

Sir Menasseh Meyer

Sir Manasseh Meyer was the most prominent Jewish leader in Singapore during his lifetime (1846-1930).

A businessman trading commodities and, later, one of the largest retail estate entrepreneurs in Singapore, Sir Manasseh Meyer was a graduate of St Joseph's Institution in the city. The Meyer family, consisting of three sons and four daughters, was truly cosmopolitan, travelling together to China, India, Japan, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Israel (then Palestine) and throughout Europe. Sir Manasseh ensured his children would be international citizens, learning about people and cultures throughout the world.

As Sir Manasseh's wealth increased, so did his interest in philanthropy. He became fully immersed in both the community affairs of Singapore and religious affairs of the country's Jewish Community. Working with the British, Sir Manasseh obtained their agreement to allow the sale of the original synagogue on Synagogue Street in order to construct the spacious Maghain Aboth Synagogue on Waterloo Street to serve the growing number of Singapore's Jewish families. Maghain Aboth officially opened in 1878 and continues to serve Singapore's Jewish Community today.

By 1902, Maghain Aboth could not adequately accommodate Singapore's Jewish population which had grown to 500. Sir Manasseh realised this and constructed a new synagogue, at his own expense, on Oxley Rise, named Chesed El. It was opened for services in 1905 and continues to serve the community today.

His philanthropy was not limited to the Jewish community. As a Singaporean, he was a leading donor to Raffles College, one of the first colleges established in Singapore. The National University of Singapore's original science building was named after him due to his support of the school. Today the Manasseh Meyer Building is an integral part of NUS's Bukit Timah campus.

Sir Manasseh's generosity was known far beyond the shores of Singapore. Albert Einstein was asked to visit Sir Manasseh to seek his support for the building of Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Einstein arrived in Singapore in 1922 to engage the support of prominent Jewish leaders and, specifically, to meet with Sir Manasseh who opened his estate Belle Vue on Oxley Rise. He used his estate to entertain the community's leaders, including the Bishop of Singapore and the future Nobel Prize winner and his wife.

Einstein asked Sir Manasseh for his support to establish a Jewish University to ensure the general and science education for the Jewish people throughout the world. His plea was met with a donation of 500 British pounds sterling (equivalent of \$287,000 US today) to establish Hebrew University.

Manasseh Meyer was knighted in 1929 by George V of Great Britain "in recognition of his public services and benevolence." The Straits Times stated he was "a man of great wealth who contributed lavishly to various local and imperial causes, in addition to having done a vast amount of good in Malaya... and it is fitting that such services be recognized."

Sir Manasseh's commitment to education in Singapore was carried on by leaders of the Jewish Community. This belief in the centrality of education was witnessed by the establishment of the Ganenu Learning Centre (Our Garden). Due to the growth of the school, it expanded in 2008 to become the Manasseh Meyer School. In 2016 it moved to a state-of-the-art campus and became an International School.

Today we serve students from 2 years old to Grade 10 at Sir Manasseh Meyer International School. A school committed to bringing Sir Manasseh's vision of international education for children to provide them with the values to lead successful, ethical lives.