

## **Biographical Notes**

### **David Saul Marshall (12 March 1908 – 12 December 1995) – Lawyer/politician/diplomat**

David Saul Marshall was born on 12 March 1908, one of seven children of Saul Nassim and Flora Mashal. His parents were Sephardic Jews, and Marshall was brought up learning Hebrew and according to strict Jewish practices. The family name “Mashal” was anglicised to “Marshall”.<sup>1</sup>

Marshall studied in several schools including St Andrew’s School and the Raffles Institution.<sup>2</sup> He suffered from poor health in his youth and was sent to Switzerland for rehabilitation. There, Marshall studied French, and became intrigued by its literature and the French ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, Marshall was certified as a teacher of French and taught night classes at the YMCA.<sup>4</sup>

Although his ambition was to study medicine, tight finances made it more practical for Marshall to study law.<sup>5</sup> In 1937, Marshall received his Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of London and was called to the English Bar at the Middle Temple.<sup>6</sup> The following year, Marshall was called to the Singapore Bar.<sup>7</sup> Marshall began his legal career at Aitken and Ong Siang, but left in 1940 for Allen and Gledhill, then the largest law firm in Singapore.<sup>8</sup>

In the run-up to the Japanese invasion of Singapore, Marshall joined the Straits Settlements Volunteer Force.<sup>9</sup> When Singapore fell, Marshall was captured as a prisoner-of-war. He was initially interned in Changi Prison but later sent to work in a labour camp in Hokkaido, Japan.<sup>10</sup>

In the post-war years, Marshall became involved in various community and civil society groups. These included the Jewish Welfare Association (later known as the Jewish Welfare Board),<sup>11</sup> the War Prisoners (Singapore) Association, the Automobile Association, the Singapore Association and the Singapore Ratepayers’ Association.<sup>12</sup>

Marshall became politically active in 1954 when he became president of the Singapore Labour Front.<sup>13</sup> The party won the most number of seats in the 1955 Legislative Assembly elections, and Marshall became Singapore’s first Chief Minister, heading a coalition government.<sup>14</sup>

One of the key items on Marshall’s agenda was achieving self-government for Singapore. In April 1956, he led an all-party delegation to London for constitutional talks.<sup>15</sup> The talks failed and Marshall resigned as Chief Minister.<sup>16</sup> He was succeeded by Lim Yew Hock.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Chew, Melanie, “David Marshall”, *Leaders of Singapore* (Singapore: Resource Press, 1996), pp.69-70.

<sup>2</sup> Chan Heng Chee, *A sensation of independence: David Marshall, a political biography (ebook)* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Editions, 2008), pp. 43-45.

<sup>3</sup> Tan, Kevin YL, *Marshall of Singapore: a biography* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2008), pp. 48-49.

<sup>4</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> “I had wanted to be a doctor, says lawyer-ambassador Marshall”, *Straits Times*, 4 May 1992.

<sup>6</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 86.

<sup>7</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 88.

<sup>8</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 103.

<sup>9</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 109.

<sup>10</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, pp. 121-122; 133-134.

<sup>11</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 148-150; Bieder, Joan, “David Marshall and national leadership”, *The Jews of Singapore*, (Singapore: Suntree Media, 2007), p. 125.

<sup>12</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 158-161.

<sup>13</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 222.

<sup>14</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, pp. 241-244.

<sup>15</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 345.

<sup>16</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 358.

<sup>17</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 365.

Soon after his resignation from government, Marshall visited China between August to October 1956, on the invitation of the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs. During his time there, Marshall helped around 550 Jews then "stranded" in China, obtain permission to relocate to Israel. His experiences and impressions of post-revolution China were recorded in a series of letters Marshall wrote to his brother, Meyer. These letters have been published as "Letters from Mao's China".<sup>18</sup>

In 1957, Marshall resigned from the Labour Front and founded the Workers' Party. He returned to government after winning the seat of Anson in the 1961 by-elections.<sup>19</sup> That year, Marshall also married social work lecturer, Jean Mary Gray.<sup>20</sup> The couple had four children: Jonathan Mark, Ruth Ann, Sarah Farha and Joanna Tamar.<sup>21</sup>

In 1963, Marshall resigned from the Workers' Party claiming that the communist left-wing had taken over the party. Later that year Marshall, ran for Anson as an independent candidate but lost.<sup>22</sup> After losing Anson in 1963, Marshall retreated from politics to concentrate on his family and legal career.

By this time, Marshall had made his name as a criminal lawyer and was involved in several high-profile cases such as that of Cathay-Keris film star Maria Menado, and Tan Kheng Ann, the leader of the Pulau Senang rioters.<sup>23</sup> He had established his own law firm, David Marshall & Co., in 1957 and took on partners over time.<sup>24</sup>

In October 1972 Marshall was suspended from practicing law for six months for "improper conduct" in discharge of professional duties. Marshall was the solicitor for four executives from the Nanyang Siang Pau who had been detained under the Internal Security Act. Prior to their habeas corpus proceedings, Marshall had sent sets of their affidavits to a press institute although he had undertaken to the Attorney-general not to make these public.<sup>25</sup>

Marshall was recalled to public service in 1978 when he was appointed Singapore's ambassador to France.<sup>26</sup> In 1981, he was also made ambassador to Portugal and Spain, and in 1991, the ambassador to Switzerland.<sup>27</sup> Marshall retired from the Foreign Service in 1993 at the age of 85.<sup>28</sup>

Marshall died on 12 December 1995, and buried at the Jewish cemetery in Choa Chu Kang.<sup>29</sup>

Link to [David Marshall Private Papers Index List](#)

---

<sup>18</sup> Marshall, David, *Letters from Mao's China*, (Singapore: Singapore Heritage Society, 1996), pp. 1-2; Bieder, *The Jews of Singapore*, pp. 130-132.

<sup>19</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 409.

<sup>20</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, pp. 432-434.

<sup>21</sup> Sitragandi Arunasalam, "David Saul Marshall", *Singapore Infopedia* website (2008), retrieved from [https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP\\_283\\_2005-01-13.html](https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/infopedia/articles/SIP_283_2005-01-13.html)

<sup>22</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 425.

<sup>23</sup> Marshall's famous cases, *Straits Times*, 5 October 1993; Josey, Alex, *The David Marshall trials* (Singapore: Times Publishing International, 1981) p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, pp. 427-428.

<sup>25</sup> "Marshall suspended", *The Straits Times*, 8 October 1972; Sitragandi Arunasalam, "David Saul Marshall".

<sup>26</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 521

<sup>27</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 537

<sup>28</sup> Tan, *Marshall of Singapore*, p. 539

<sup>29</sup> "David Marshall, 87, dies of cancer", *Straits Times*, 13 December 1995; "Marshall buried in a Jewish ceremony attended by 300", *Straits Times*, 14 December 1995.