

DR. BIALOGUSKI IN THIRROUL

(continued from September Bulletin)

Dr. James had freely admitted that in the twenties he was employed by the Soviet Government as a doctor. He had been sent to Manchuria with a railway construction team, and, at the expiration of his term, refused to return to Russia. He went to Harbin, he told me, and settled there as a doctor.

It was unusual, I thought, that a person who left the Soviet illegally would stop his flight almost within reach of the dreaded N.K.V.D., and that he would settle in Harbin where human life is not worth a great deal at any time. But still people do odd things, and this probably had no significance.

Dr. James's attitude to the Soviet was not typical of the old Russian emigres who were usually embittered and outspoken in their criticism of anything even vaguely connected with a Communist regime.

Again this might not mean anything, but at least it raised certain questions. Was James a man of detached mind? Was he a philosopher, who could rise well above personal considerations and grievances, in search of objective truth?

One thing was a fact. His daughter in the U.S.A. was a permanent employee to the Voice of America. I say it was a fact because he showed me cuttings from American magazines with photos, names and descriptions, putting it nearly beyond doubt. And The Voice of America was, and still is, an organization broadcasting to the countries behind the Iron Curtain. Its anti-Soviet activities are well known.

I became a regular visitor to the James's home, but I could never acquire a feeling of being at ease. It seemed as if they were on guard.

Then I received an invitation to attend a wedding reception at their home. Nina was to marry a Russian engineer, a pleasant and reliable young man who had been living in Australia for many years.

I was late, and the guests were sitting at long tables, arranged in a horse-shoe fashion. James showed me to my seat, and introduced me to my table companions. It was difficult to hear the names he mentioned - they were mostly lost in the deafening din of eighty, or so, voices that were produced by obviously well lubricated throats.

A plump middle-aged man was sitting on my left. His greying straight hair was brushed back, his light, somewhat faded blue eyes and thick, sensuous lips gave him the appearance of a man over-indulgent in food and drink. His face seemed familiar to me, and I thought I could remember him from the Russian Club.

His manner was jovial and he talked a lot and loudly, mostly in well-spoken Russian.

"Well, let's have a drink, doctor. You have a few to catch up on us."

We clinked our glasses and gulped down some neat brandy.

"I'm sorry," I said, "but I haven't quite got your name. The noise here . . ."

"Klodnitsky. I'm also known as Claude - George Klodnitsky. I think I have seen you in the Russian Club, some time ago."

"But of course, I know your name well. You're the club's president, aren't you?"

"No, it's my wife. She is the president, but I am assisting her in club affairs as much as I can."

He introduced his wife, a short slender woman with reddish hair and small dark eyes. Her prominent sharp nose gave her a bird-like appearance.

Mrs. Klodnitsky gave me the impression of a hopelessly frustrated woman, and I felt this prompted her to seek a reputation for intellect and personal charm. Judging by the respectful attitude of those present, her efforts met with some measure of success. It was also evident that the prominent position she held in the Russian Club was a source of great self-satisfaction and pride to her.

She also remembered my frequenting the club.

"Whenever you are in Sydney, doctor," she said, "call and see us at the club. We'll be glad to have you. You have probably heard we collected big sums in response to our Appeal for Sheepskins for Russia."

"It would be a great pity," Mrs. Klodnitsky went on, "if our efforts in the past were to pass into oblivion. Our main task now is to show what great progress is being made in the Soviet Union; in science, in culture and in industry. Of course, it's not easy. These Australians! All they think about is beer and races!" Her voice rose to a high dramatic pitch.

"How true," I said sympathetically, thinking of my poor punting on the previous Saturday.

"Life here seems quite aimless in comparison with that in Russia," continued Mrs. Klodnitsky. "Here money is the God. Money, money, money! But there is no culture, no theatre. Do you know doctor, there are seventy-nine first class theatres in Moscow alone. Just imagine, seventy-nine! We have a Russian library in the club with a great choice of books by Soviet authors. We also have all the Soviet periodicals, some being sent to us direct from Moscow.

"If you'd care to see me in the club I would show you articles on Soviet medical research which undoubtedly would be of great interest to you. You simply must find the time."

"I'll do my very best." I politely but firmly excused myself, and joined another group. The tables were being taken away, and the floor cleared for dancing.

The guests could be divided into two distinct groups; young Australian people - workmates of the groom - and middle-aged Russians, invited by the bride's parents. Among the latter I recognized many names and faces from the Russian Club, some of them like the Klodnitskys, well-known for their strong pro-Soviet leanings. They were obviously on friendly terms with Dr. and Mrs. James.

A week or so later I saw Barnwell's successor, George Brownley, in Sydney. George was a big, rather heavy man in his forties. He was not easily ruffled, and

there was an air of dependability about him.

I told him about the wedding reception, and gave him my general impressions of the people I had met, with special reference to the Klodnitskys. They were known to him already.

In the months that followed, I kept in touch with Dr. James, but I did not visit the Russian Club while I was in Sydney. I felt that James would, in the course of his social encounters with the Klodnitskys and others, give some account of his conversations with me, thus preparing the ground for any future intelligence activities that might develop in Sydney. I did not consciously contemplate any, but felt that just in case, I might as well exploit any opportunity that came my way. Therefore, whenever I talked to James, I endeavoured to present myself as one who was interested in cultural and scientific developments in Russia. Politics? Not even mildly interested, except for being strongly anti-fascist.

*(from The Petrov Story by Michael Bialoguski,
William Helnemann, 1955, pp 38-44)*

[There has been a strong reponse to this article by Michael Bialoguski. Hugo Zweep was first to reassure me that the house of Dr. James was actually "Massandra", the old Mine Owner's Residence in Fords Road, Thirroul. The reason I was unable to recognise it from Bialoguski's description is, as Mr. Zweep explained, the conservatory was missing and the garden much reduced from its original - almost 'botanic' - proportions.

My own research into this marvellous Federation period house had established it was owned by Bernie Kirton the son of J.S. Kirton (mine owner and Bulli Shire President). It was originally called "Ballinderry" and I suspect built later than the date 1900 suggested by the recent Wollongong Heritage Study. It originally consisted of 2 separate main buildings with 4 acres of gardens and is remarkable for the decidedly 'English' influence in its design - highly unusual in Thirroul and one of the earliest examples of twentieth century 'English Revival' style I've encountered in Australia.

Nina Marzi, the daughter of Dr. James, has also been in contact with the IHS and reports that the house at 7 Ford's Road, Thirroul was named "Massandra" after one of the Tsar's holiday homes.]