

OUR HISTORY



Opening of the Melbourne Holocaust Museum in March 1984. One of the Melbourne's Holocaust survivors addresses the crowd.

Within these walls: Our history, our journey

The MHM story began when a group of Melbourne Holocaust survivors came together. They had a single 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. And 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-story building at 13 Belyyn Street Elsternwick was secured. And in March 1984, the Melbourne Holocaust Museum opened its doors.



Group of Melbourne Holocaust survivors making the museum up in the early days.

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 re-trained 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 commiserate 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 Cytle 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 re-modelled in 1990 and the Srengor 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. And 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 Ethel Girth 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.

Exciting new chapter on the horizon

Visitors 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.

The MHM Founders



Syntha Beem (Dora) Wiener
FOUNDER



Mina Fink
FOUNDER



Aron Sokolowicz
FOUNDER

Learn more about the Holocaust



Meet the survivors
Meet directly from Holocaust survivors and eyewitnesses, as they share their testimonies and experiences.



Plan your visit
Find out more about our needs and exhibitions – and organise your journey before your visit.



Search our collection
Explore our extensive collection of materials, testimonies and artefacts related to the Holocaust.

Stay connected

Stay up to date with the latest news and events from the Melbourne Holocaust Museum.

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