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Linden 26 Acland Street, St Kilda

Moritz Michaelis (1820-1902) was born in Hanover (now in Germany). The Kingdom of Hanover, restored under the Treaty of Vienna after the catastrophic defeat of Napoleon in Russia, was still ruled 'in personal union' by George III of Great Britain, in much the same way as Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is Queen of Australia, as well as of Britain. It was relevant to his future that life began in this anglicised environment. His parents, though struggling financially, sent Moritz to private school in Hanover and on to study medicine.

When money ran out, he did an apprenticeship, then worked for a Cologne linen merchant and was soon manager. Young Moritz then went to Manchester to join his brother in the soft-goods business of Sampson and Leppoc. The business prospered, and Moritz was rapidly promoted, but the heavily polluted air of industrial Manchester affected Moritz's health. Newly married, he leapt at the opportunity to establish a branch of the business in the wealthy fledgling colony of Victoria.



Mr M and Mrs R Michaelis, c1853

On 15 April 1853, he arrived at Melbourne, first class from Liverpool on the *Falcon*, in 33 days, with his young wife, Rahel and a friend, Adolphus Boyd. Gold had been discovered and separation from New South Wales achieved, only two years earlier. Lodging in Collins Street, near Spring Street, Michaelis established the firm's soft-goods business in a building on the corner of Elizabeth and Flinders Streets, the present site of Hosie's Hotel, and later in Richmond. In 1855, he and Boyd broke with Sampson and Leppoc and so

established Michaelis and Boyd. In 1867, with three Hallenstein nephews, he established the Michaelis Hallenstein (later Michaelis Bayley) tannery and leather-goods plant in Footscray, on the bank of the Maribyrnong River.

Michaelis, Hallenstein & Co. grew rapidly; in 1876, a branch opened in New Zealand. The firm pioneered the glue industry in Australia and first processed gelatine. So in 1884,

Moritz could take time off to take his family to England for a two year visit. The firm was strong enough to weather the 1890s financial crash. From Collins Street, the Michaelis family moved to East Melbourne, and then settled in St Kilda. At first, they rented Marli (Place) at 3-7 The Esplanade.

Marli had been built before 1855, for J S Johnston. It consists of three narrow terraced houses. The two outer houses were enlarged before 1873, possibly after the Michaelis' left, but equally possibly to suit their needs. It was converted to flats around 1900, using external stairs.

In 1870, as business was expanding so rapidly, Moritz commissioned the prolific, if undistinguished architect A F Kürsteiner to design a two-storied, 18 roomed mansion for his family. Kürsteiner practised over 40 years (1853-93), firstly as Bagge and Kürsteiner, then Bagge, Spurer & Kürsteiner (1854-59), then on his own, responsible for some 124 buildings in Melbourne. He designed one remarkable complex of speculative workers' housing in Fitzroy (1-30 Greaves Street, 310-313 Fitzroy Street and 12 & 14 Mahoney Street) in 1871-74, immediately after completing Linden. Moritz then commissioned the celebrated curator of the Royal Botanic Gardens, William Guilfoyle to design an extensive garden setting for his house.

In German, 'Linden' means lime tree. It was one of several distinguished mansions built in St Kilda from c1855-85, when it was a salubrious, elevated and accessible resort of a suburb. These include Oberwyl, 33 Burnett Street (1856 & 78, **27**) for merchant John Gomes De Silva; Berkley Hall, 11 Princes Street (1854 & 1910, **26**) designed by Albert Purchas for Henry Field Gurner. All evoke the ambience of gracious suburban living.

Linden is a symmetrical, rendered Italianate house, with canted bay windows, surrounded on three sides by a double-storied cast-iron verandah with column-pairs and balustrade. In 1876, Melbourne architects, Crouch and Wilson (**44**), had called tenders for 'repairs' to Linden and again in 1892. It was being well maintained.

Though he never ran for public office, Moritz supported liberal reform. For years, he was acting Prussian Consul in Melbourne. Fascinated by mechanical inventions, he financed several. He also enjoyed music and theatre. He achieved renown as a Melbourne entrepreneur and philanthropist.

Born Orthodox Jewish, he became treasurer of the Melbourne and East Melbourne Hebrew congregations and he founded the St Kilda congregation in 1871, the year he completed Linden. He donated large amounts to both congregations and was on the committee of the Melbourne Hebrew School. However, he was not himself an Orthodox practitioner, he sent both his sons to Wesley College and often attended the East Melbourne Unitarian Chapel, where he felt the minister to be a 'very clever preacher.' Although a founder of the *Australian Israelite*, he later boycotted the paper. His philanthropy also extended to gifts to both the Alfred and Melbourne hospitals.

His great interest was his family. Only sons and sons-in-law ever became partners or shareholders in his business, though he advised them to become financially independent. In 1889, his daughter, (Alice?), was married at Linden to Isaac Hallenstein's eldest son: bonding the business relationship between the families. In the same year, Moritz bought Romscui, a 1,620-hectare property on Lake Victoria, near Paynesville. Ten years later, he published his memoirs: *Chapters from the Story of my Life*. After Rahel died in 1901, his own health declined and he died at Linden within the year.

After World War I, many of the St Kilda mansions were converted to boarding or rooming houses, or even to houses of ill repute, but the Michaelis family stayed on in Linden.



Linden Court Private Hotel, c.1957

On 15 August 1953, Alice Michaelis celebrated the centenary of her grandparents' arrival in Australia with an 'at home' at Linden. Only four years later, in November 1957, 'Linden Court' in a 'very dilapidated condition' was sold to Mr and Mrs Witty, who proceeded to renovate it as a 'high class residential business' for 45 guests at 25/- each per day. Two years later, it was on the market again for £27,500. By then, the land had reduced to only 40 x 24.4 metres. The National Trust, founded only four years earlier and still led by their first president, Sir Darryl Lindsay was sufficiently concerned by this turn of events to classify Linden 'class B'. Over ten years, (1962-72), Linden was operated as a private

hotel by Theodou and Alice van Veenendaal. In November 1983, it was auctioned, again as 'Linden Court' and this time, purchased by the St Kilda City Council for use as an art gallery for the community.

Linden Gallery (later Linden Arts Centre & Gallery) opened in late 1984, by presenting the visual arts component of the St Kilda Festival. In late 1986, the building was more seriously renovated. There were performances there that year by Theatreworks. The exhibitions programme was organised by St Kilda's Art Acquisitions Officer, Michael Vale. Later coordinators included Joan Winter, (1985-89), Kevin Wilson (1989-94) and James Harley. There were few precedents in Melbourne for municipal art galleries in 1984, and the early years at Linden required struggle and dedication to survive. There was also support from local private gallery owners; Luba Bilu and Anna Schwartz of Tolarno (17).

Linden now has five individual gallery spaces, community access studios, artist-in-residence studios, media arts facilities, a gallery shop and the Children's Sculpture Garden. In the early years, exhibitions were of a remarkably high standard. Exhibiting artists included: Tony Clark, Stieg Persson, Vivienne Shark LeWitt and Polly Borland in 1987; Yuendumu aboriginal community, Rick Amor, Yosl Bergner, Asher Bilu, Charles Blackman, Arthur Boyd, Sidney Nolan and Clifton Pugh in 1988; all interspersed with events, readings, talks, performances, music, and classes. Various arts organisations began to use Linden as their headquarters, as it became a fulcrum of the life of St Kilda in the arts.

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