about.

But as the years went by, they soon realised that they wanted – and needed – to tell their stories. Because the next generation deserved to know what had truly happened. And the world cannot afford to forget.

Connected by the past and a purpose

So, in 1984, a group of Holocaust survivors in Melbourne came together to start a Holocaust museum and research centre. They dedicated it to the memory of the six million Jews who were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators between 1933 and 1945.

Following a generous donation from the late Mina Fink (in memory of her late husband, Leo Fink), an old double-storey building at 13 Selwyn Street Elsternwick was secured. And in March 1984, the Melbourne Holocaust Museum opened its doors.

Ordinary people, extraordinary endeavours

During the early days, the MHM was run entirely by volunteers and Holocaust survivors. Armed with passion and dedication, they set about collecting and preserving experiences of the Holocaust the best they could.

Their commitment was so strong that many retrained to become educators, archivists, librarians and curators, with guidance from experts in these fields. Many Holocaust survivors began to contribute their personal collections of photos, documents and objects. But beyond that, they trusted the MHM with their own life experiences. And told their survivor testimonies with unbelievable transparency, courage and resilience.

A light to sweep out darkness

Our mission was clear: to honour all Holocaust victims, support survivors and their descendants, and inspire the next generation. We wanted to raise awareness and inspire action against discrimination. To achieve that, we created education programs that aimed to foster understanding and combat antisemitism, racism and prejudice in the community. Because that, to us, would be the finest memorial to all victims of racist policies. Our museum also became a vital place of support for survivors. Where they could heal and connect with one another. And commemorate their families who were lost to one of history's darkest moments.

"What makes it a unique institution, is that survivors provide living history as they communicate to visitors of the centre, not through hate, but through a sense of duty, that by love and tolerance greater harmony can be achieved in the world."

Holocaust survivor Cyla Sokolowicz (Editor of MHM magazine 1984-1993)

A mission that keeps growing

The MHM quickly began to attract streams of students and visitors of all ages, keen to learn about the Holocaust directly from survivors who lived through the horrors. To meet the growing demand, the MHM was remodelled in 1990 and the Smorgon Family Auditorium was built. This doubled the museum's size and provided larger facilities for programs and seminars. With the community's support, we made further extensions in 1999. Our Hadassa and Szymon Rosenbaum Research Centre was opened by the then Governor-General of Australia, Sir William Deane.

Professionalising for an enduring legacy

In November 2000, the MHM achieved another milestone when we were granted incorporation with a new Board that represented five community organisations. These included B'nai Brith Anti-Defamation League and Kadimah Yiddish Cultural Centre. Soon after, we employed our first paid Executive Director, curator and educator. In 2003, we established a fundraising arm, the Melbourne Holocaust Museum Foundation. And that made it possible for us to gradually employ more paid staff across the organisation.

Museum Focus

The museum focuses on educating younger generations against hate, with tens of thousands of students visiting the museum every year to participate in MHM's age-appropriate education programs.

Apart from guided tours through the museum, the MHM offers adult education programs, teacher training and also hosts a range of events which are open to the public.

Exciting new chapter on the horizon

Visitations from schools continued to increase. And by 2016, we were receiving about 23,000 students per year. To ensure the ongoing sustainability of our programs, we built the Judy and Leon Goldman Learning Centre as an adjunct to the museum in 2019. And, after exploring other expansion options, we decided it was time to rebuild the entire museum.

Thanks to the support of our wonderful community, as well as the Federal and State Governments, we embarked on a redevelopment of our site which was completed in early 2023.

Incredible efforts and achievements

Besides the astounding growth, the MHM and our volunteers have also received many distinguished honours through the years.

These included:

- The Westpac Museum of the Year
- The Victorian State Government's Multicultural Award
The prestigious Small Museum, Permanent
- Development Award at the Museum and Gallery National Awards (MAGNA, 2010)

Many of our volunteers' work and achievements have also been recognised in Australia Day and Queen's Birthday honours. Our success is a testament to the incredible efforts of the hundreds of Holocaust survivors who voluntarily gave their time and energy so their messages would be heard. Their legacy lives on in every corner of our museum.

Championing the past for a better tomorrow

Today, the MHM is home to more than 1,300 survivor testimonies and 12,000 historical artefacts. We've educated more than 800,000 students with true experiences of bravery, kindness and hope. And we will continue to provide a space for the community to learn about the Holocaust. To preserve our survivors' memories and legacy. And to share their voices.

Museum Rebuilding

The museum closed to the public in 2020 to undergo a major redevelopment project with Kirstin Thompson Architects and McCorkell Constructions.

In April 2023, ahead of the anticipated reopening, the name was updated to the Melbourne Holocaust Museum, with a fresh logo.

In November 2023 the museum officially reopened to the public with two permanent exhibition spaces, a gallery for temporary exhibitions, a virtual reality documentary experience, a memorial room, two auditoriums and four classrooms. The permanent exhibition titled 'Everybody Had a Name' follows the chronology of the Holocaust, beginning with pre-war Jewish life, and closing with how local survivors rebuilt their lives in Melbourne after the war. The exhibition 'Hidden: Seven Children Saved' is an immersive audio-visual exhibition designed for younger audiences (10+).

It follows the journey of seven children who were in hiding during the Holocaust. The new museum also features a reinstallation of the *Pillars of Witness* sculpture by Andrew Rogers.

Overseas Helpers

Since 2008 Austrian volunteers from the Austrian Holocaust Memorial Service are able to work for 10–12 months in the MHM alternatively to compulsory military service or civilian service in Austria. Their work includes, among other things, the translation of documents, the preparation of exhibitions, working in the library and cataloguing of photographs.



Jewish Museum of Australia former entrance 1984 MHM website



Jewish Holocaust Museum Elsternwick original Building 1984 MHM website



Melbourne Holocaust Museum after 2023 Rebuild from MHM website
Information from MHM website & Wikipedia.

Notes compiled by Geoff Wallace

E&OE