



THE MASONIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PAPER No. 147

PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY: G.H. Cumming

DATE: 23 July 2007

**Bro. JACK DIETER HANNES
1923-2005
(Founder of Hanimex)**

The Australian photographic industry pioneer and founder of Hanimex, Jack Hannes, died suddenly in early 2005 while on a holiday with his family in Zurich. He suffered a heart attack during dinner at a restaurant with his wife, Margaret, and his sons, Stephen and David. He was 81.

Hannes made an outstanding contribution to the business of photography in Australia and around the world. He was the recipient of the highest awards the world industry had to offer, including the Queen's Medal for services to Australian industry and a lifetime achievement award from the Japanese Photo Industry Association, being one of the few non-Japanese recipients. He was a man of extraordinary energy and vision and led a vigorous life.

Jack Dieter Hannes was born in Berlin in 1923. In 1934 he was sent to Buxton College in Derbyshire, England, where he played cricket and became a King's Scout. In 1939, however, the family fled Germany and came to Australia.

At 16, Hannes enrolled at the University of Sydney to study engineering. After graduating in mechanical and electrical engineering, he worked for Standard Telephones, then spent two years at Email before returning to Sydney University. He studied economics while lecturing in physics, and waged a long unsuccessful campaign to be enlisted for active service; he was rejected because of his place of birth.

While completing his economics degree, Hannes produced telephone note pads and began importing propelling pencils, pearl necklaces and trouser braces via airmail parcels from England. These he distributed from his parents' home in Bellevue Hill. Said Hannes, "In those early days after the war, the trick was not in selling, but having something to sell."

He had also developed an interest in photography and researched the background of many European manufacturers which were in the process of re-establishing themselves after the war. He began importing arrangements with an Italian company to sell Safilo sunglasses, Durst Duca cameras and Durst enlargers. This was the beginning of his involvement in the photographic industry.

The Duca was the first 35mm camera to be imported into Australia after the war. It used the Agfa Karat system and strong demand was created by using a popular radio personality, Bob Dyer, to promote it on the top rating *Pick-a-Box* radio show (both personality and show later achieving television fame).

Hannes saw the potential for photographics and liked the industry, so in 1947, at the age of 24, he set up a company with a staff of three. He named it Hanimex from the first three letters of his name and the words import and export.

In the first year the company turnover reached \$25,000 and in 1948 Hanimex set up office above a newsagency in the centre of Sydney, having the use of two rooms up a rickety flight of stairs and an earthen-floored cellar that acted as a storeroom.

The biggest hurdle for the company was that there were few independent retailers. Kodak owned many of the photographic stores and had contracts with chemists that prohibited them from buying supplies from anyone other than Kodak. So much of Hannes's early efforts went to encouraging new retailers and department stores to enter the business.

Needing more capital to finance expansion, in 1950 Hannes persuaded a University friend, John Howie, to invest \$20,000 of his father's money into the company and to become a partner. Hannes then took the long voyage by sea from Australia to West Germany and secured the Finetta, Iloca and Futura camera agencies and the Practika from East Germany.

He opened his first overseas branch in New Zealand in 1952 in a joint venture with Kerridge Odeon. The following year he entered the consumables market with such products as Osram and Wotan flash bulbs and projector lamps.

In 1954 he was the first Australian to go to Japan looking for agencies. Other importers in Australia were shy of emerging Japanese manufacturers and were reluctant to upset their traditional German suppliers.

In Japan, he secured every known photographic agency with only one exception. Nikon and Canon would not agree to joint representation, so he chose Nikon and brought back 100 Nikon cameras in his luggage. He also secured the Fuji agency and began importing Fuji colour negative film and slide viewers. This began one of the longest trading associations in Australian photographic history.

By 1955, Hanimex had opened branches in all capital cities in Australia and its catalogue had become the industry bible.

The government introduced import restrictions in 1956 and importers were unable to bring in all the stock they needed to meet the demand. Hannes solution was to begin local manufacturing of slide projectors under licence to the U.S. company Argus.

The next year he decided to sell his own projectors overseas and listed Hanimex Corporation on the Sydney and Melbourne stock exchanges.

He convinced the prominent English pharmacy chain, Boots, to order 10,000 slide projectors in 1958 and in 1960, Dixons, a photographic chain, placed its first order. Within three years they had bought 400,000 projectors.

During the 1960's Hanimex established its own organisations around the world and began to set up offices and factories in Britain, Ireland, France, Germany, Switzerland, Canada, the U.S., Hong Kong and Japan. The company received two export awards and was listed on the London stock exchange.

Hanimex began optical manufacturing in Hong Kong and slide projector manufacture in Ireland and the U.S. By the beginning of the 1970's it was the second largest manufacturer of slide projectors in the world. The company also developed large-scale photofinishing activities and opened laboratories in Australia and New Zealand.

By 1978 the company had more than 2000 employees and Hanimex projectors, slide viewers, electronic flashguns, camera lenses and hosts of other accessories were being sold in more than 70 countries.

Throughout all this rapid expansion, Hannes was a tireless worker who kept in close contact with industry trends and consumer needs. He also developed close relationships with his industry colleagues around the world and earned considerable respect from his staff. He was a keen member of his own design team and his energy and enthusiasm were an inspiration to all the company.

Even with all this activity he was able to devote considerable time to the industry as a whole. In the 1950's he was instrumental in mounting the first consumer exhibition of photographic equipment in Australia and in the 1970's he was active in bringing wholesalers and retailers together for the first time in the first of two South Pacific photographic conventions.

The huge success of Hanimex attracted considerable interest from the stock market and the company was the constant target for takeover bids. With Hannes's work commitments in so many countries it is small wonder that eventually there was a substantial change in share ownership.

In 1982 Hannes resigned from the company. In the 35 years of his management, Hanimex grew at an average annual cumulative rate of 20 per cent. He developed it from a small Australian distributor to a brand name recognised throughout the world.

After Hanimex he broadened his range of activities and held positions in many organisations. He was a director of the Chamber of Commerce and held directorships with various other companies.

Many start-up companies and their executives benefitted from his advice. He was a foundation fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and an active director of Merino Pty. Ltd., a manufacturer of paper and plastic products jointly founded by his father. Other business interests ranged from property development to luxury boat imports.

He had a wide-ranging interest in politics and economics and would vigorously debate any subject. Because of his Jewish heritage his views were strongly influenced by his experiences in Germany before World War II. He believed the power of a

demagogue to stir up nationalistic, xenophobic or racist attitudes should never be underestimated, and he disliked nationalistic or jingoistic attitudes in politics.

Hannes had a natural ear for music and played a number of instruments. He was a patron of Opera Australia and a lover of the arts.

Along with his family he maintained his passion for holiday travel. It was on his last trip, which included skiing, tennis, hiking, diving and water skiing in six countries, that he died.

Hannes is survived by Margaret, his children Stephen, David, Martin, Vicki and Tony and four grandchildren.

Bro. Jack Dieter Hannes was made a Mason in Lodge Shaw Stewart No. 133 United Grand Lodge of New South Wales on 16 November 1954. He was passed Fellowcraft on 15 February 1955 and raised a Master Mason on 24 May 1955. He called off on 21 September 1976.



Energy and enthusiasm . . . Jack Hannes worked tirelessly and inspired respect among his employees.

REFERENCES

Paul Curtis The Sydney Morning Herald, March 5-6, 2005. This Life - Suzy Baldwin, Editor.

United Grand Lodge of NSW and the ACT - Membership records.
