

A most unusual gift

The Drakensberg Trust and the University of Melbourne

Juliet Flesch

The University of Melbourne has been the recipient of numerous gifts and benefactions, many described and celebrated in these pages. Those from the Drakensberg Trust are different because they are not rare books, *objets d'art*, manuscripts or paintings: in fact the most significant are in microform. An earlier paper outlined some of the history of the trust and its effect on the University Library.¹ The recent death of its founder, however, has led to a greater appreciation of its importance to the university as a whole and provides an opportunity to record it.

The Drakensberg Trust was established in 1978 in Australia by Edward George Brownstein (1933–2014) as an incorporated charitable trust registered in the State of Victoria. Its capital base was part of an inheritance from his father, Marcus Louis Brownstein, a leading member of the Johannesburg stock exchange for 40 years. The philosophy of the trust (named after the mountains of its founder's homeland), is grounded in a firm adherence to Judaeo-Christian religious ideals and the primary concepts of trust and benevolence.

Many charitable organisations have benefited from the support of the Drakensberg Trust. The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute

(WEHI) publicly recorded its gratitude for the trust's support of its building extension in 2008.² This involvement was shared for 14 years with Eddie's second wife, Beverley. After Eddie's death, Professor David Vaux acknowledged Eddie's personal involvement with WEHI over many years. He had also served on its human research ethics committee for over a decade.³

Between 2011 and 2013 the Burnet Institute, Amnesty International and Médecins sans Frontières all expressed their gratitude for Eddie's years of personal interest and substantial financial support for their work in the field. In 2013 Eddie Brownstein was recognised for his 50 years of defending human rights around the world, for campaigning to free prisoners of conscience, and for speaking out on behalf of individuals at risk, when he received the first Amnesty International Australia Freedom Award. He had joined the Victorian branch of Amnesty shortly after arriving in Australia, and in 1964 established its Horsham branch.⁴

Making a difference 'at the coalface', as Eddie put it, was always a strong priority. The Benalla and District Memorial Hospital greatly benefited from the trust's support of the district palliative care services.

The Rotary Club of Horsham, the Victorian town in which Brownstein worked as a general surgeon for many years, recorded another typical, practical instance of Eddie's non-financial support for his local community when the club described the 'fatigue zones' established on the Western Highway after Eddie had compiled statistics on deaths and recommended action. These were subsequently set up by the Country Roads Board throughout Victoria.⁵

This interest in practical solutions to problems is exemplified in the support provided by the Drakensberg Trust to the university. This support has been exceptional in its duration, the amounts of money involved and especially in what the funding has enabled. This article will provide some personal information on Eddie Brownstein, what motivated his benefactions and how these expanded the university's research collections and furthered its scholarly mission.

Edward George Brownstein was born in South Africa in 1933 and lived there until the age of 23. His mother died when he was only three years old. He took his Bachelor of Medicine from the University of Witwatersrand (long a site of opposition to apartheid) in 1956. In a 2003 interview with his grandson



Eddie Brownstein with one of his grandchildren, James. Photograph courtesy the Brownstein family.

James, he recalled becoming intensely aware of the repercussions of government policy that he had opposed as a student:

I worked in the hospitals in South Africa for two and a half years and there could see the difference in treatment between black and white and see the horrible results of apartheid. It was dreadful to see in the hospital system ... and at that time the violence was beginning to grow opposing apartheid.⁶

It was at Witwatersrand that Eddie met Anne-Hazleton Mills, known as Kitty. After their marriage in the Anglican Church they both converted to Roman Catholicism. He undertook his surgical studies at the University of Edinburgh and their second son was born in Lancashire. Eddie became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh in 1960 and the family returned to South Africa.

On 21 March 1961, what became known as the Sharpeville Massacre occurred. It proved a defining moment in the fight against apartheid. About 300 armed policemen faced a crowd of 5,000 Black men, women and children protesting against the 'pass law',

which obliged them to carry reference books containing their personal details at all times. The police shot at random: 69 people were killed and 180 were injured.

The Brownsteins realised the situation in South Africa was unlikely to change in the near future and, although they felt strongly that they should stay to work to improve it, they were persuaded by a family priest in Edinburgh to take their children to a more stable and peaceful place. In Australia Eddie soon discovered that 'it was impossible to get work as a general surgeon in Melbourne, because everyone specialises'.⁷ He established himself for the next 25 years at the Wimmera Base Hospital in Horsham, where both David Vaux and Kate Leslie recall his talented partnership with the anaesthetist Rex Bennett. Professor Leslie noted:

I remember my internship at Horsham Base Hospital with great fondness. It was my first rotation (in 1986) and the day I arrived was very hot and dry ... As soon as we got down to work with Rex and Eddie Brownstein everything turned out okay. Rex was a very gifted teacher and an expert and calm anaesthetist, and I know that Eddie and the other surgeons trusted him implicitly.⁸

Eddie was made a Life Governor of the Wimmera Health Care Group, a distinction bestowed on people whose actions or contributions have changed the organisation. He became a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons in 1965. Professor Vaux had been impressed, while working with Brownstein and Bennett the year before, by Eddie's knowledge of transgenic mice, oncogenes and their activation by chromosomal translocations.⁹

The Brownsteins had another five children, eventually moving to a 40-acre hobby farm, where Eddie could indulge his fondness for building and gardening. They both loved the Wimmera and the Grampians, as the flat plains and mountains in the distance reminded them of Transvaal. As we have seen, Eddie was also deeply involved in the local community. His son John recalled at his funeral:

Dad left his mark on a lot of people's lives. We continue to encounter grateful patients and family members. While working [at] Swan Hill a man told me his story of Dad saving the life of a lady who had her legs crushed against the front of Poon Ming's grocery store

by a car. Dad had also operated on this man and encouraged him into the teaching profession. Dad delivered first aid lessons to his students.¹⁰

An event that did not involve funding provides another illustration of the practical form of assistance that Eddie Brownstein favoured, and is recorded in the *Surgical News* of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons.¹¹ He had been given a set of surgical instruments in 1981 by Thomas Walpole, a doctor who had served in the New Guinea campaign of World War II and had been involved in setting up field hospitals. Having decided that these instruments, unused for over 30 years, should not be incorporated into those of the Wimmera Base Hospital, Eddie took them home and stored them. In 2004 a fellow surgeon, David Price, mentioned that he was taking a voluntary locum appointment at the Baucau Hospital in East Timor and was concerned about the appropriateness of the surgical instruments he would find there. Those that Eddie had stored were still in exceptionally good condition, and were duly delivered to the Baucau Hospital and put to immediate use for an extraordinary variety of procedures.

In 1986, when their children had all left home, the Brownsteins moved to Melbourne to be closer to them and Eddie began studying for the BA that he took from the University of Melbourne in 1990. In 1999 he took his Master of Bioethics from Monash University with a thesis on pain relief and causation of death in the context of palliative care. Kitty died in 2000.

It was in 1987, when he was enrolled in arts, that Eddie Brownstein became aware that the University Library's collections of materials in political science generally, and South African history and politics specifically, were woefully inadequate to support even undergraduate work. He made the library an exceptionally generous offer. Initially intended as a five-year project, funding from the Drakensberg Trust, at the rate of \$15,000 a year, eventually reached \$195,000 over 13 years. In 1990, additional money was made available to pay the salary for a three-year position of senior research fellow in South African politics, together with a further \$15,000 annually for library materials to support the appointee's teaching and research.

Dr Paul Rich (b. 1950) took up the appointment and organised a major international conference at

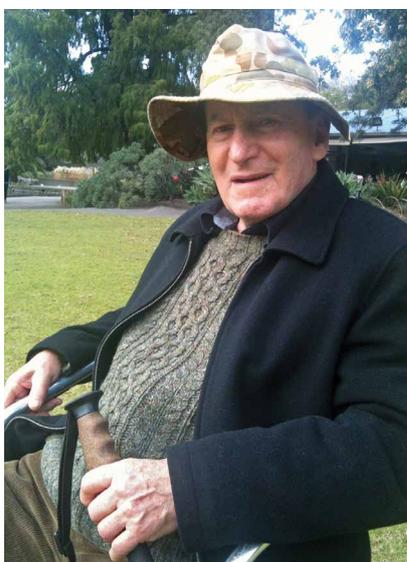
the university in May 1992. The proceedings were published as *The dynamics of change in southern Africa*. The book contains edited papers from the conference and two additional contributions and attempted an up-to-date survey of political and economic trends in southern Africa.¹² The proceedings of a 1994 conference were published as *Reaction and renewal in South Africa*.¹³ Paul Rich also published *State power and Black politics in South Africa, 1912–51* and several journal articles as a result of research enabled by the Drakensberg Trust.¹⁴

In 1991, the trust made another far-reaching pledge to the university. The Centre for Philosophy and Public Issues (CPPI) had been set up in 1989 under Professor Tony Coady. It was entirely dependent on outside funds and voluntary support. Money came from business and professional ethics workshops that the centre conducted with government agencies and businesses, outside sources both private and public (especially the Australian Research Council), and the then vice-chancellor, David Penington. The contribution from the Drakensberg Trust amounted to \$30,000 a year for three years and was put towards staff salaries. The centre ran until 2000, when it was absorbed into the ARC Special Research

Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics (CAPPE), run in partnership with Charles Sturt University. Coady noted that ‘The achievements of the small CPPI operation were a big factor in our successful application’.¹⁵

This initial funding supported research that resulted in several publications, notably by Coady’s former PhD student, foundation professor of philosophy at Charles Sturt University and professorial research fellow of the CAPPE, Seumas Miller. Scholars in the Department of Political Science such as David Tucker published work on South Africa’s Constitutional Court and David Philips in the Department of History published on the end of apartheid.¹⁶ Several theses have also been made possible through the resources provided by Drakensberg Trust funding, beginning, during the early years, with work on the nexus between feminism and nationalism in South Africa and a PhD on democratic transition theory and democratic consolidation there.¹⁷

It is, however, in enabling the purchase of library materials, in all formats then available, that the Drakensberg Trust brought the greatest benefit to the university. In these days of digital availability, it is hard to make clear the importance



of back runs of journals that were otherwise unavailable in Australia. Titles such as *Medicine and War*, *South African Review*, *Social Epistemology*, *Summary of World Broadcasts* and *The National Interest*, all now accessible online, were available to University of Melbourne staff and students at the time only through the generosity of the Drakensberg Trust.

As well as enabling the library—as journal subscription prices rose and most libraries were reducing their number—to place new orders and buy back issues, the trust funded hundreds of books, including publications from the UN and the University of Leeds,

which has a longstanding interest in South Africa. Perhaps the most important came from Ravan Press, a steadfast opponent of apartheid, notable for publishing novels such as J.M. Coetzee’s first book, *Dusklands*, rejected by other South African and international publishers, as well as political and historical material.

By far the most significant acquisitions funded by the Drakensberg Trust, however, were large microform sets of documents, many from recently opened archives. Some were described in the earlier paper, and warrant recording again.

The papers of Z.K. Matthews cover the career of an extraordinary man.¹⁸ The son of a mineworker, Zachariah Keodirelang Matthews (1901–1968) taught with Albert Luthuli and took his LLB from the University of South Africa. He was admitted as an attorney and practised for a short time in Alice. In 1933 he was invited to study at Yale, where he took his MA, subsequently spending a year at the London School of Economics, reading anthropology under Malinowski. Appointed lecturer in social anthropology and native law and administration at the University of Fort Hare, he was promoted to professor in 1944 and became head of the Department of African Studies.

Matthews bridged the gap between the old guard and the more militant younger members of the African National Congress (ANC) in the late 1940s and 1950s, providing a guiding and moderating influence on African political history at a critical period. Perhaps the most distinguished African intellectual of his time, he was arrested in December 1956, and was one of the accused in the Treason Trial (the transcripts of which were purchased through the trust).¹⁹ He was released in 1958 and returned to Fort Hare, resigning in protest against legislation reducing the university to an ethnic college for the Xhosa community only. In 1961 he moved to Geneva as secretary of the Africa Division of the World Council of Churches. Appointed as Botswana's ambassador to the United States in 1966, he died in Washington in May 1968.

Alfred Bitini Xuma (1893–1962) studied teaching at the Pietermaritzburg Training Institute and taught in the Eastern Cape before leaving in 1913 to study medicine in the USA. After graduation he continued his studies in Britain, becoming the first Black South African to take his PhD from the London School of Tropical Medicine. He returned to South Africa in 1928, practised as a physician in

Sophiatown and became involved in political activities. He was elected vice-president of the All-African Convention in 1935 and president of the ANC in 1940. Under his leadership, the ANC constitution was revised, the organisation became more centralised and the Youth Group was established.

Xuma worked to unite the groups protesting against apartheid; the Joint Declaration of Cooperation, popularly known as the 'Doctor's Pact' of 9 March 1947 and signed with G.M. Naicker from the Natal Indian Congress and Yusuf Dadoo from the Transvaal Indian Congress, established a united front involving Indians and Africans. Described as moderate and conservative, Xuma came under increasing pressure from the militant element within the ANC—notably its Youth League—which demanded radical action and closer association with the South African Communist Party. When the National Party won the 1948 elections, Xuma was replaced as ANC president by J.S. Moroka. The Drakensberg Trust funded the acquisition of a microform set of Xuma's personal papers from 1918 to 1960.²⁰

Albert Luthuli (1898–1967), who taught with Z.K. Matthews at Adams College, was the first African winner

of the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1960. He joined the ANC in 1945 and was elected Natal provincial president in 1951. In 1952 Chief Luthuli was a leader of the Defiance Campaign, a non-violent protest against the pass laws. As a result he was obliged to renounce either his ANC membership or his government-funded tribal chieftaincy. In a press statement entitled 'The road to freedom is via the Cross', Luthuli refused to resign from the ANC: he lost the chieftaincy. He was elected president-general of the ANC following J.S. Moroka in 1952, with Nelson Mandela becoming his deputy. The government responded by banning Luthuli, Mandela and nearly 100 others. Luthuli died allegedly after being hit by a train when crossing the line near his house. This explanation was dismissed by many of his followers, who believed more sinister forces were at work. His papers were acquired on microfilm.²¹

As well as these and several other collections of personal papers such as the letters of Jan Christiaan Smuts (1870–1950), general, segregationist and prime minister of South Africa 1919–24 and 1939–48, the Drakensberg Trust funded acquisition of microform versions of extensive collections of documents

emanating from the CIA, strategic studies institutes and major American university research institutes, as well as the papers of the Rivonia Sabotage Trial, at which Nelson Mandela delivered the speech ending with the words:

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.²²

The Drakensberg Trust also allowed the library to buy the records of the Treason Trial of 1956–61 and the inquiry into the death of Steve Biko (1946–1977), the founder of the Black Consciousness Movement, killed in police custody.

The generosity and interest of Edward George Brownstein, polymath and philanthropist, have vastly and permanently enriched the University of Melbourne Library collections and research in several domains.

Dr Juliet Flesch was principal librarian (collections) in the University of Melbourne Library from 1978 to 1997, then completed her PhD in women's studies in 2002. Among her books are several university histories, including *Minding the Shop* (2004), *Life's logic* (2012) and *Transforming biology* (2015). *40 Years / 40 Women*, published by the University Library in 2015, commemorates the 40th anniversary of International Women's Year.

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- 3 David Vaux, 'A tribute to Eddie Brownstein', Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research, 2014, www.wehi.edu.au/about_us/history/a_tribute_to_eddie_brownstein/, accessed 11 September 2014.
- 4 Amnesty International, 'Recognising Eddie Brownstein', 12 November 2013, www.amnesty.org.au/leader/comments/33302/, accessed 11 September 2014.
- 5 *75 years of service: A history of the Rotary Club of Horsham, Inc.* The Rotary Club of Horsham, 2003, pp. 7–8.
- 6 Edward Brownstein, interviewed by James Brownstein, transcript courtesy of Gerard Brownstein.
- 7 Edward Brownstein, conversation with Juliet Flesch, 1 May 1990.
- 8 Gordon Matthews, 'Obituary: Rex C. Bennett (MBBS 1961) 1937–2011', *Melbourne Medical School: 150 years of medicine*, <http://medicine150.mdhs.unimelb.edu.au/alumni/1960/obituaries/rex-c-bennett-mbbs-1961>, accessed 11 September 2014.
- 9 David Vaux, 'A tribute to Eddie Brownstein'.
- 10 John Brownstein, eulogy at the funeral of Edward Brownstein, 22 May 2014, text courtesy of Gerard Brownstein.
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- 12 Paul B. Rich (ed.), *The dynamics of change in Southern Africa*, Houndmills, UK: Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994.
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- 16 Seumas Miller, 'Academic freedom in South Africa', *Australian Universities Review*, vol. 34, 1991, pp. 33–6; Seumas Miller, 'Freedom of the press in South Africa', *Comment*, vol. 8, 1992, pp. 32–7; Seumas Miller, 'Freedom of the press', *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1995, pp. 24–36; David Tucker, 'The role of South Africa's Constitutional Court', *TransAct*, 1995, pp. 1–6; David Philips, *The end of apartheid: South Africa's first free and democratic election*, History Department, University of Melbourne, 1994.
- 17 Gabrielle Marcus, "'A feminism of our own': South Africa—past, present and future: The nexus between feminism and nationalism', MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1991; Arthur G. Katsiroubas, 'Democratic transition theory and democratic consolidation in South Africa: Devising an alternative framework for analysis', PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2001.
- 18 Z.K. Matthews, *Personal papers Z.K. Matthews* [microform], Johannesburg: Microfile, [19—].
- 19 *Treason Trial* [microform], Johannesburg: Microfile, [19—].
- 20 A.B. Xuma, *Personal papers of Dr. A.B. Xuma* [microform], Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution, 1960.
- 21 A.J. Luthuli, *Papers, letters etc., 1948–67* [microform], University of Chicago, [19—].
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