

## Northcote Significant Women - Joan Rosanove (1896-1974)

(c) Paul Michell 2005. Revised and updated 2014.



[img - Joan 1919]

Daughter of Mark Lazarus QC. Grew up in Ballarat. Joan Lazarus gained her LL.B in 1917 from Melbourne University where she met her husband who was studying medicine. The ceremony marking her admission to the bar was delayed for two years later so that it would seem more 'serious' with more men graduating. She was the first female Jewess in Australia to be admitted to the Bar. One of her mates from Ballarat and University was Robert Menzies, later to be Prime Minister.

She was duly admitted to the Victorian Supreme Court in 1919 at 21, an especially young age for such an admission.



[img - Marriage 1920]

In 1920 she married Emmanuel (Mannie) Rosanove and they moved from her father's Ballarat legal practice to Tocumwal where she had two children. When the local doctor informed them that he had been there for over thirty years – they realized it was time to pack up or succumb to the rural country life of a lawyer in Tocumwal! Joan and Mannie wanted more! They set their sights on a bigger city.

In 1923 they moved to Northcote. Mannie had found a run-down general practice at 75 Westgarth St and despite having only £600 in the bank, was seriously considering the offer of the house and general medical practice costing £2000. This was a large sum of money and the young couple were concerned about the debt. A friend, the famous ex MP (and father of Australian Banking and Canberra) King O'Malley, assisted in establishing Mannie's medical practice with a financial guarantee. This arrangement meant that in a year if they still wanted out of Northcote, he would give them £500 on top of their original monies back! This generous offer was never taken up. As part of the practice Mannie provided medical work for Northcote Council.

From September 1923, and now established in Northcote, Joan worked only as a barrister even though she was also a qualified solicitor. This was unique for a woman still in her twenties. She was the first woman in the state to do so. Joan was particularly lucky that her husband Mannie was supportive in her desire to continue her legal career after marriage. He was content to run the small suburban medical practice whilst his wife's legal career took precedence.



[img - 75 Westgarth St]

She was denied chambers to practice her profession. As a result her cases were now few, mostly on referral from her father's offices. In 1925 she became primarily a solicitor taking on mainly criminal and divorce cases. Though to save money for her clients she was acting as a barrister in court for these cases as well. As much of the work went through the Westgarth medical practice. The house was often

filled with the 'crocks and crooks'. That is the local criminals and particularly women seeking divorce. A complicated procedure legally. Joan Rosanove's practice became extremely successful by the end of the 1930s in divorce and breach of promise cases. Clients would call at all hours. It was not uncommon for Mannie to be in surgery during the day and Joan attending to clients at night, as she was often in court during the day.

Home-wise Joan and Mannie would give each other presents on their own birthday. One time Mannie gave her a baby Austin car on his birthday. Inevitably the car would run out of petrol (filling it was more of an after thought by Joan) in the most inopportune moments and Joan would then push it to the curve and taking a glass lemonade bottle full of petrol, proceeded to fill the tank. Apparently some wag driving past remarked,

*"There you are - she does feed it from a bottle!"* A reference to the 'baby' car.

**J. CAIN,**  
Selected Labor Candidate

The following is a list of Public Work which Mr. J. Cain, M.L.A., the sitting member, has had carried out in the constituency during the last three years:-

SCHOOLS	ESTIMATED COST	JUDICE BUILDINGS	ESTIMATED COST
New Schools	110,000	Preston (including purchase of land)	4954
Alphington	49,996	North Fitzroy (including purchase of land)	41300
Foster's Grove	170,700		
Westgarth	115,286		
Reservoir	48,280	COURT HOUSES	
Re-Modeling Schools:-		Land purchased at Preston for New Court-house	1300
Headingley School	25,000	Seawing, Heidelberg Court House	2000
South Preston School	17,400		
Preston School	18,000	ROADS	
Re-opening Schools:-		Yarrs Improvement, Construction of Boulevard	47,777
Northcote School	1200	Towards Construction Bourke Rd. Bridge - Approx.	430,000
Fairfield School	1421		
Prince of Wales Pk. School	1411	RAILWAYS	
Chorlbury School	1300	New Station, Dandenong	12,222
North Fitzroy School	471	New Station, Traralgon	18,525
Preston West School	411		

In addition, Mr. Cain expects to have placed in this year's Railways Estimate an amount towards the Construction of a New Station between Ivanhoe and Heidelberg. Land is also being acquired for New Schools at Hill, Heidelberg West, and McLeod.

Be wise and VOTE for the Man who looks after your interests.

Polling Day: Thursday Next, 26th June, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

VOTE THUS:  
**1 CAIN, John**  
Selected Labor Candidate

A. WALLIS, President, 1 Blythe St., Reservoir.  
C. N. H. J. HARRY, Hon. Secretary, Alexandra St., Northcote.

Joan's disappointment on not getting to work from the prestigious Selborne Chambers at this time turned out to be somewhat of a boom. Her case load had become prolific. Years later it would be stated that she had handled some ten thousand cases during her career! When her second child was born she told this story,

*"I know what will happen when baby can talk. She will say to her father, "Daddy, when did Mummy die?" "Mummy hasn't died, darling. She's only at the courts".*

Joan could be quite a wit and always enjoyed life, the court-room and her family - though she was no housewife!

[img - John Cain 1924]

The Rosanove's had become friendly with another soon to be prominent Northcote family. Aspiring

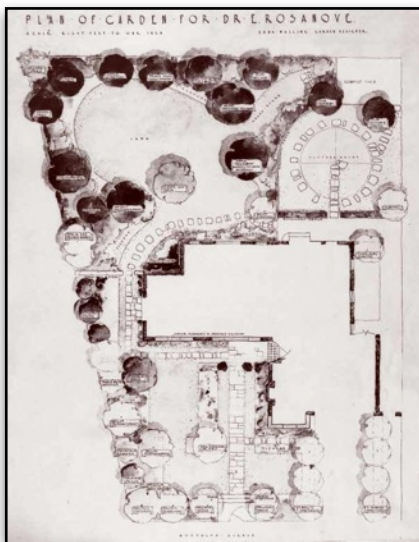
politician John Cain (senior) and his wife Dorothea. Cain was a friend of Joan's father - Mark Lazarus who had introduced them. Mannie, John and others would play cards every thursday night, whilst Joan and Dorothea would go to the pictures. They would stay connected with the Cains even when they had moved to the Mornington Peninsula many years later.

Joan could be quite a character. Many times a woman, from a more well-to-do area (often south of the Yarra), came to Northcote, requesting a divorce. The client would often say, "My solicitor does not handle 'dirty cases' and has referred me to you." Joan would press a button, her assistant would come and Joan would repeat what the woman had said. Her assistant would dutifully make a note then exit and add a 'twenty pounds nuisance charge' to the bill!

In 1932 it was reported in the Northcote Leader:

*"Dr E & Mrs Rosanove - sail to Europe. Medical officer to Northcote Council will take a post medical graduate course in Vienna. Mrs Rosanove is a barrister and solicitor is one of the first women to practice in the courts of Victoria. She is daughter of Mark Lazarus and has been practising law for over twelve years. She will attend as Australian representative the Conference of the Laws Committee of the International Council of Women".*

What the paper did not say was that Joan was pregnant and in her late thirties. She had contacted her old friend Robert Menzies, now in federal parliament. He gave them an official letter of introduction for London and the USA. Though Mannie kicked up a fuss when he found it was addressed to Joan Rosnaove and husband - another introductory letter was duly produced! It was planned that Mannie would study post graduate dermatology in Scotland and later in Vienna. The third child, Judith was born. In 1933 they travel to Vienna were Mannie attends lectures. Being Jewish, a planned Berlin trip is wisely cancelled and they return to Melbourne after being away over ten months.



[img - Walling plan]

Upon return to Westgarth they sell the general practice in Westgarth and Mannie establishes a practice as a dermatologist in Collins St. They build a house more fitting to their lifestyle at 146 Orrong Rd, Toorak. Plans for a garden designed by Edna Walling are made up.

Not long after in 1934, a case occurred that had a large impact on Australia - that of Egon Kisch. The author Katherine Susan Pritchard had asked Joan to represent a Jewish Czech journalist who had come to Australia to lecture about world peace and the dangers of Hitler's fascism rising in Germany. Attorney General, Robert Menzies in parliament, stated that Kisch would not set foot on Australian soil. Perhaps he was misinformed of the journalist's aims due to incorrect intelligence information sent from London. Kisch was prohibited from disembarking in Melbourne. Despite Joan's courtroom manoeuvres the Commonwealth was not going to let Kisch land. Joan had even organised a writ of Habeas Corpus to get him off the boat.



[img - Kisch escapes]

A court ruling allowed Kisch to land. He was about to walk down the gangplank. But the captain spoke to the Government and flouted the ruling preventing him from disembarking, removing the gangplank. In desperation Kisch jumped off the boat, breaking his leg landing on Station Pier. The gangplank was lowered again and he was dragged screaming back on board. No doctor was called for, the boat soon steaming to Sydney. Luckily the press was on hand to record this inhuman treatment. As a result of this fiasco. Kisch's life would be reported in the newspapers for many months!

Joan wisely saw that his case was going to be drawn out and as she did not wish to spend a long time away from home. She advised Pritchard that Christian Jollie-Smith should take over the case in Sydney. "Free Kisch" was now the catchcry around

Australia.



[Img - Kisch, Kisch, Kisch]

The government who wanted this man to depart the shores quietly and with little fuss was completely befuddled. Kisch received far more media attention than he more than likely deserved! The case did drag on for some time including the now famous Gaelic immigrant dictation test. Kisch was fluent in so many languages, passing all immigration tests. Inevitably he was found guilty and was sentenced to six months hard labour. Finally Kisch was freed on appeal to the high court yet again. Menzies was more than somewhat embarrassed by these various courtroom manoeuvres. Quite likely sowing the seed for his later violent anti-communism rhetoric in the 1950s.



[img - Joan 1949]

Success continued in Joan Rosanove's life. One day Mannie walked into the house, saying he had just had an expensive walk. He had bought a property at Frankston and employed Roy Grounds, later the architect of the Victorian Arts Centre, to design a 'family retreat' called Little

Medlore. Their main house in Toorak was called 'Medlore'. A amalgam of Medicine and Law. Joan was now extremely busy, lecturing, advising women's groups and still running her successful legal practice, which was still predominately divorces.



[img – Rosnaove lawyers]

In 1940 their daughter Peg married Graeme Larkins and they had two sons. After the early death of Graeme she married Theodore Lusink. Peg's son, John, was introduced to Melbourne University Law school by his grandmother Joan. When he was in third year his mother Peg enrolled in first year! Peg went on to a successful career in law also, including being a judge of the Family

Court. John became a successful QC himself. At one point there were three generations of the family practicing law!

Joan Rosanove would often see the comical side of the law and the people she would represent. These asides were often related to her aides as 'the funny bits'. For example within a few minutes she heard the following variations on the oath as a jury was being sworn,

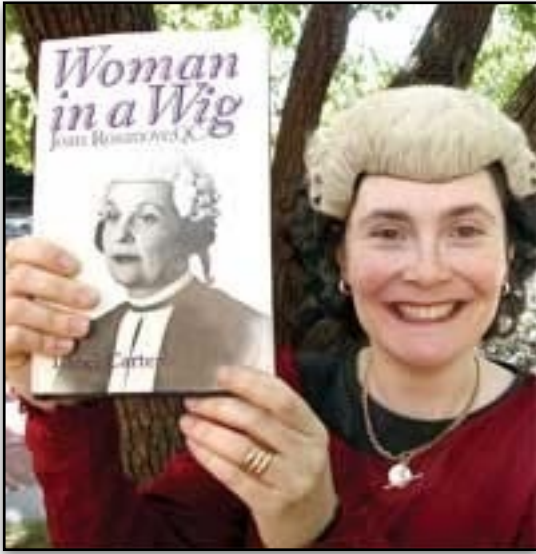
*"I swear by almighty God so to do." is the oath. One juror said, "I swear by almighty God and so do you." and another, "I swear by almighty, God Save the King."*

After 1949 Joan practiced as a Barrister however she continued to apply to be a QC. She would in time be Victoria's first female QC and Australia's only second. However this was denied to her until 1964, close to her retirement!

It is a little sad to note that at no time in her career was Joan awarded any government honours or Royal Commissions, which clearly should have been her due. She retired from legal practice in 1969 and passed away five years later in 1974, still holding 'court' to a number of legal friends in hospital.

One of her greatest contributions occurred in the 1950s when she documented in great detail the complex divorce procedures in each state of Australia, at the time there being no uniformity. She duly made a list of recommendations. However it would be twenty years before action. Only In 1975, the year after her death, was her Family Law act passed by the Commonwealth Government, abolishing 'fault' in marriage, and making family law uniform throughout Australia.





[img Woman in a Wig]

In 1999 the Joan Rosanove Chambers were opened at 550 Lonsdale St. A fitting tribute. The Melbourne University Law school prize for top female student is named in her honour.

On 3 March, 2004, Associate Professor Kim Rubinstein wore the very wig that Joan did (from 1919-1969), when she appeared in the High Court. Another Rosanove relative practicing law! Joan was her great aunt. This picture shows her with the biography of Joan – 'Woman in a Wig' written in 1970 by Isbel Carter.

A detailed story of Egon Kisch was released in 2004. Joan Rosanove QC deserves a more detailed study as well.

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