

Meyer, Felix Henry (1858-1937)

Felix Henry Meyer (1858-1937), medical practitioner, was born on 19 June 1858 in Melbourne, son of Menk Meyer, businessman, and his wife Rebecca, née Fink. His Prussian-born father had come to Victoria in 1853. Felix received his first schooling from James Bonwick, then attended the St Kilda Collegiate Academy, the Flinders National Grammar School at Geelong, and finally Wesley College where he was dux in 1875. Retaining a lifelong affection for Wesley, Meyer was president of the Old Collegians in 1897-98 and in 1932 published a biography of its famed headmaster, L. A. Adamson.

Meyer entered the University of Melbourne medical school in 1876 and in 1880, with T. R. H. Willis, convened a meeting which led to the founding of the Medical Students' Society. He graduated M.B., B.S., 1880-81, and M.D. in 1902. In 1881-85 he was sole resident medical officer at the Lying-in Hospital (Royal Women's Hospital); during this time he initiated both systematic clinical teaching of students and formal training of midwives, and along with John Springthorpe founded the Victorian Nurses' Association and the nursing journal *Una*, which he edited for five years. In 1887 he was appointed to the honorary staff of this hospital and in 1891-1918 was senior gynaecological surgeon. His private practice in obstetrics and gynaecology was conducted first at Carlton, and then in Collins Street until he retired in 1935. He lectured in these subjects at the University of Melbourne in 1914-18 and published many articles on them in medical journals. In 1932 he delivered at Brisbane the Jackson oration, 'The makings of obstetrics'.

Meyer's commitment to his profession is reflected in his appointments: president of the Victorian branch, British Medical Association, 1894; creator of the board of examiners for the Victorian state certificate of midwifery and its first chairman, 1916; and member of the obstetrical research committee set up by the faculty of medicine in 1925, which led to the establishment in 1929 of the chair of obstetrics in the University of Melbourne. He was a foundation fellow, 1927, of the College of Surgeons of Australasia (Royal Australasian College of Surgeons).

Proud of his Jewish origin, Meyer was a man of wide culture. A master of languages, a lover of books and learning, art and music, he was a member of the faculty of music of the University of Melbourne and of the board of the Lady Northcote Permanent Orchestra Trust, and a regular attender at concerts and exhibitions. He wrote elegant verse and prose and was a brilliant speaker and conversationalist. He was a keen spectator-sportsman, enjoyed the camaraderie of clubs such as the Beefsteak, Wallaby and Yorick and attracted the friendship of men as diverse as Samuel Alexander, Sir John Monash and Sir John Longstaff. He died at Armadale on 31 August 1937 and was cremated.

On 20 January 1904 Felix Meyer had married Mary Fisher (1878-1975), second daughter of Professor E. J. Nanson, a talented artist who had studied under E. Phillips Fox. In 1965 she held a retrospective exhibition at the Lyceum Club, of which she was an original member. There were no children and on her death on 7 March 1975, she left an estate of about \$874,000. She bequeathed to the University of Melbourne \$130,000 to endow postgraduate scholarships in literature and in obstetrics and gynaecology, both in her husband's name, and \$20,000 to the Brownless medical library.

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Draft compiled by Allan Mawdsley

