

Reinhold Eckfeld

Title: *Last Months in Vienna: Notes from an Australian Internment Camp 1940-41.*

Author: Reinhold Eckfeld

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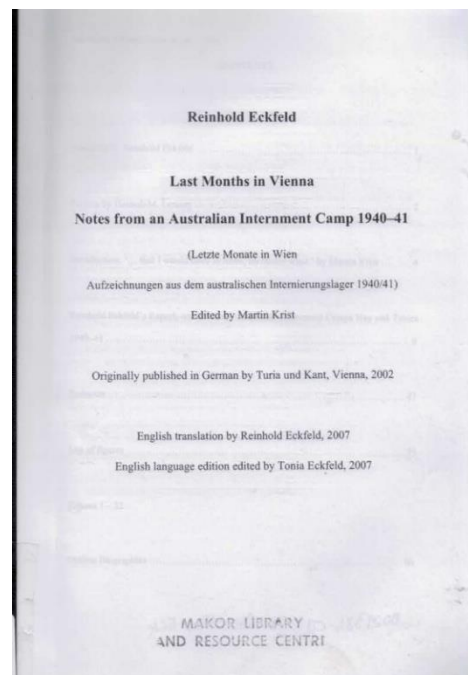
Year of Publication: 2007

Location of Book: Lamm Jewish Library, Melbourne Holocaust Museum and Sydney Jewish Museum.

Cities/towns/camps: Austria: Vienna; United Kingdom: London; Australia: Hay and Tatura internment camp, Melbourne.

Note: those cities/towns/camps underlined are those which are most central to the narrative

Genre: Memoir **Key events/experiences:** *Kristallnacht*; Jewish refugee



Last Months in Vienna is the 80-page account of Austrian survivor Reinhold Eckfeld, written while he was placed in an Australian internment camp in 1940-41. After narrowly escaping the Nazi regime in 1939, the 19-year-old wrote a detailed account of his final months in Vienna, beginning with the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 1938 through to his flight to England.

Pages 1-9 comprise introductory material, including explanatory notes by German historian Martin Krist, and a foreword by the author. Pages 9-46 comprise the author's account of his arrest during *Kristallnacht* and subsequent escape from Austria. Pages 47-80 consist of explanatory footnotes by Martin Krist. The book also includes 33 unpaginated pages of supplementary material, including historical photographs, documents and excerpts of the original German manuscript.

Reinhold Eckfeld was born on 25 September 1921 in Vienna, the third child of a Jewish father, Wilhelm, and a Catholic mother, Eugenie, who later converted to Judaism. He also had a brother, Waldemar. Following the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany Reinhold was expelled from school on 29 April 1938, along with 103 other students.

On 9 November 1938, during the *Kristallnacht* pogrom, Reinhold, then aged 17, was arrested on the street by SS officers and taken with a group of Jewish men to a police station, where he was interrogated and held in a cramped cell. Later, the prisoners were subjected to physical abuse by SS personnel as they were forcibly loaded onto trucks in front of jeering crowds. The men were taken to a large hall, where Reinhold was beaten. As Reinhold was under eighteen years of age he was released, while the others were interned in the Dachau concentration camp.

In the months that followed, new antisemitic regulations were imposed, including property taxes. In January 1939, Reinhold registered to emigrate through a Quaker-run centre operated by the Society of Friends. As war loomed, however, foreign consulates began closing and emigration grew more difficult, and the remaining Eckfeld family spent many months navigating an exhausting bureaucratic process to secure the necessary documentation.

Reinhold's sister Judi emigrated first after securing employment as a domestic servant in England. On 17 May 1939, Reinhold finally obtained a passport and taxation clearance certificate, which was valid for three months. Rather than departing immediately, he remained while his mother and brother sought the necessary documents. After months of delays obtaining visas, tax clearances, and transport, they were issued British visas and passports on 12 August 1939.

By the time arrangements for departure had finally been secured, Reinhold's own clearance had expired. Nevertheless, on 26 August 1939, just days before the outbreak of war, the family succeeded in leaving Germany, with Reinhold boarding a train bound for the Netherlands before continuing to London. There, he and his brother were later classified by British authorities as "enemy aliens" and deported to Australia aboard the HMS *Dunera*. These events, however, are not described in the memoir.

Reinhold spent eight months imprisoned in Hay before being relocated to Tatura. The memoir was originally written and published in German in 2002 by Turia & Kant, before being translated into English in 2007 and published by the Makor Jewish Community Library in Melbourne. Reinhold's daughter Tonia Eckfeld, an art historian, wrote a biography of his life titled *No One Knows Their Destiny*.

Despite its brevity, *Last Months in Vienna* provides a vivid and highly detailed account of the months surrounding *Kristallnacht* and the escalating persecution of Austrian Jews. The author also carefully documents the numerous obstacles confronting Jews seeking to emigrate. Written in the second person and largely in the present tense, the narrative conveys a sense of immediacy and captures the uncertainty and urgency that accompanied efforts to leave Austria before the outbreak of war. It does not describe the years preceding Kristallnacht nor the author's experiences in England and Australia.