

# AUSTRALIAN JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY JOURNAL



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## **Front Cover**

Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen

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*Opinions expressed are those of the authors, and do not reflect the official position of the society.*



## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The year 1995 is a landmark year for Australian Jewish history as it marks the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation of Europe from Nazi domination; the jubilee year of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies which held its first meeting on 29 July 1945; and the centenary of the *Australian Jewish News*, incorporating the *Australian Jewish Times* and the *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, the first issue of which appeared on 1 November 1895.

The major article in this issue of the *Journal* is Rabbi Apple's study of Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen, rabbi of the Great Synagogue from 1905 to 1934, and one of the central figures of Australian Jewish history. This article examines in depth key aspects of Rabbi Cohen's ministry, taking a thematic rather than chronological approach. It is, perhaps, no co-incidence that Rabbi John Levi's study of Rabbi Jacob Danglow, rabbi of the St Kilda Hebrew Congregation, 1905 to 1957, has also just been published and was launched by Rabbi Apple at the Great Synagogue on 31 July 1995. Cohen and Danglow, two British trained rabbis, had much in common and proved to be seminal figures for Sydney and Melbourne Jewry during the first half of the twentieth century.

The two articles by Jenny Shub and Arthur Lionel Rosebery focus on the stories of three Jewish doctors, all of whom were pioneers in different senses of the word. These articles also highlight experiences of Jewish doctors during World War I and World War II.

The last two articles by Morris Ochert and Louise Rosenberg deal with personal histories. Max Chaikin's story is of interest because of his circus connections, while Colleen Rich's heritage provides an intimate insight into Jewish life during the second half of the nineteenth century, in particular the challenges of living a Jewish life in the country areas of New South Wales.

The two book reviews focus on two different aspects of Australian Jewish history. Louise Rosenberg's review of *Yerranderie - The Story of a Ghost Town* looks at a country town in New South Wales where a number of Jews settled, including Alfred Harris, founder and editor of the *Hebrew Standard*. When Alfred Harris married Celia Esther Harris (no relation) in 1908 they began their married life together in Yerranderie. In the centenary year of the *Hebrew Standard* this book review is of particular interest. Helen Bersten's review of Paul Kraus' book, *A New Australian, A New Australia*, focuses on a different period of Australian Jewish history - the postwar European migration which included those

of Jewish ancestry whose horrific experiences during the Holocaust led them to convert to Christianity after the war.

Australian Jewry experienced a great loss with the passing of Sydney David Einfeld in June of this year. The late Syd Einfeld laid the foundations for the present-day Jewish community in Australia and I have written about his enormous contributions to Australian Jewry, as well as summarising his political life, in my article 'The Hon. Sydney David Einfeld: Builder of Sydney Jewry' published in Volume XI, p.312 of our *Journal*.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to say farewell to Professor William (Bill) D. Rubinstein and Dr Hilary Rubinstein who have been staunch supporters of the Australian Jewish Historical Society and have done much to promote the study of Australian Jewish history. They have both made such a significant contribution to research into Australian Jewish history that, in a short editor's introduction, it would be impossible to list all of their publications. The level of their scholarship is evidenced in their two volume history, *The Jews in Australia: A Thematic History*, with the first volume covering the years from 1788 to 1945 written by Hilary and the second volume dealing with the period from 1945 to 1988 written by Bill. For the last five years Bill and I have shared the editorship of this *Journal*, with Bill bringing out an issue in Melbourne in November of each year and myself editing the June issue each year. It has been a pleasure to work with Bill and I feel that the joint co-operation which we have established between Melbourne and Sydney is to the benefit of the Society. I look forward to working in a similar manner with the new Melbourne editor, Malcolm Turnbull.

Suzanne D. Rutland



## FRANCIS LYON COHEN : THE PASSIONATE PATRIOT

*Rabbi Raymond Apple*

### INTRODUCTION

Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen (1862-1934) was for nearly fifty years a leading figure in the Anglo-Jewish ministry, with a career divided between England and Australia. In England his ministry at the Borough Synagogue in South London proved merely the home base for a varied and innovative range of wider involvements. In particular he was the first Jewish chaplain in British military history, and a world authority on Jewish music. With some justice he explained that his appointment to the Great Synagogue, Sydney, had aroused widespread interest "because I am myself not unknown to the public".<sup>1</sup> The Great Synagogue, the oldest Jewish congregation in Australasia, occupied a position of great prestige in the life of the nation, and despite the relative smallness of the Jewish community the rabbi appointed to lead the congregation had to be a man of stature able to play a role in public life. That role Cohen enjoyed. He won acclaim as a worthy ambassador of his faith, not least because of his passionate Empire loyalties. But within the Jewish community, those same Empire loyalties embroiled him in controversy. Because of his love for Britain he was more than uneasy about political Zionism, feeling that Zionist sympathies might compromise patriotism. And because he believed strongly that Jews must integrate as much as possible into the life of the nation, he is said to have been almost the prophet of a policy of Jewish "non-distinctiveness" which may in fact have weakened the Jewish loyalties of his community.

His English period has an interest of its own for the historian. The validity of his approach to musicology, the contribution his military work made to Jewish integration into British society, the extent to which his religious views were representative of the Jewish ministry of the time – all could be studied in some depth. This study, however, concentrates more on his Australian period. This is both because it raises significant wider issues such as the place of the Jew in Australian society, the extent to which integration into a host society poses a threat to the maintenance of the distinctive culture of a minority group,



and the question of multiple loyalties such as devotion to Israel combined with full loyalty to British or Australian nationality; and because of the existence in Australia of primary source material, notably letters between Cohen and successive presidents of the Great Synagogue, which this study utilises for the first time.

My own interest in the subject of Cohen's views and career against a backdrop of Jewish and general history was aroused when, as a student in London, I became interested in Anglo-Jewish history and came across his name in widely differing contexts. It intensified when I later assumed the office in Sydney which he had held from 1905 to 1934, and found that his memory evoked two contrasting reactions – affectionate recollection, especially amongst the longer-settled members of the community, and critical comment, especially amongst those who rejected his concept of Jewish identity as entirely (or almost entirely) spiritual without ethnic content.

In 1980 when a set of old classrooms at the Great Synagogue had to be cleared prior to the commencement of rebuilding works, a number of store cupboards were found to contain many dusty parcels, wrapped in brown paper, preserving a range of Synagogue correspondence from most years of Rabbi Cohen's ministry and later periods. From these parcels I extracted and classified the material relating to the rabbi and the issues in which he was involved, and this material has been extensively utilised in the preparation of this study. In addition, some use has been made of Cohen's press cuttings book, covering his career until 1905 with odd material from later years. The use of this book was, however, rendered difficult because it is in relatively poor condition, and the date and source of most of the cuttings are not recorded. There are also available broken ranges of the local and London Jewish newspapers, though neither the Great Synagogue nor the Australian Jewish Historical Society possesses full sets. It is relevant to note that throughout his Sydney ministry, Cohen generally gave the manuscript of his weekly sermon to the editor of the *Hebrew Standard*, who gave it pride of place in the following week's issue; Cohen's views on religious, communal and general issues are thus well documented, and considerable use has also been made of this material.

This does not purport to be a biography of Cohen or a history of his times in Australian or even New South Wales Jewry. Its pattern is thematic rather than chronological, as it was felt that this approach would be better suited to an examination of Cohen's thinking, his community's response to his work and views, and the wider issues raised by a study of his career.

The obvious impression that emerges from almost every chapter is that the dominant force in Cohen's life was his British patriotism. Whilst none of his Jewish contemporaries in Australia, or for that



matter in England, would have disagreed with his basic and instinctive feeling of loyalty to and appreciation of British justice and institutions, his passionate Empire loyalty was thought by some to have been taken to illogical extremes. Thus a major puzzle was posed for many when he could apparently not bring himself to feel any enthusiasm for the fact that it was the very same British Empire which he loved so much which had promised to use its best endeavours to create in Palestine a Jewish national home, to paraphrase the wording of the Balfour Declaration of 1917. By way of contrast, Sir John Monash, whom no-one could accuse of lack of patriotism and British loyalty, asserted that Australian Jews had a double responsibility – as British citizens as well as Jews – to work for the rebuilding of the land of Israel. It is because Cohen's patriotism was so supremely important to him that it led him even to apparent illogicalities, that this study is entitled, "Francis Lyon Cohen: the Passionate Patriot".

In concluding this Introduction, it is a pleasant duty to acknowledge the assistance and advice of Dr Bruce Mitchell of the Department of History at the University of New England, as well as the constant helpfulness of M.Z. Forbes and Louise Rosenberg of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, whose immense dedication to the Great Synagogue and to the colourful history of Australian Jewry is an inspiration.

In London, the Rev. J. Sunshine, archivist of the United Synagogue; Mr John Julius, acting secretary of the United Synagogue; and the staff of the Jewish Chronicle library have been most helpful. My dear friends Hyman A. Simons and Phineas L. May have given me much material and many leads, and I am grateful to them for this and so much else. My wife knows how much I owe to her patience and practical support in this and all my undertakings.

## 1 . UPBRINGING AND EDUCATION

**F**rancis Lyon Cohen was born in Aldershot, Hampshire, on 14 November 1862. His father, Woolf Henry Cohen, descended from a family that came from a village near Vilna in Lithuania. The family name of Litzky was changed to Cohen, which means "priest" in Hebrew, reflecting their priestly lineage.<sup>2</sup> At the time of his marriage to Harriet Phillips on 8 February 1860, Woolf Cohen (the marriage certificate omits the second name Henry though other references give both names) was aged 21 and his profession is given as that of a dealer. The marriage took place at the home of the bride's father, Moses Phillips, in Aldershot, and was conducted by the Rev. Abraham Barnett, reader of the New Synagogue in London. The bride was 18; her father is described as a silversmith.<sup>3</sup> The Phillips family, originally from Warsaw, had moved from Portsmouth to Aldershot in 1855 when the military camp was established there during the Crimean War.<sup>4</sup>

Very few Jews lived in Aldershot at the time. There are references to one J. Defries, whose firm was employed to light the schools, camps and churches in the town,<sup>5</sup> and to Joseph Lazareck, who held many public offices over a series of years.<sup>6</sup> Not until 1864 does the *Jewish Chronicle* record any signs of Jewish community life in Aldershot. In that year a burial ground was acquired;<sup>7</sup> in 1866 S. Melson was president, and W. (presumably Woolf) Cohen gabay (another executive office) of the congregation;<sup>8</sup> in 1884 Moses Phillips was president and the Rev. Isaac Jacob Cohen (it is not known whether he was related to Woolf Cohen's family) minister and shochet (ritual slaughterer).<sup>9</sup> The congregation must have been very small as the standard bibliographies of Anglo-Jewish history pass it over in silence.<sup>10</sup> In the 1890s, however, there was a temporary Synagogue in Barrack Road, partly maintained by the United Synagogue Visitation Committee in return for facilities being made available for use by Jewish servicemen.<sup>11</sup> The fact that the Jewish chaplain – indeed the first Jewish chaplain in British military history – at that period was Francis Lyon Cohen has more than incidental significance.<sup>12</sup> It was certainly the Aldershot connection which explains his lifetime interest in military matters. Uniforms, pageantry and martial music were bound to have an emotional impact on a boy growing up near a military garrison. But he saw more than the merely superficial. We presume that the Cohen family made it their business to take an interest in the few Jewish soldiers, and thus, as Francis



Lyon Cohen recalled years later, it became apparent that a Jew in the army had special problems of his own:

I had noticed, in my boyhood near Aldershot Camp, that Jewish soldiers and sailors almost invariably concealed their origin because of outside prejudices, and still more through their own people's feeling about the difficulties in observing certain religious duties, and the dislike of all uniforms so natural in our people who had come to England from countries where authority condones such cruel oppression.<sup>13</sup>

In due course his own efforts as a chaplain aimed at improving the image of military service amongst the Jewish community and equally at spreading public knowledge of Jewish patriotism and loyalty.<sup>14</sup>

Cohen was educated at Jacob H. Cohen's private boarding school, Sussex House, Brighton. His parents may be assumed to have sent him there to gain a better Jewish education than was possible in Aldershot; the fact that they could afford the expense obviously indicates a degree of affluence. After passing the Oxford and Cambridge Local Examinations,<sup>15</sup> he enrolled at Jews' College School in London. This was a day school founded in 1855 by Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler, to whom was also due the establishment of Jews' College proper as a seminary for the training of Jewish ministers. The school lasted only 25 years and closed its doors in 1880 due to lack of support.<sup>16</sup> By this time Cohen had already been a student at the College itself for three years, continuing his studies there until 1885. He also attended University College and passed the Intermediate Arts examination, though he did not proceed to a degree. At Jews' College his career was punctuated by the award of various scholarships; in 1881, for instance, the Lord Mayor's Commemoration Scholarship and in 1885 the Lady Montefiore Scholarship endowed by Sir Moses Montefiore.<sup>17</sup>

One subject appeared to attract his special interest and he made it his area of unique expertise. This was Jewish liturgical music, taught by the Rev. Marcus Hast, first reader of the Great Synagogue, London, and Julius Mombach, the Synagogue choirmaster.<sup>18</sup> Music became Cohen's passion. From the age of 18 he was already preparing and delivering research papers on the subject. He addressed the College Literary Society in the 1881-2 season on the Music of the Bible, and the following year on the History and Character of Synagogue Music. Other subjects on which he lectured before the Society were "The Attempts of Anton, Speidel, Haupt and Arends to Reconstitute the Psalmody of the Ancient Hebrews" (1888-89 season) and "The Hymns of Rabbi Israel

Nadjara" (1891-92 season).<sup>19</sup> He also, at the age of eighteen, was joint honorary secretary with the veteran Rev. Aaron Levy Green of the Jewish Choral Society directed by Hast.<sup>20</sup>

During his student years Cohen acted as superintendent of the Chicksand Street classes of the Jewish Association for the Diffusion of Religious Knowledge, and was briefly the minister, reader, teacher and secretary of the infant South Hackney Synagogue.<sup>21</sup> On the retirement of the Rev. M. Kaizer he became assistant reader of the Great Synagogue.<sup>22</sup> In this capacity he not only worked directly with and under his teacher Hast, but gained experience of the Anglo-Jewish liturgical tradition of which in later years he became the almost unrivalled custodian and representative.<sup>23</sup> He also came increasingly under the influence of the charms of Hast's daughter Rose, who before long became his wife.



## 2 . A DEVELOPING CAREER

**I**n 1885 the honorary officers of the Hebrew congregation in Dublin came to London in search of a minister for their community. The Chief Rabbi recommended Cohen, who later remarked:

I went to Dublin at the end of May 1885, and spent a very happy year with a congregation at that time much resembling our own here in Sydney, though on a smaller scale, and combining some of the best Jewish characteristics with all the lovable charm of the finest Irish type.<sup>24</sup>

But, his Dublin ministry was so short that he hardly figures in the histories of the Jews in Ireland.<sup>25</sup> His eye was on the greater opportunities in London as well as on Rose Hast.

In early 1886 he applied for the ministerial post that had become vacant at the Borough Synagogue, Walworth, where the Rev. Simeon Singer, deemed the very model of an Anglo-Jewish minister, had held office before going to the New West End Synagogue in Bayswater. Cohen was one of three candidates. He received 51 votes at the congregational election, the Rev. H.P. Levy of Middlesbrough 43 and the Rev. E. Collins of Belfast 7.<sup>26</sup> Cohen thus won the position and on 14 December 1886 was married at the Great Synagogue to Rose Hast. Dr Hermann Adler, the Delegate Chief Rabbi, conducted the ceremony and spoke symbolically of how the ancient sage, Rabbi Akiva, acknowledged that his wife's love and generosity were largely responsible for the success of his career.<sup>27</sup>

From her father Rose Cohen inherited musical and vocal talents which made her partnership with her husband a cultural as well as a personal and professional one. The reputation he developed as a lecturer and writer on Jewish music was assisted by the songs and piano illustrations which she frequently contributed to his lectures. It goes without saying that her family background uniquely equipped her to support her husband in his pastoral work both in England and Australia.<sup>28</sup>

The Borough Synagogue was the only one south of the Thames, an area vaguely designated as "over the water". In a sermon in Sydney, Cohen once explained that the name Borough derived from a fort or





*Book plate of Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen.*

borough that used to stand at the southern foot of London Bridge.<sup>29</sup> Jews had lived in the district from the late eighteenth century and the congregation built up in about the middle of the nineteenth century as Jewish families moved from the City where, according to the congregational historian, warehouses were replacing the old residences.<sup>30</sup> The fact that a day school was established in association with the Synagogue suggests strong community feeling and adequate numbers of children, though it was never a large Jewish settlement. The congregation was scattered over an unusually wide area, estimated to have been in 1905 eighteen square miles; in 1903 there were 116 male members, 103 females and 129 children, making a total of 308 souls, one of the smallest concentrations of Jewish families in London at the time.<sup>31</sup>

In 1886 the Synagogue board believed there to be a "very large

number of Jewish residents – mostly Germans – living in the southern suburb, who still remain unattached to any Synagogue in London”,<sup>32</sup> but this is probably an exaggeration. Vivian Lipman suggests that the fact that Jewish population movements mostly bypassed the Borough illustrates a “linear tendency of Jewish settlement” whereby Jewish suburbia developed along clearly defined axes which provided easy access to the City and East London, where until relatively recent times many Jews had their businesses.<sup>33</sup>

Among the families long associated with the Borough Synagogue were those of Baruch Cohen and his kinsmen the Levys. Rosenbaum wrote in 1917 that:

The descendants of both families have held responsible positions in the congregations of Liverpool and Sydney (New South Wales) as well as distinguished public offices in these cities, and it is a curious co-incidence that the two present Ministers of the latter congregation were taken directly from the Borough Synagogue, the selection being in the hands of members of these two families.<sup>34</sup>

True, the patronage of the leading families may have played a role in Cohen’s appointment to Sydney, but the support of Hermann Adler, by that time Chief Rabbi, seems to have been more significant.<sup>35</sup>

Some hesitation had been felt in entertaining Cohen’s candidature at the Borough on account of his being a member of the priestly tribe and thus not permitted by Jewish law to have direct contact with the dead or be close to a grave.<sup>36</sup> The board consulted Hermann Adler, who replied that “it would be much to be deplored if that young and promising Preacher were to be disqualified on the score of his *Kehunah*” (i.e. his priestly lineage).<sup>37</sup> Another aspect of the problem arose in the synagogue in 1890 when not only the minister but also the reader and the senior master of the congregational school were members of the priestly tribe and required to participate on festivals in the ceremony of blessing the congregation in unison; in these circumstances the junior master of the school was asked to prompt the words, a duty normally performed by the minister or reader.<sup>38</sup>

No such problem appears to have exercised the minds of the Sydney community when appointing Cohen in 1904. The ceremonial recital of the priestly benediction did not form part of the congregation’s ritual at that stage, and any difficulties occasioned by attendance at the cemetery were presumably left to Cohen to solve for himself. In later years he did complain of embarrassment in this respect,<sup>39</sup> though he



admitted that "a little ingenuity can usually surmount such difficulties."<sup>40</sup>

Cohen found the Borough congregation congenial. He mixed both with the social élite (when Sir Robert Waley Cohen visited Sydney in 1925, the rabbi said that in London he had "been brought into the circle in which Sir Robert's relatives had moved"<sup>41</sup>) and with the less affluent members of the community who represented by far the majority of the congregation, as illustrated by the relatively low levels of membership contributions to the synagogue.<sup>42</sup> His pastoral interests extended far beyond the confines of South London, though he was not alone in maintaining a widespread programme of social work; most of the "establishment" ministers of the time were interested in both the East End and the West.<sup>43</sup> Cohen's social work was summed up in these terms:

He has been an active participant in visitation work...The arduous and delicate duties of Visiting Chaplain to Brixton Prison are his, besides the care of Jews in quite a group of Metropolitan Asylums, Hospitals and Infirmarys. Mr. Cohen has also latterly spent one day each week out of town at the Stone or Darent Asylums or the "Exmouth" training-ship. He has served as examiner for Jewish schools and religion classes, is Chairman of the Education Committee at the South London Jewish Schools, of the South London Jewish Literary Society, the Borough Orphan Aid Society, the Newington Branch of the Country Holidays Fund (non-sectarian), and a member of numerous benevolent and educational committees.<sup>44</sup>

What marked him out amongst his colleagues was that he expanded the role of the minister in an unprecedented and innovative fashion by becoming an authority on Jewish music and influencing the Anglo-Jewish musical tradition,<sup>45</sup> inaugurating the Jewish military chaplaincy and improving the lot and the image of the Jewish serviceman,<sup>46</sup> and as a founder and officer of the Jewish Lads' Brigade.

The establishment of the Brigade, a Jewish version of youth movements current in other denominations, was his idea. In 1894 the Maccabeans, an association of Jewish public workers and professional men of which Cohen was a foundation member at its inception in 1892,<sup>47</sup> arranged a lecture by Colonel Albert E.W. Goldsmid on the subject of the athletic training of Jewish youth. After the lecture Cohen suggested the formation of a Lads' Brigade and continued to advocate the idea in the



letter columns of the *Jewish Chronicle*<sup>48</sup> until the movement finally came into being in 1895. It aimed "to instil into the rising generation from their earliest years habits of orderliness, cleanliness, and honour, so that in learning to respect themselves they will do credit to their community."<sup>49</sup> Cohen was Brigade Staff Chaplain and took his duties seriously, as was his wont with any activity in which he involved himself. The success of the Brigade in fostering quasi-military skills and teaching patriotism and loyalty, especially at a time of great Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe when anglicisation of the immigrant was a communal priority, resulted in as many as 80 of the 90 Brigade officers volunteering for service in the First World War and obtaining commissions.<sup>50</sup>

Cohen's activities in this and other directions did not fail to bring him some criticism. Writing in 1904 to the president of the Sydney congregation he remarked:

I have always perhaps (even in my college days) varied a little from the mere conventional line of clerical activity, and have often felt impelled to go well outside of the narrower limits of official duty in directions where it seemed to me the general welfare of my brethren might be promoted. Naturally enough, any sort of individuality in a public worker exposes him to a certain amount of criticism, especially from those self-constituted authorities of whom our own community has its full share, and possibly a specially liberal allowance. But the Press, both general and communal, has proved so sympathetic to my humble suggestions on the one hand, while my own congregants have so readily acknowledged on the other that my local responsibilities have meanwhile met with adequate fulfilment, that I have been so fortunate as to reap credit for the influences I have ventured to exert during my ministrations in London, and so see some outcome to my endeavours.<sup>51</sup>

The Borough congregation encouraged his activities, but perhaps because of the relative smallness of South London Jewry he began to look for preferment elsewhere. When Hermann Adler became Chief Rabbi in 1891 a vacancy arose for a preacher at the prestigious Bayswater Synagogue. Cohen applied for the appointment, first informing the board of his own congregation of his intentions. They agreed to give him a testimonial in writing, which seems to illustrate the cordiality that existed between minister and congregation.<sup>52</sup> Cohen was not successful in his candidature – the position went to the much more experienced Rev. Hermann Gollancz<sup>53</sup> – and Cohen remained at the Borough.



### 3 . AUTHORITY ON HEBREW MUSIC

Whilst still a student Cohen's researches on Jewish music attracted favourable attention. A youthful paper of his written in 1883 and published on the Continent as well as in England is said to have been "at once recognised as a novel and important handling of a phase of Jewish traditional culture that was still awaiting treatment by competent investigators."<sup>54</sup>

His subsequent musical career took two forms – as a teacher, custodian and promoter of Jewish traditional melody, and as a scholar and lecturer concerned with the definition and derivation of Jewish music as a whole.

In respect of the first aspect, his return to London from Dublin brought with it an appointment as teacher of liturgical music at Jews' College.<sup>55</sup> This enabled him to influence a whole series of aspirants for the ministry and through them to mould the musical patterns of the synagogues they served. He was called upon to take charge of the musical arrangements for many important communal occasions.<sup>56</sup> As early as 1887 he was invited by the readers and choirmasters of the metropolitan synagogues to work on a collection of traditional prayer melodies "as should enable every worshipper to take part in the singing".<sup>57</sup> The resultant "Handbook of Synagogue Music for Congregational Singing", jointly edited by him and B.L. Mosely and issued in 1889, was followed by a much larger and more comprehensive work edited by him with David M. Davis and entitled "The Voice of Prayer and Praise".<sup>58</sup> Colloquially known as "the blue book" on account of the colour of the binding, this became and remained for many years the standard collection of Anglo-Jewish synagogue music. Its systematisation of synagogue music may be said to have completed the series of stages, amongst which regular sermons in the vernacular must be counted,<sup>59</sup> whereby the synagogue attained an image of respectability and decorum in the eyes of wider society. Cohen's scrapbook contains a sheaf of reviews, mostly laudatory though not uncritical, of the blue book; some reviewers, however, impliedly accused him of arrogance in purporting to be the authoritative arbiter on the subject.<sup>60</sup> Another task Cohen undertook as a recorder and redactor of traditional music was that of popularising old melodies by associating them with paraphrased English texts. A selection of these melodies appeared in "Lyra Anglo-Judaica", issued in 1891. Material on specific melodies and their background and significance was also presented in his frequent articles



in the Jewish papers. One example, which appeared in the *Jewish Chronicle* the week before his appointment to Sydney was announced, was on a Passover melody, the music being printed in full with the heading, "In a Strange Land: traditional melody, adapted to Lord Byron's verses by Isaac Nathan, 1815, arranged, from earlier transcriptions, by the Rev. F.L. Cohen."<sup>61</sup>

The wider field of the nature and history of Jewish music engaged his attention for many years. He lectured extensively, often with Mrs Cohen providing the musical illustrations, before many Jewish and general audiences in England, on the Continent and in the United States. Most of his lectures were published in Jewish or learned periodicals, and some as separate monographs. Some of his articles permitted themselves a somewhat polemical tone, and some appeared under the pen-name of Asaph Klesmer; Asaph was a Biblical musician and Klesmer is a popular corruption of *k'le zemer* (musical instruments).

One author suggests that Cohen's theories are "in the same half-scientific, half-artistic vein as is Renan's famous proof of the non-existence of Moses or his repudiation of the Exodus" and accuses him of "purely psychological casuistics, drowning in a torrent of dramatic verbiage . . . in contradiction to every bit of historical evidence."<sup>62</sup> Other assessments are more generous as well as less intemperate in language. The vast amount of work he put into editing (and largely writing) the articles on music in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia* led a Sydney paper to call it "an acknowledged fact throughout the world" that he was an expert on the subject; it added, "if the work he has completed for the *Jewish Encyclopaedia* were to be collated from the twelve volumes, it would require a number of books to itself."<sup>63</sup> The *Jewish Chronicle* considered his *Encyclopaedia* article on cantillation to be "of distinct scientific value, and remarkable for an unprecedented presentment of the parallel forms of the *Neginoth*" (notes for cantillation).<sup>64</sup> A popular essay on the subject refers to his "masterly article on synagogal music in the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*,"<sup>65</sup> whilst another deems his work to be an "authoritative statement."<sup>66</sup> Years after the *Encyclopaedia* had appeared, Cohen derived pleasure from favourable reference to his contribution.<sup>67</sup> Coming at a time when much of his communal activity in Australia was attracting criticism and even denigration,<sup>68</sup> one can understand his pleasure at being appreciated. The field of Jewish musicology has developed considerably since his time and his name hardly figures in modern works on the subject, but his contribution to the laying of foundations for modern Jewish musical research has historical significance.

After he arrived in Sydney his many other responsibilities left him less time than before to pursue his musical interests, and though he took a keen interest in the Synagogue choir and gave occasional musical lectures, his major work as a musicologist was over.

*Idea for Calling-up Chief Rabbi*

*April 9<sup>th</sup> (+ perhaps also April 23<sup>rd</sup>) 1920.*

*Allegretto*

Ya - a - mod Mo-reh mo-rei-nu ve-rab-bei-nu ho-rav! etc.

Once in Sydney Cohen took a keen interest in the musical component of services at the Great Synagogue. As this piece of music illustrates, he planned a special musical calling-up to the Torah for the Chief Rabbi, Dr Hertz, at the Great Synagogue in 1920.



#### 4 . MILITARY CHAPLAIN

From boyhood days Cohen had been interested in military matters. The well being of the few Jews stationed in Aldershot must have been a matter of renewed concern to him every time he visited the town. The community in London had so far taken no official interest in the subject, but early in 1892 he urged the Visitation Committee of the United Synagogue to organise ministerial visits to Aldershot.<sup>69</sup> His suggestions were taken up and the Visitation Committee recommended that the War Office appoint him as "the first Jewish Minister recognised in connection with the British army."<sup>70</sup> With the assistance of the small Aldershot community he began seeking out and befriending Jewish members of the garrison, at first paying a weekly Sunday morning visit to conduct services for them and later involving senior students of Jews' College in the work.<sup>71</sup>

His motives went beyond the merely humanitarian. He was determined to make soldiering respectable amongst Jews, especially because this was a time when vast numbers of Eastern European Jews were arriving in England bringing with them a justifiable set of prejudices against the hated authority which uniforms represented for them, as well as the feeling, reinforced by the experience of Jews conscripted into the Czar's armies, that military service entailed religious compromise.<sup>72</sup>

In addition, he was disturbed by allegations that Jews were unpatriotic. Evidence that there were Jewish members of the armed forces would have helped to counter these accusations. But no-one knew how many Jewish servicemen there were. It was not only that the Jewish community itself had not taken an interest in the subject. In many cases Jews hid their religious origins – some out of lack of religious commitment, but many because until 1886 the army simply did not officially recognise Judaism as a denomination that could be recorded for attestation. Though Jews had had naval and military connections in England from the time of Cromwell or even before,<sup>73</sup> it was not until Major-General Sir Frederick John Goldsmid, a Crimean War veteran, made determined representations that Judaism received formal recognition for military purposes. Cohen acknowledged Goldsmid's efforts but insisted that credit also be given to private soldiers like W. Cohen of Mare Street, Hackney, who while serving in the 5th Lancers regularly insisted on reporting himself as a Jew.<sup>74</sup> Historians who believe that 1858, with its parliamentary emancipation of Jews in England,



represented the culmination of efforts for Anglo-Jewish emancipation, have failed to recognise fully the significance of 1886 in the emancipation process.

When Cohen began work as a chaplain, the available military congregation consisted of one man, a former pupil of the South London Jewish Schools.<sup>75</sup> By 1895 he could report,

About thirty-two Jewish regulars and militiamen at Aldershot, and twenty-eight at other stations, have come under my notice during two years of officiation, quite fifty of whom are at present serving in the army . . . Some ten or eleven Jewish recruits joined the troops at Aldershot during 1894 . . . It would appear that between sixty and seventy Jews enlisted during the year . . . I estimate that there are now quite two hundred Jews in the Army, and that by the end of the century the number will reach and perhaps exceed four hundred.<sup>76</sup>

He provided regular military statistics to the *Jewish Year Book*, first issued in 1896, considering the increasing numbers as good for Jewry and good for England. In 1904 he estimated that one in 188 English Jews was a soldier, compared to one person in 148 in the general population. Though he insisted he was not a recruiting sergeant, the new image he gave the Jewish soldier must have aided enlistments.

He hit upon a dramatic method of attracting both Jewish and gentile attention by inaugurating an annual Jewish military service held in one or other London synagogue on the festival of Chanukah, which commemorates the exploits of the ancient Maccabee warriors. The first such service took place at the Borough Synagogue on 10 December 1893. One of the most notable military services took place during the Boer War, at the Central Synagogue:

With all the solemnity and impressiveness of Jewish liturgy, the ninth annual special military Hanuca service was held yesterday at the Central Synagogue, Great Portland-street. The Lord Mayor was present in state, accompanied by the Lady Mayoress and Mr. Alderman Sheriff Bell and Mrs. Bell. They were accommodated with seats on the left of the Ark, the Chief Rabbi being seated immediately opposite the civic party. The pulpit was gracefully draped with Union Jacks, and the





*Rabbi Cohen conducts a Chanukah military service at the Borough Synagogue, 1903.*

space between it and the almemor or platform where the service is conducted was occupied by soldiers of the Jewish faith in uniform . . .

An appropriate sermon was preached by the Rev. F.L. Cohen. After pointing out that Jews were to be found serving in the Navy, Militia, Regulars, Yeomanry, Volunteers and Colonial irregular corps, he went on to say that the present war had, and was, exacting its full tribute of blood and tears from Jew and Gentile alike. Nearly 100 Jewish soldiers slept on the field of honour side by side with the many thousands of their comrades of other faiths, for all of whom their hearts were bleeding and their eyes welling full.<sup>77</sup>

The military services aroused some criticism within the Jewish community but were supported by Lord Rothschild, lay head of the community, and by 1905 they were widely acclaimed as "an annual feature of Jewish communal life in London."<sup>78</sup> After Cohen left for Australia the new chaplain, the Rev. Michael Adler, continued the services, and Cohen himself attempted to imitate them in Sydney, but they lapsed at about the commencement of the First World War.<sup>79</sup>



## 5 . APPOINTMENT TO SYDNEY

In 1903, the Rev. Alexander Barnard Davis retired as chief minister of the Great Synagogue, Sydney, after 41 years' service. His board of management began the search for a successor. His assistant since 1892, the Rev. J.H. Landau, declined to contest the appointment on a competitive basis, and went to the United States. The board asked its past president, George Judah Cohen, who was on a visit to London, to consult the Chief Rabbi. The latter, together with Neville D. Cohen and Benn W. Levy as representatives of the congregation, recommended that Francis Lyon Cohen be appointed. The Chief Rabbi's long record of support and encouragement of Cohen led him to believe Cohen to be a reliable public representative of Judaism with the English background and proven patriotism that would be right for a leading colonial congregation.

The Great Synagogue accepted the recommendation with the proviso that Cohen qualify within twelve months to assume the presidency of a local Beth Din or rabbinical court. This proviso was deemed of the utmost importance by the leaders of the Sydney community. Despite its pre-eminent position as the mother congregation of Australian Jewry, with origins going back to convict days, the Great Synagogue had never had a fully qualified rabbi competent to conduct a Beth Din. Davis was popularly known as "Rabbi Davis" but he had no rabbinical diploma, and the Beth Din which Nathan Marcus Adler had reluctantly allowed him to form had severely circumscribed powers. This contrasted with Melbourne, where there was a permanent Beth Din headed by Rabbi Dr Joseph Abrahams. In Sydney the lack of a rabbi and Beth Din encouraged the emergence of so-called "religious charlatans" whose pretensions it was hard to control,<sup>80</sup> and of "foreign" rabbis who denigrated Davis and his authority.<sup>81</sup> Thus a combination of self-respect, communal discipline and simple efficiency made it essential for the new chief minister to qualify as a rabbi before assuming office.

Cohen accepted the appointment subject to this condition. He announced his resignation from the Borough Synagogue when he addressed his congregation on the first day of Passover and evoked an emotional reaction, especially from the ladies.<sup>82</sup> After relinquishing his congregational duties he embarked upon what he called "the literary, physiological and juridical studies required in addition to my present theological and homiletical qualifications."<sup>83</sup>



His plans became, however, the subject of controversy. His letters to Sydney speak of "conspirators" who sought to place obstacles in his way. Was it that there were doubts as to his orthodoxy? The fact that in 1892 the Borough Synagogue asked the Chief Rabbi to approve 35 changes in the ritual, some quite radical, does not reflect adversely on Cohen.<sup>84</sup> The Chief Rabbi had convened a conference of ministers to consider synagogue ritual in detail; the Borough Synagogue's proposals were neither stated to be approved by the minister nor presented officially on behalf of the board but simply summarised suggestions that had been put forward from time to time.<sup>85</sup> There is surely also some significance in the fact that though one of the 35 suggestions asked for approval of a mixed choir of men and women, it was not until 1899 that the Synagogue introduced such a choir, long after the Hampstead Synagogue had led the way despite Hermann Adler's disapproval.<sup>86</sup> Cohen's orthodoxy was representative of the religious position of most of the "establishment" ministers of the period, even though his views became more lenient as his Sydney career progressed.<sup>87</sup>

He did have his critics who thought him too much of an individualist who had often gone "well outside of the narrower limits of official duty".<sup>88</sup>

But the "conspirators" appear to have wished to embarrass the Chief Rabbi more than to discomfit Cohen. For many years the Chief Rabbinate had not wished to encourage ministers to become fully qualified as rabbis:

The constitution of the Jewish ministry in England presented an anomaly which was not to be found in any other country. The head of the Jewish ministry was styled the Chief Rabbi. But it was not considered necessary for any of the ministers under his jurisdiction to possess rabbinical status, so that his own position very much resembled that of a general without an army.<sup>89</sup>

The powerful voice of Hermann Gollancz, who had gone abroad to gain rabbinic ordination, led those raised in insistence that there be a proper course of rabbinic study available in England. Gollancz wrote that his agitation caused "a storm in the hierarchical Chair".<sup>90</sup> Adler agreed in the end, but by approving Cohen's appointment as president of a Beth Din before gaining the rabbinical diploma aroused the indignation of Hermann Gollancz's brother Israel, an eminent academic, who wrote an open letter to the Chief Rabbi which was published in the *Jewish Chronicle*.<sup>91</sup> Israel Gollancz spoke of "widespread discontent" in



the community at the news of what the Chief Rabbi had approved; to say that Cohen's examination for the rabbinical diploma would take place a year or so after his appointment had been confirmed was to "run counter to every method of fair procedure" and would produce nothing but a "make-believe degree".<sup>92</sup> In the course of subsequent press correspondence B.W. Levy stressed that the Chief Rabbi had made it clear to Cohen that the appointment was conditional on the rabbinical diploma examination being satisfactorily completed,<sup>93</sup> but Israel Gollancz returned to the fray several times.<sup>94</sup> Cohen wrote to Sydney that he believed "Mr. Gollancz is not acting solely on his own initiative, but rather as the mouthpiece of a faction whose consistent aim is the mere thwarting of Dr. Adler".<sup>95</sup> He suspected that the Chief Rabbi would have to make the examination so difficult that the critics would be disarmed.<sup>96</sup>

Cohen spent almost a year in intensive study and also gained practical experience at the London Beth Din. His examination took place at the end of March 1905. On the day the examiners asked that he accept no proselyte, and administer no religious divorce, without reference to them. He replied that he could not agree to anything which would fetter the autonomy of the Sydney community. They then asked that he obtain the assistance of "a gentleman who holds the diploma from a competent authority" (the rabbi they had in mind may have been Dr Abrahams of Melbourne who had qualified on the Continent) before preparing divorce documents to be sent abroad, and to this Cohen assented. The results of the examination were favourable; Adler wrote to B.W. Levy to confirm that Cohen had passed "creditably".<sup>97</sup>

After farewell functions which included a dinner given by the Maccabeans, and a Jews' College reception presided over by Jacob Danglow who was soon to follow Cohen to Australia, Rabbi and Mrs Cohen, with their two sons and daughter, sailed on the S.S. *Salamis* on 2 May. They reached Sydney on 17 June and Cohen was formally inducted into office at the Great Synagogue by his much revered predecessor on 25 June.

## 6 . PREACHER AND TEACHER

Cohen attached great importance to his role as a preacher. Sydney had in fact enjoyed a tradition of regular preaching long before English sermons had become an established feature of synagogues in England. The first recorded Jewish sermon in England dates from 1817, though occasional sermons had been given before this date.<sup>98</sup> Ministers were chosen not for their learning or homiletical ability but for their vocal talents. Their major role was as officiants or readers (the latter term is one of a number of marks of Jewish acculturation to the ways of the established church<sup>99</sup>). The Jewish press increasingly advocated the introduction of regular sermons or lectures, both in order to raise the low levels of religious knowledge of the masses of the community and as a weapon in the struggle for emancipation. This was a time when preaching was highly esteemed amongst the general community, and sermons were seen as instruments of "seriousness of thought and self-discipline of character".<sup>100</sup> The image of the Jewish community was considered to be in jeopardy if the synagogue had neither preaching nor preachers. The *Jewish Chronicle* declared in 1849,

We are anxious to obtain full emancipation; and would it not be a disgrace if we were told by our Christian opponents, that the Jews of England are so ignorant that they cannot find a lecturer in their community?<sup>101</sup>

In Sydney the community had been well served in this respect from the time of the Rev. Herman Hoelzel in the mid-1850s. A.B. Davis, minister from 1862, preached regularly and eloquently, walking up and down the steps leading to the Ark; the synagogue had no fixed pulpit until 1899.<sup>102</sup> In his old age Davis was assisted by the Rev. J.H. Landau, who had considerable oratorical powers. Both David and Landau had a flowery style and used abundant reference to Biblical quotations.

Cohen's style and subject matter are relatively easy to examine as he generally used carefully prepared manuscripts. Left on the pulpit each week for collection by the editor of the community newspaper, the *Hebrew Standard*, they were published on the front page of the following week's paper. Twenty-nine years of almost weekly sermon-essays of



this kind, carefully preserved in the files of the *Standard*, represent a solid, sustained contribution to Jewish homiletical literature in English. Significantly, a rival paper, the *Australian Jewish Chronicle*, from its inauguration in 1922 hardly ever even reported Cohen's sermons though it published those of other ministers, including the Rev. L.A. Falk whose passionate Zionist views accorded with the paper's own position.

Cohen's style in his earlier years in Sydney was ponderous and academic. He often went over people's heads, and this might explain his complaint in 1928 that:

The sudden departure of congregants, not all children, as soon as any Sermon commences has disconcerted visiting Preachers, and involves delay sometimes in my own commencement. Can some more extended policing check this?<sup>103</sup>

It is also possible that his unpopularity with those congregants who were offended with his views on Zionism might be connected with the sermon-time walk-out.<sup>104</sup>

Despite the consistent intellectual content of his sermons he did not lack the ability to speak in very direct terms which left his audience in no doubt as to his meaning. The following are two examples:

It is a peculiar form of Judaism which spends guineas on fiddling and waltzing, and grudges shillings or even pence for Hebrew . . . What the Jews of Sydney lay out on theatres and variety shows on one single Saturday night, or at the card table one Sunday night, would suffice to keep our Education Board financial for a whole year.<sup>105</sup>

A daughter of Israel who knowingly purchases for her household meat which has not been regularly slaughtered by an approved Shochet and is therefore "nebelah", is in fact deliberately withdrawing that household from the ranks of *am kadosh*, "God's holy people".<sup>106</sup>

His sermons generally took some twenty minutes or so. The fact that this was so much less than the length of many Christian sermons did not reassure his board of management. In 1922 his president wrote to him about "the vexed question of the time required for your Sermons" and asked him to comply with the board's request that he should not



exceed fifteen minutes. "This is a very sore question with the Board, I am afraid," the letter went on, "and we would be glad to see it finally disposed of without friction."<sup>107</sup>

Cohen's reply expresses his hurt at having "hurled" at him a request "which my own forty years' experience, and the opinion of experts in all communions, finds impracticable," and adds, "Nor do I consider I should be so constantly worried over a trifling difference of five minutes at most, in the very nature of the circumstances often inevitable."<sup>108</sup> (This exchange of letters appears to underline uncertainty on both sides as to the proper relationship between rabbi and board. To what extent was the rabbi a servant of his board and bound to adhere to its instructions? This question will be considered at greater length in



*An early photograph of Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen*



a later chapter.<sup>109</sup>)

The subjects of his sermons ranged from matters of Jewish law, belief and practice to wider questions of community and national policy. On national issues he sometimes advocated a clear and specific point of view. Thus, disappointed that Jews who observed the Saturday Sabbath were not always accorded the right to work on Sundays, he deplored the fact that Australia was

A country which penalises the observant Jew in business by refusing to recognise his conscientious scruples with any generous liberality like that displayed by the Old Country in her Factory Acts.<sup>110</sup>

Usually he refrained from taking sides in matters of national controversy and addressed himself to the underlying ethical principles that both sides ought to respect. Hence a reference in 1909 to an industrial dispute (the reference seems to be to Broken Hill) which he said had been "greatly augmented by reprehensible explosions of a foolish violence," adding, "We anxiously pray that hot-headed impetuosity may not be misled into shedding the blood of warfare in time of peace."<sup>111</sup> His care not to take sides was derived to a large extent from the concern he shared with most of his congregation that the Jewish community not be seen as politically partisan. No Jewish action or utterance should be embarked upon, he believed, if it might, even unwittingly, jeopardise the Jewish position in Australia. This policy led him on several occasions to warn Jews to be ethically scrupulous and not put the good name of their community at risk:

Any liar or deceiver who happens to be of Jewish origin, by these very transgressions marks himself off as one who deliberately separates himself from the Religion of the Jewish people.<sup>112</sup>

He did not however hold back from speaking out on current theological issues when he felt Jews might be confused as to where Judaism stood, or even when Christians might need to be informed as to the way in which Judaism understood passages of Scripture which Christianity handled differently. Jews sometimes objected to his use of the synagogue pulpit to discuss such matters. The question of the virgin birth of Jesus, some argued, had no place in a Jewish pulpit.<sup>113</sup> Others said that his public references to differences between Christians and Jews would arouse ill-feeling towards the Jewish community.<sup>114</sup> On these matters, though, most Jews who took the trouble to express



themselves supported his stance, and this included even the *Australian Jewish Chronicle* which on Zionist questions disagreed with him.<sup>115</sup> He trod boldly into the arena when attempts were made to establish missionary organisations aimed at converting Jews to Christianity. Calling such groups "misguided interlopers into our private affairs," he warned them: "Leave us alone; leave your fellow-citizens of the Jewish persuasion to the lofty religious belief they already hold, and which they have not less right to hold than you have to hold your particular creed."<sup>116</sup> His use of the word "right" in this context carries with it more than a hint of the nineteenth-century struggles over the legitimacy or otherwise of non-Christian groups on Australian soil.<sup>117</sup>

On internal Jewish issues he insisted to his congregation that modern Judaism did not necessarily believe in customs and superstitions from "the backward parts of Eastern Europe,"<sup>118</sup> a somewhat unfortunate phrase which reinforced the hostility towards him of some of the more recent immigrants from Eastern European countries.<sup>119</sup> He argued that neither extreme orthodoxy nor radical reform were right for Australia, but his advocacy of liturgical modification led some to think of him as "an insanely reform rabbi".<sup>120</sup> Someone once, Sheridan-like, suggested that it might be said of him, "Rabbi Cohen is a traditional exponent of Jewish music and is himself a composer of Jewish law!"<sup>121</sup> His religious views and attitude to Zionism, both of which invested many of his sermons with a controversial quality, are dealt with in detail in later chapters.<sup>122</sup>

He showed a completely different side to his capacity as a preacher when he occasionally gave Talmudic discourses to devotees of traditional learning. As early as 1906 he spoke on the second day of the New Year festival at the Masonic Hall services of the Baron de Hirsch and Hebrew Benevolent Societies, groups which generally preferred to pray in a less structured and anglicised atmosphere than that of the Great Synagogue. His address "took the form of a *drosho*,<sup>123</sup> by an old-fashioned *Maggid*,<sup>124</sup> and the novel interpretation of the text and frequent Talmudical references were much appreciated."<sup>125</sup> In 1925 a group of learned men established the Chevra Midrash, a Sabbath afternoon study group at the Maccabean Hall in Darlinghurst, and his lectures to the Chevra likewise followed an old-fashioned pattern.

He often addressed audiences, both Jewish and general, on Biblical and other Jewish subjects. As a freemason he was much in demand for his lectures elucidating points of masonic ritual and teaching in the light of Jewish history and literature. He was considered unrivalled as an after-dinner speaker. His lectures, even to Zionist groups with whose major policies he was out of sympathy, evoked commendations in terms such as "considerable erudition . . . great usefulness . . . humorous. . . delighted all present . . . most interesting and scholarly . . . blended



considerable humour with the serious interest of the subject."<sup>126</sup> He attracted much praise for a two-hour impromptu lecture on Jewish history at the Maccabean Hall, when a function, cancelled because it was deemed religiously inappropriate, had to be replaced at short notice.<sup>127</sup>

Parallel to his capacity as a preacher was his ability as a teacher and inspirer of children. For all that some accused him of holding himself aloof from members of the community and even posting a dog at his front gate to discourage callers, many members of the community, now elderly, speak fondly of his warm interest in them when they were children, and recall that he welcomed them to his home.

He believed that religious instruction was "the first duty and highest privilege of a minister of religion in all communions,"<sup>128</sup> and he threw himself with great enthusiasm into the community's educational work. There was no Jewish day school at the time, but a tripartite system provided Sabbath classes, Hebrew and religion lessons on Sunday mornings and after school hours during the week, and withdrawal classes at state schools. As both president and director of education he worked energetically, teaching, supervising, establishing curricula, visiting classes, raising funds, and seeking greater parental involvement. M.H. Kellerman says:

Rabbi Cohen, a keen educationalist, energetically furthered the cause of Jewish Education in Sydney. He reorganised the centres, updated and enriched the Syllabus, and implemented the improvements suggested by the Chief Rabbi. He was responsible for the constitution of the two Boards of the time into the N.S.W. Board of Jewish Education in 1909; developed the Sabbath School, Right of Entry classes, and participation of pupils in Synagogue services, and strengthened co-operation between the Board and the Great Synagogue. He regularised the tests for prizes, barmitzvah and confirmation, and became the first Director of Education in 1928, when Mr. Saul Symonds became President. He faced great difficulties during World War I, and the early stages of the Great Depression; also problems associated with the introduction and spread of Secondary education, and the dispersion of the Jewish population in suburban areas.<sup>129</sup>

The reference to suburban areas denotes more than the obvious fact that centres had to be opened in new districts. It also reflects the



suburban suspicion of both the Great Synagogue and its rabbi.

For many years the Great was the only permanent synagogue in Sydney and it was not until 1913 that synagogal accommodation for suburban residents began to come into being. Both Cohen and his successive presidents encouraged and assisted new congregations to come into being, but there was a feeling that the Great wanted to control the whole community.<sup>130</sup> This expressed itself in the early 1920s in particular, when the Eastern Suburbs Central Synagogue opposed the creation of a United Synagogue federating all the New South Wales congregations,<sup>131</sup> and when independent education boards were set up both by the Eastern Suburbs congregation and by supporters of the Rev. A.T. Chodowski (whom Cohen disliked and called "that creature"<sup>132</sup>) in Randwick-Coogee. Chodowski's paper, the *Australian Jewish Chronicle*, criticised the Education Board which Cohen headed, saying that less than half of the eligible Jewish children were receiving any form of religious education.<sup>133</sup>

Cohen's view was that the problem lay less with the Education Board than with the parents. From the moment he arrived in Sydney he had been proclaiming that "many young Israelites in Sydney receive no sort of systematic religious training whatever".<sup>134</sup> Even communal self-respect ought to motivate parents towards ensuring their children received Hebrew education, he said; the numbers attending the Sydney Jewish Sabbath School were "only one seventh of the number they might expect if Jews in Sydney were as earnest in the religious education of their children as certain of the non-conformist Protestant sects."<sup>135</sup> His efforts at securing parental co-operation never met the kind of response he hoped for. In 1924, at the time when he was being attacked by the suburban boards, he declared:

There is nothing dearer to my own heart, nothing in which I am more deeply concerned, nothing on which I have pleaded more often and to many since I first came amongst you – and there is nothing in which I have encountered more disappointment.<sup>136</sup>

The criticism of his efforts was not total. The *Australian Jewish Chronicle* might attack him, though it acknowledged how successfully he kindled enthusiasm amongst the children for functions such as a Chanukah function at the Maccabean Hall in 1923, a few weeks after the opening of the Hall in November that year, and called the children's celebration "the most impressive . . . ever seen in Sydney."<sup>137</sup>



## 7 . MINISTER AND ADMINISTRATOR

Cohen was a diligent pastoral minister and a good administrator; his president said he was "the equal in ability and capacity for work within and without the congregation of any whom we may hope to acquire,"<sup>138</sup> and the *Hebrew Standard* declared that "Rabbi Cohen's administrative ability has been shown to be successful."<sup>139</sup> He carefully prepared rosters allocating ministerial tasks amongst all the clergy of the congregation who, besides himself, were the Revs. Abraham David Wolinski and Philip Philippstein, veterans who had served the synagogue since the early 1880s; the Rev. Marcus Einfeld, appointed in 1909; and the Rev. Leib Aisack Falk, appointed in 1922. He often complained, however, that they did not give him adequate support and respect. One minister he called an "old man of the sea".<sup>140</sup> Another described as "a subordinate who looks at everything from a different angle".<sup>141</sup> With the arrival of a third, who asserted he had "come out to uphold orthodoxy," Cohen felt himself to be "sitting on the edge of a volcano".<sup>142</sup> As head of the Beth Din, Cohen co-opted them as "assessors" to assist him in handling ecclesiastical cases, but complained that they did not always keep Beth Din proceedings confidential.<sup>143</sup>

A major problem was that the Great was the only permanent synagogue in Sydney until 1913, and it was the only congregation with official incumbent clergy. It, therefore, had to provide ministerial services for thousands of Jews throughout the city and state, whether they were members of the synagogue or not. In 1911, when there were 7660 Jews in New South Wales,<sup>144</sup> less than half of the Jews of Sydney attended services (at the Great or the overflow services at Newtown, the Baron de Hirsch Rooms and the Hebrew Relief Society) on the Day of Atonement.<sup>145</sup> The need for additional synagogues and more clergy was clear. When suburban congregations came into being, their lay leaders and ministers came to Cohen and the leadership of the Great for assistance and advice, but felt that the Great was trying to dominate them. Thus, moves to establish a United Synagogue of New South Wales in the 1920s failed because of resentment at the size and strength of the Great and a feeling that it was "dominated by people of social position," making relations with other congregations into a "distinct class war".<sup>146</sup>

Cohen for his part feared that the ministers appointed by other synagogues generally lacked training and even tact, and urged that they accept his guidance to ensure that they did nothing which would



affect the good name of the Jewish community or contravene Jewish law. Deploring a tendency to appoint "other than British-trained men", he pointed out what he called

. . . the calamitous effect, on the Jewish reputation and status, of any and every action or utterance of persons in such a responsible position, which may run counter to the legitimate feelings, the conventions, or even only the prejudices, of the majority amongst whom our lives here have to be lived.<sup>147</sup>

Whilst all the ministers made public protestations of patriotism,<sup>148</sup> the "other than British-trained men" and the generally more traditionalist groups they served, felt that Cohen and the Great were too anglicised and that they were more concerned with raising the status of the Jews in gentile eyes than with increasing Jewish commitment.<sup>149</sup> The Great Synagogue itself did not lack its own traditionalist lobby, not necessarily composed of recent immigrants. Cohen was on bad terms with a number of this group; one of its vocal members he called "his lordship . . . amateur rabbi . . . swelled head."<sup>150</sup> Cohen resented the attempts of such people to put pressure on him, and at one annual general meeting the president commented, "There has been too much dictation on the part of well-meaning laymen to lay down the Jewish law to their spiritual leaders."<sup>151</sup> This did not solve the problem, and in welcoming the appointment of Sydney's second rabbi, Rabbi Gedaliah Kirsner, to the Eastern Suburbs Central Synagogue, Cohen spoke of ignorant people who were "sadly prone to leap into the judgment seat and attempt to instruct one whom a college of experts had certified to be the competent instructor."<sup>152</sup>

One attempt to defy Cohen's rabbinical authority caused much controversy in the early 1930s and led to the final establishment of a co-ordinating body of synagogues. The small independent Machseki Hadas congregation in Bondi had appointed as its minister a man who was said to be solemnising marriages, accepting proselytes and acting as a Shochet without the rabbi's authorisation. When warnings and pronouncements of various kinds failed to restrain the Machseki Hadas, the Beth Din unanimously decided that the minister whom the congregation had appointed was "incompetent to act as Jewish Minister for entire lack of due Hebrew knowledge and training."<sup>153</sup> Finally the Beth Din together with the lay leaders of the congregations brought into being a N.S.W. Congregational Advisory Board comprising "every consenting congregation in this State which has at its head a Minister recognised by the Ecclesiastical Board."<sup>154</sup>



Relationships between Cohen and his lay leaders were generally very cordial but there persisted an ambiguity on the scope of his rabbinic prerogatives. As head of the ministry of the congregation he supervised the ministerial work of the other clergy, but the board frequently insisted that it or at least its president had a measure of authority over the rabbi.

Cohen, as was customary in Anglo-Jewish congregations, had been appointed by congregational vote, and his salary and terms of employment were fixed by the board. The extent to which he was constitutionally bound to adhere to board directives was not clearly defined. Though the board re-affirmed from time to time that on religious matters, "the Rabbi's opinion . . . is the authority for the Board to act upon,"<sup>155</sup> Cohen complained that the board tended to usurp his prerogatives, for instance in laying down criteria by which applicants for conversion to Judaism should be measured.<sup>156</sup> He complained, "I continually find my honest decisions contradicted and my lawful authority contemptuously flouted."<sup>157</sup> He suspected that because his predecessor had not been a rabbi, the board had not been used to having rabbinic decisions made locally<sup>158</sup> – it sometimes even appealed to the Chief Rabbi in London when Cohen had already given them a ruling.<sup>159</sup>

Whilst tension of this kind usually involved religious questions or the problem of which questions were religious and which were not, it was particularly in relation to his public statements that the board attempted to advise and even direct him. At first the instances of this policy appear innocuous. In 1909 the board resolved:

That no information be given to the Press without being first submitted to the President, as at times, notices of matters appear in the *Hebrew Standard*, of which the members of the Board are not cognisant, and consequently when questioned, they are placed in an awkward predicament.<sup>160</sup>

Cohen was most upset and replied:

What grounds has the Board, with its full knowledge of me, for so suspecting my judgment or good faith? Surely it would be more reasonable for the Board, as well as worthy of it and of me, to credit with some discretion and common sense a minister on the point of completing twenty-five years of untarnished service.<sup>161</sup>

This evoked a conciliatory letter:

The Board has every confidence in your ability, judgment and experience, but at the same time thinks it as well that the Chief Minister, whoever he may be, should confer with the President in an emergency.<sup>162</sup>

In the 1920s Cohen's involvement in Zionist controversies led to the issue being renewed. The Zionist question aroused strong feelings on both sides and when Cohen told the president that he might find it necessary "to defend with equal publicity principles which to the less assertive majority of Sydney Jews are still sacred and precious,"<sup>163</sup> he was advised, "I would suggest your walking very warily."<sup>164</sup> Cohen promised not to "reveal internal differences outside without proper consultation" but insisted that something had to be done to counter what he called "irresponsible coteries."<sup>165</sup> A few months later after Cohen had written (on a subject unconnected with Zionist matters) to the Sydney Morning Herald, the board once again requested that "as a matter of principle and prudence" he should "submit for the 'O.K.' of whoever may be President any future press copy, written in your official capacity as our ecclesiastical head."<sup>166</sup> He explained that his letter had been written in a private capacity as a student of the subject, but agreed to follow the board's advice in future.<sup>167</sup>



## 8 . PUBLIC FIGURE

With his combination of handsome appearance, intellectual ability, personal dignity, social graces and proven patriotism Cohen as a public figure and Jewish spokesman was widely known and highly respected in many circles. So esteemed was he that when on occasion he made public statements with which some in the Jewish community disagreed, his critics were apprehensive lest it be thought that because it was Rabbi Cohen who had spoken, his were the opinions of every Jew. It was for this reason that many Jews were alarmed when he told James Scullin, the prime minister, that a Zionist demonstration was not necessarily representative of the thinking of the Jewish community.<sup>168</sup>

On the whole even those who disagreed with his views were proud of his ability as an ambassador. Though the 1920s and early 1930s might have witnessed significant antisemitism in Australia by reason of Jewish immigration, the economic depression and the rise of Hitlerism, the *Australian Jewish Chronicle* could acknowledge in 1925 that "in Australia, we are little touched by any Anti-Semitic feeling,"<sup>169</sup> and Suzanne Rutland, surveying the period as a whole, could say that Sydney Jewry was "undisturbed . . . by anti-Semitism."<sup>170</sup> Australian Jewry enjoyed a high degree of acceptance in the general society. Jews had been part of the fabric of Australian life from First Fleet days and Jewish participation in public life, especially during Cohen's ministry when the national heroes included Sir John Monash and Sir Isaac Isaacs, was out of all proportion to the percentage of Jews in the Australian population. It has also been suggested that "for generations Jews in Australia were sheltered by the conflict between Catholic and Protestant."<sup>171</sup> But a measure of credit for the lack of antisemitism is also due to Rabbi Cohen, whose careful concern that the Jewish image in Australia should be positive and patriotic was a feature of his Sydney career. A 1933 report stated that "the dignity and restraint of Rabbi Cohen's attitude . . . had not alone warded off threatened complications for Sydney, but had actually made it many new and powerful friends."<sup>172</sup>

Tributes to him praised not only his behind-the-scenes diplomacy but also the quality of the addresses he gave from public platforms on national occasions. A comment on his 1924 Empire Day speech is typical:

Rabbi Cohen's remarks upon that occasion explained the Jewish attitude to war and humanity so ably



that they were greeted as the worthiest of Empire Day utterances, and . . . did good in interpreting the Jew better to his non-Jewish fellow citizen.<sup>173</sup>

The image he sought to project was that of a community of Jewish Britons on Australian soil. He saw Australian and British identity as more or less synonymous. Not for him the suggestion that Australian nationalism should be separated from Empire loyalty, as was the case with the Irish in Australia, especially during the First World War.<sup>174</sup> For him an Australian was a Briton overseas. In 1908 the American fleet visited Sydney and the Great Synagogue welcomed uniformed officers and men at the Sabbath service; Cohen spoke in his sermon of "what the sea means to the far-flung Empire to which we belong; how it binds us . . . to the little islands across the globe which we love and in whose glory we glory."<sup>175</sup>

He believed Jews appreciated England even more than did gentiles. In his Empire Day address to children in 1924 he said:

Think of the position of other Jews, not brought up beneath this banner of freedom as you are . . . How warm must be your reverence and affection for the flag under whose folds you enjoy all the rights of the rest around you . . . We British Jews indeed, who love the privilege of fully serving the Empire over which this flag waves, can none of us be too zealous, too generous, too devoted, in her service.<sup>176</sup>

And on another occasion he warned:

The decay of the Empire, or the planting of a foreign flag on its Australian territories, would prove a greater calamity and woe to the Jews even than to their gentile fellow-countrymen.<sup>177</sup>

This concept reflects Jewish gratitude for the haven England had provided for Jewish victims of persecution. All sections of the community supported these views. Foreign-born Jews with personal experience of oppression in other countries echoed the words of the Rev. Marcus Einfeld, born in Galicia, who said when he came back to Australia from an overseas trip,

What an immense privilege it was to live in a country like Australia where the best of all the conditions obtained under the British flag.<sup>178</sup>



Einfeld had in fact proudly given the address at the Great Synagogue to mark the coronation of George V in 1911, whilst Cohen himself, on a visit to London, gave the coronation sermon at the Great Synagogue, Duke's Place, in place of the Chief Rabbi who was ill.<sup>179</sup>

Though the community supported Cohen's love of Britain they sometimes criticised the extent to which he went in expressing it, such as in 1927 when the *Australian Jewish Chronicle* carried a letter from a congregant of the Great Synagogue who said that the festival of Shavuot<sup>180</sup> was not the right occasion to sing the National Anthem in the Synagogue.<sup>181</sup> On a more serious note, many were irritated and even scandalised by Cohen's suggestion that gentiles might suspect Jews of lacking patriotism if they supported Zionism.<sup>182</sup>

He stressed national loyalty and civic duty both for its own sake and as a counsel of prudence. He advised Jews not to speak foreign languages in the street or to hold weddings or dances on Sundays, as both might arouse the feelings of non-Jewish neighbours.<sup>183</sup> He felt the formation of a Yiddish-speaking club might lead to the creation of a Jewish ghetto and irritate gentile fellow-citizens.<sup>184</sup> On such issues he was generally supported by the communal leaders as well as by the Jewish press.<sup>185</sup>

The expression of patriotism which he stressed most, in Australia as in England, was that of national defence. Though he had been the first Jewish chaplain in England, his was the second Jewish chaplaincy commission in Australia; the first had gone in 1908 to Jacob Danglow of Melbourne. But even before Cohen himself became a chaplain in 1909,<sup>186</sup> he had already taken an initiative in arranging Chanukah military services, though on a smaller scale than in London. The first such service was in 1907. The service on 1 January 1911 was held on the day on which the new Defence Act came into force. Welcoming the Act, Cohen declared:

In the spirit of an act of worship, in humble reverence and sacred dedication, should our youths between thirteen and seventeen years of age today who have the honour of being the pioneers in this new development of British citizenship, within the next few weeks register their names. May they never forget that they are called upon to uphold not only their country's political independence, but still more her moral ideals of liberty and equal opportunity.<sup>187</sup>

Other Jewish ministers shared his view. In Western Australia, for instance, the Rev. David I. Freedman used the same festival of Chanukah



to utter a very similar message.<sup>188</sup> On all the occasions when military services were held the synagogue presented an impressive appearance with the many-coloured uniforms of the officers and men. Gentile dignitaries were always present in some numbers.

As a chaplain Cohen exerted himself, as he assured his president, to see that when Jews were in camp they should enjoy "the arrangements which in my English experiences enables Jews to effect a working compromise between their religious and their patriotic obligations."<sup>189</sup>

With the outbreak of war in 1914 he wanted to go on active service. Urging enlistment, he told his congregation in 1915:

It is not for me to judge any individuals or to ask others to do what I am not prepared to do myself. All the young men of my own family are already on service; and if the congregation will permit me, and the authorities accept me, I am quite willing to proceed to the Dardanelles and minister to my brethren there.<sup>190</sup>

The board declined to release him and in any case the military authorities would probably have rejected him as too old, at 52, to go on active service. In consultation with Rabbi Dr Joseph Abrahams of Melbourne he supported the offer of an overseas posting to Jacob Danglow of Melbourne, whose congregation would not release him at that stage though they did later in the war. Hence D.I. Freedman of Perth proceeded overseas.<sup>191</sup> At home in Australia, Cohen conducted intercession services, added a prayer for the Australian troops to his weekly Sabbath services, and personally visited and consoled bereaved families. He energetically supported the recruiting campaigns, curtailing some of his normal activities in order to devote himself to the cause. Supported by the Jewish community, he favoured conscription. Like many Protestant advocates of compulsory enlistment, he saw support of the war effort as an act of religious virtue, in contrast to the Catholics who were divided on the issue with even the supporters of conscription being motivated by mostly pragmatic considerations.<sup>192</sup> Cohen's theological endorsement of the war effort is seen in this flight of romanticism:

We Australian Jews are moved by the same love for freedom and devotion to British ideals as have stirred our brethren in the Old Country to sent to the front as many as nine hundred officers and twelve thousand other ranks from their own total of less than a quarter of a million souls . . . This is not merely a war of defence against torturers of



women and slayers of babes, it is a veritable Holy War, a war on the side of holiness against the cynical infringement of those Ten Commandments we read from the Scroll this morning.<sup>193</sup>

His concern for the wellbeing of Jewish members of the forces continued long after the cessation of hostilities and brought him in 1929 a promotion to the equivalent rank of colonel and the award of the V.D. (Volunteer Decoration).<sup>194</sup>

His stress on participation in general society did not imply unconditional surrender or integration at all costs. He reserved the right to criticise prevailing trends and fashions. Preaching in 1909 on "The Dangers of Indiscriminate Society," he declared:

It is not always the pleasant thing, or the entertaining thing, to show all that moral and social fastidiousness which Judaism calls for; and to do so invariably exposes us to the mockery of worldly people and the sneers of the free and easy.<sup>195</sup>

Speaking the following year on "Purity and Innocence," he said:

The streets, the newspapers, positively force upon us some familiarity with evil . . . financial rewards to hulking muscularity and its unscrupulous exploiters . . . Harm does not necessarily follow from the mere knowledge of evil . . . but knowledge which participates in the evil, and so helps to confirm and establish it – that is the thing which works the harm.<sup>196</sup>

He objected to women appearing "half naked" at wedding ceremonies.<sup>197</sup> "Despite many years of personal protest (and refusal to officiate in extreme cases)," he wrote to his president, "bare feminine backs are still frequent in Synagogue . . ."<sup>198</sup> He did not go as far as did some Christian clergymen in objecting to public dances; what worried him was that dances at the Maccabean Hall might disturb the neighbours on a Sunday.<sup>199</sup>

He urged that legislative or administrative provision be made to enable Jews to observe their religion without hindrance. Thus he advocated an Australian equivalent of the British Factory Acts, allowing Sabbath-observing Jews to make up on Sundays the work they missed on Saturdays.<sup>200</sup> He made representations to the authorities in connection with the holding of Jewish funerals on Sundays.<sup>201</sup> He



planned to tell a Royal Commission that if shops closed at noon on Saturday more people would shop on Friday night, which would imperil the Jewish Friday evening celebration of the Sabbath, but he decided to take no action because he was ashamed that so few Jews kept the Sabbath strictly.<sup>202</sup>

He represented a very small religious denomination but such was his own and the Jewish community's standing that he was always counted amongst the leading Sydney churchmen. But his willingness to co-operate with church leaders was not without its limits. In 1931 the Council of Churches invited his co-operation in one of its campaigns. He informed his president that he preferred to retain "friendly independence



*Rabbi Cohen joins Christian clergy in consecrating a scouts' memorial chapel at Pennant Hills, New South Wales.*



of action":

There was an original Council open to all religionists, and with that I gladly worked. But it was eventually dissolved in favour of a Council deliberately limited to Protestant sects (as indeed indicated in its letter-heading), and our representative was no longer welcomed. In these circumstances, and as the present Council is sometimes more puritanical than Judaism justifies, I think it better to continue in friendly independence of action.<sup>203</sup>

He did not hesitate to formulate a Jewish response when Christian theological issues became matters of public controversy. Discussing in a sermon the ninth chapter of Isaiah with its statement, "Unto us a son is born, unto us a son is given," he said:

This rendering tears away these verses from the plain sense of the rest of the passage . . . What the Prophet was discussing was surely not some distant age, but the immediate escape of the little hill-kingdom of Judah . . . It is doing . . . an injustice to snatch out a verse here and there, and apply it to quite another time and person, and quite different objects and ideas, from those of which the sacred author is obviously speaking in the rest of the passage.<sup>204</sup>

Speaking on "Spiritual Healing," he said:

Judaism bids us to rely not on mystic rites and dramatic invocations, but on the reverent utilisation of those Laws of God in Nature which it is the function of medical science to investigate and to apply . . . It is not for us to criticise our neighbours' faith or their religious methods . . . We hold our own ideas; but we grant the same right to others as well as ourselves.<sup>205</sup>

A protracted Jewish controversy followed his efforts to explain the Jewish interpretation of texts used in Christianity to teach the concept of the virgin birth. He argued that the Christian teaching arose out of a combination of legend and slipshod translation, but insisted

that though Jews had to have "fidelity in themselves," they should not lack in "courtesy towards those who preferred other interpretations."<sup>206</sup> The Melbourne paper, the *Australian Jewish Herald*, castigated Cohen for getting involved in such subjects, saying that "public criticism of matters that do not concern us will benefit nobody." The *Australian Jewish Chronicle*, which did not hesitate to hold views at variance with his on other subjects, especially Zionism, came to his defence, stating:

With the contention that it is undesirable for any controversy to be aroused that might give occasion for ill-feeling between Jews and their Christian fellow-citizens we can cordially agree; but the advice of a minister to his congregation upon any subject which is a matter of discussion in the public press must exercise their thought, can hardly be described as plunging into a public controversy . . . The fear of possible offence should not deprive Jews of the courage to stand for the soundness of the doctrines to which they cling.<sup>207</sup>

Many congregants wrote in appreciation of Cohen's motives and approach.<sup>208</sup> The *Jewish Herald* was not satisfied and returned to the fray; it had in fact often criticised him in the past, such as when a gentile reporter took notes of a sermon on the Sabbath and the *Herald* blamed Cohen for allowing or condoning the infringement of the Sabbath law which does not permit writing on the day of rest.<sup>209</sup> Attacking him again, the *Herald* urged "the duty of responsible religious leaders – particularly in Australia – not so much to show their congregants the weakness of other beliefs, as to strengthen their knowledge of their own." Again the *Chronicle* defended Cohen, stating:

The friendship by which he [the Jew in Australia] is surrounded is the most dangerous lure; and the fact that the Jew is accepted as a member of the general community makes its discussions so much a matter of interest to him, that he requires to have argument of his own, lest the argument he hears upon the religious beliefs of others causes his half-informed faith in the doctrines of his own religion to be weakened . . . The *Jewish Herald's* article has been responsible for comment in the secular press which reflects both on Rabbi Cohen and the Sydney Great Synagogue.<sup>210</sup>



The *Chronicle's* reference to the "dangerous lure" of friendship towards the Jew in Australia suggests that the policy of integration (a recent writer calls it "non-distinctiveness"<sup>211</sup>) which Cohen fostered had a paradoxical effect. On the one hand the years of Cohen's Sydney ministry were probably the golden age of Jewish integration in Australia, with one Jew (Monash) having headed the armed forces of the nation and another (Isaacs) heading the judiciary and becoming governor-general. On the other hand defection from Judaism, traditionally measured in terms of the rate of out-marriage, was reaching proportions which threatened the survival of the community. In 1891 the percentage of Jews with non-Jewish wives was 20%. This figure had risen to 23% by 1911 and to 30% in 1921, though there was a slight decline to 23% in 1933. The number of Jewish women with non-Jewish husbands also increased. In 1891 only 7% of Jewish women had married out of the faith; by 1911 the figure was 13% and in 1921, 16%, with a slight decrease to 13% in 1933.<sup>212</sup> Further, between 1921 and 1933 the overall size of the community remained static: the numbers of Jews in New South Wales were 6,447 in 1901, 7,660 in 1911, 10,150 in 1921 and 10,305 in 1933. It is known that in the 1920s there was some Jewish immigration, notably from Palestine and Eastern Europe; hence the fact that the size of the community did not grow in this decade can be explained in terms of losses through out-marriage and an inadequate birth rate. Paradoxically, therefore, the position of Jews in Australian society had grown stronger whilst the position of Judaism amongst Australian Jews had weakened.

Cohen was by no means unaware of the problem. He welcomed the establishment of the Maccabean Hall as a social and community centre.<sup>213</sup> He continued to urge more and better Jewish education.<sup>214</sup> He advocated increased synagogue accommodation, even to the extent of making the Great Synagogue into a three-tiered building.<sup>215</sup> He insisted that ministers needed to be qualified in wider respects than merely the conducting of services.<sup>216</sup> Three concepts recur in his thinking. The first is that religious institutions run by "foreign" Jews would not attract the unattached.<sup>217</sup> The second is that it was the needs of the young people of the community which had to be considered.<sup>218</sup> The third is that the minority who objected to modernisation of the Synagogue ritual should not be unduly heeded.<sup>219</sup> All three come together in a lengthy letter sent to his president in 1931:

The Board and I are united in desiring to maintain Jewish historical continuity whilst actively combatting the drift of the younger generations from the anchorage of the Synagogue, due (as my recent observation everywhere so forcibly impressed on

me) not so much to change of doctrine or diminution of reverence, as to altered social environment and enhanced opportunities for the cultivation of aesthetic tastes. It was my definite impression round the world that where the fixed habits of the more pious among the older generation were alone considered, the decay after them of Jewish sentiment was already apparent; but where mutual sacrifice was made to consider the tendencies of all sections, and more particularly the changed outlook of the young, the continuance of Jewish vigour was already seen to be definitely secured.

So our own efforts, carefully considered though be the permissibility of what we propose, will fail in their lofty intention if we pay undue deference to the minority who are disturbed by every change, without regard to its motives or practical merits.<sup>220</sup>

It is to the type of Judaism that he believed would attract and retain his congregants, and especially the youth, that the next chapter addresses itself.



## 9 . RELIGIOUS VIEWS

In many ways Cohen was a classical representative of the Anglo-Jewish ministry of the Hermann Adler era. The two Adlers, father and so, had occupied the Chief Rabbinate from 1845 to 1911, developing a centralised synagogue system which emphasised pastoral outreach, decorous worship and religious instruction in pulpit and classroom. Though some of their ministers, like Cohen, were men of intellectual capacity and learning, the stress was less on the academic than on the functional aspects of their calling. From the two extremes, however, there was mounting unrest and Israel Zangwill wrote that the Rabbinate was experiencing "grave difficulties in reconciling all parties to its rule" and "could scarcely" do aught else than emit sonorous platitudes and remain in office."<sup>221</sup> From the right came the accusations of the strictly orthodox, many of them recent arrivals from Eastern Europe, that the Rabbinate was too compromising and Jewish clergymen in Western clerical garb with the title "The Reverend" could inspire no confidence.<sup>222</sup>

From the left came the radical theology of Claude Goldsmid Montefiore, who argued that "the Bible contains the highest truth, but not every word of the Bible is true."<sup>223</sup> The mainstream congregations were moved to passion by neither argument but concerned themselves much more with the externalities of synagogue worship, debating the pros and cons of what was dubbed "reform of the ritual." It was within this context that Cohen was found, both in London and in Sydney. Soon after he arrived in Australia he spoke of "great divergencies known as Orthodoxy and Reform . . . strenuously fighting after supreme authority . . . We . . . stand perhaps midway between the extremes."<sup>224</sup> His critical use of the word Orthodoxy is unfortunate, for his published sermons mark him out as theologically traditional, and from the inception of his Sydney ministry he stressed the indispensability of the Sabbath and dietary laws and other observances of traditional Judaism.

Three illustrations of the traditionalism of his theology may be given. On Biblical criticism he said:

These temporary and constantly changing controversies in no way affect for us Jews the authority of the Bible. That authority is unshakably based upon the Torah's own sublimity and commanding truth.<sup>225</sup>

On evolution:

No true follower of Jewish tradition will check such enquiries . . . Judaism, unlike some other faiths, is not dependent upon any belief in the miraculous and the supernatural . . . The modern idea of evolution is not excluded by the Biblical idea of Creation, for the universe is there stated to have been produced by successive acts of creation in systematic order.<sup>226</sup>

On the problem of suffering:

We do not know what purpose the Master Hand has in view when we are called upon to suffer the knocks and chiselling of His fashioning in His service.<sup>227</sup>

And on another occasion he proclaimed that through the experience of calamity (he was referring to a recent earthquake and tidal wave which had caused havoc with life and property), "men come to hear 'the voice of the Lord upon the mighty waters'".<sup>228</sup>

Many of his sermons urge the observance of the Sabbath and dietary laws; indeed within two months of his arrival in Sydney he bluntly declared that the neglect of the dietary laws was "perhaps the greatest religious blemish of Sydney Jewry,"<sup>229</sup> though the *Australian Jewish Chronicle* said twenty years later,

The Rabbi has been amongst us so long that no doubt he has grown used to the deplorable disregard of these important regulations which at that time dismayed and appalled him; but it is regrettable to have to say that the position is very little, if at all, improved.<sup>230</sup>

He declares himself disappointed that

The pious custom of attending Service at Synagogue on the *Jahrzeit*<sup>231</sup> is unhappily so very little observed in our City, and the recent attempt we made to resuscitate it was received with such emphatic indifference, that I think no useful purpose would be served by bringing Dr. Adler's communication [on the subject] to the notice of our members.<sup>232</sup>



Yet by 1931 he is complaining about "certain hostile circles" in which he was considered "an insanely reform Rabbi".<sup>233</sup> The "reform" tendencies of which he was accused do not appear on the whole to have manifested themselves outside the confines of liturgical modification, though there are exceptions such as his readiness to permit a Cohen to marry a Jewess (such as a divorcee),

... to whom his marriage, if irregular under ancient precautions, nevertheless holds good when celebrated. To impose such precautions upon a community which lacks the European and American safety-valves of synagogues that ignore them, and which refuses to see the force of them, is to court an explosion which the conciliatory policy here has happily hitherto avoided.<sup>234</sup>

There is also the implication in some of his letters that he would not have minded being somewhat more lenient than the law allowed. Writing to Sir Samuel Cohen in 1929 he said:

My *personal* views about certain old forms are rather in agreement with your own, yet I am *officially* bound to interpret faithfully the established rules, and not to vary from custom even where permissible without the formal consent of the Board.<sup>235</sup>

Though his reformist tendencies, such as they were, expressed themselves mostly in liturgical matters, some of the innovations he favoured (but was not always able to introduce) are of sufficient moment to have evoked the cry in a letter to the *Australian Jewish Chronicle*, "New South Wales requires a Rabbi who advocates traditional Judaism only".<sup>236</sup>

His motives, as reiterated in countless letters written throughout his ministry, were the provision of services that were as short, dignified and decorous as possible. The most minor of details of services is carefully noted and assessed. He believes the posture of the other clergy is poor, referring to the "clumsy rolling walk of certain officials" and "a languid lolling up on the Almemmar".<sup>237</sup> He objects that for want of a beadle to hand out prayer books, a congregation had to sit "mum, glum and dumb".<sup>238</sup> He is aghast to find that mothers who come to say prayers of thanksgiving after childbirth have no minister in attendance to help them and is scathing about the fact that "West the sweeper has been the officiating minister".<sup>239</sup>

Whilst understanding that there was a "risk which attends every Reform",<sup>240</sup> he expressed himself in favour of a number of liturgical



initiatives of a major kind. From the range of subjects which figure in his correspondence files, four are here selected for examination in detail.

#### (a) The place of the *Bimah* or readers' desk in the synagogue

The original arrangement of the Great Synagogue had the *Bimah* in the traditional position in the centre of the building, with the seats grouped around it. In order to introduce additional seating, Cohen recommended that the *Bimah* be moved and combined with the pulpit on the steps leading up to the Ark.<sup>241</sup> The authoritative code of Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) explained the siting of the *Bimah* in the centre of the synagogue so that the whole congregation can hear the reader of the Torah or the preacher, though other authorities such as Joseph Karo condoned alternative arrangements.<sup>242</sup> A new factor emerged with the rise of the Jewish Reform movement. When some of the early Reformers built synagogues with the *Bimah* next to the Ark, traditionalists accused them of imitating the practice of Christian churches with the altar at the east end. In 1866, the orthodox rabbis of Hungary and Galicia issued an edict forbidding any change from established practice.<sup>243</sup> In London the first Orthodox synagogue to be built with a combined *Bimah* and pulpit was Hampstead, and this may have been the model Cohen had in mind.<sup>244</sup>

His innovation did not appear to arouse major controversy at the time. One "Z.Z." wrote to the *Hebrew Standard* to say there was no need to seek European precedents for the innovation as the *Sydney Herald* had said in 1842 when reporting on the plans for the York Street Synagogue:

Immediately in front of the Ark, on a platform raised four steps above the level of the floor, will be the seat and table for the rabbi and readers; the platform having four semicircular sides, each two feet six inches in diameter.<sup>245</sup>

It is not known whether this proposal had been inspired by knowledge of any European Reform precedents. It may simply have commended itself on pragmatic architectural grounds. In the event, it appears that the plan was changed and the reading desk was erected in the centre of the building.<sup>246</sup> In 1906 the innovation met some opposition but was not specially contentious. However, the issue was canvassed again in the 1920s when the Eastern Suburbs Central Synagogue built a synagogue in Bondi. Elias Green protested that plans to group the Ark and *Bimah* together were contrary to the principles of traditional



Judaism on which the congregation was founded.<sup>247</sup> The secretary of the congregation replied that the congregation had asked the *Beth Din* headed by Rabbi Cohen for a ruling:

In due course the Beth Din decided that Mr. Green was wrong, and that the building is being built in the correct manner according to the plans and traditions of Jewish Orthodoxy.<sup>248</sup>

The debate continued with several letters to the *Jewish Chronicle* from the Rev. Isack Morris of Newcastle who saw no objection to the *Bimah* being adjacent to the Ark and in fact the Newcastle Synagogue erected in 1927 followed this pattern.<sup>249</sup>

### (b) Organ music in the synagogue

Instrumental music had been an integral feature of worship on Sabbaths and other days in the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, but had been abandoned after the Temple was destroyed. The use of musical instruments on the Sabbath was henceforth forbidden, but the early Reform movement introduced the organ into services at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Their innovation was trenchantly condemned by orthodox rabbis in a work called *Eleh Divrei Hab'rit* published in Altona in 1819. It is said that thereafter every community in Central Europe was divided into Orthodox and "Organ" congregations.<sup>250</sup>

In London, Cohen may have tacitly approved the Borough Synagogue's application to the Chief Rabbi for permission to employ an organ on Sabbaths on the basis that the type of instrument used and abandoned in ancient days was quite different.<sup>251</sup> The Chief Rabbi would not agree, but there must have been a more than localised interest as Dr Adler was heard to say to the warden of the Bayswater Synagogue, George Bendon: "Mr. Bendon complied with this request, and the question of an organ at Bayswater faded into thin air."<sup>252</sup>

Several times Cohen expressed lenient views on the subject in Sydney. The matter was referred to Chief Rabbi J.H. Hertz. His reply quotes the assurance of the president of the Great Synagogue, Samuel S. Cohen, that the synagogue board was "unanimous in its desire to retain the orthodox status" of the congregation. He proceeds to deal with various suggestions which the Great Synagogue has put before him for an opinion and judges them according to whether they would compromise that orthodox status. Concerning the organ he advances three arguments:

a. The organ is "the privileged Church instrument" . . . consequently its use is prohibited at Jewish services . . .

b. The playing of the organ involves "work" prohibited on the Sabbath . . .

c. It is clear that for your Congregation to sanction the playing of the organ at statutory Divine Services would at once transform your body into a Reform Congregation. No Orthodox Synagogue in England has ever thus separated itself from the body of Traditional Judaism. One further vital consideration. On the Continent, this innovation has invariably been the source of schism and disruption in the communities. A large portion of your own members would also, I am sure, strongly resent the introduction of an organ on Sabbaths and Festivals; whereas the most devout element – those most loyal in their Synagogue attendance – would no doubt be altogether driven away. And the maintenance of congregational peace is the highest duty of every Jew.<sup>253</sup>

Cohen, with some board of management support, however, kept coming back and re-opening the question. In 1928 the board asked him to state an opinion in detail. Only part of his reply is extant; it explains,

It is not easy to find an unbiased opinion on the permissibility of introducing the organ into synagogue, because the points of Jewish law involved have been clouded by many prejudices imported into the question.

He argues that because an instrument of the type of the organ was used in the Temple, the early Church objected to the use of the instrument as Judaising. When the Catholic Church stressed music, the Reformation discarded the organ as one of the "vilest remnants of Popery." Now that the organ is used far beyond the confines of religious worship, the old objections have disappeared.

Except in reactionary circles, organ music is now introduced everywhere into the Synagogue itself at any week-day celebration desired. And not only



“reform” synagogues nowadays use the organ also on Sabbaths and Festivals. Leaving the “conservative” congregations of America out of consideration, travelled members of the Board will remember synagogues on the Continent of Europe, even more “orthodox” in ritual than our own, where the organ may be heard on Sabbaths as well as week days.<sup>254</sup>

### (c) The Triennial Cycle of Torah Readings

Many letters between Cohen and his presidents concerned themselves with ways of shortening Sabbath services. One of the major problems that was rehearsed was the length of the weekly lesson from the Torah. The division of the Five Books of Moses into weekly lectionaries to be completed in the course of twelve months required congregations to accept readings that lasted half an hour or more at a time. During the influenza “pandemic” shortly after the end of the First World War, services were abbreviated and the Great Synagogue resorted to the Triennial Cycle, whereby the Pentateuch was completed in three years instead of one, as had been the custom of ancient Palestine before the Babylonian custom of an annual cycle became widespread, even in Palestine, by about the eighth century.<sup>255</sup> In 1912 the congregation of the New West End Synagogue, London, had adopted a resolution stating:

That a Committee be appointed to consider the possibility and desirability of introducing the Reading of the Scriptures in the Synagogue in a Triennial Cycle, and to report thereon.

The Committee carried out a detailed enquiry and heard expert witnesses, producing a report in 1913 to the effect that the proposal was advantageous but impracticable “owing to the cast-iron constitution of the United Synagogue. We are bound to admit that the new system of reading the Law would not . . . receive the consent of the ecclesiastical authorities.”<sup>256</sup>

In Hobart and Adelaide the congregations had introduced a form of Triennial Cycle whilst remaining under the jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbi in London and Cohen was favourably disposed to a similar modification:

There remains only for consideration the Reading of the Law, the present amount of which is so often

excessive, and which *can* be shortened in full accordance with "statutory" rule. We did so shorten it during the recent Influenza epidemic – and the heavens did not fall.<sup>257</sup>

Instead of making the innovation himself he asked his president to write to the Chief Rabbi. The letter stated:

Dis-satisfaction is persistently expressed with the length of the Sabbath morning Services. This is probably engendered by a feeling of personal discomfort, unknown in England, but inevitable in a sub-tropical climate . . .

While my Board is unanimous in its desire to retain the orthodox status of the congregation, the justice of the complaint in question cannot be denied.

I am aware that the tri-ennial Reading of the Law is not general, but what I would much like to know is whether its adoption is consistent with the liturgy of a congregation recognising the jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbi.<sup>258</sup>

The Chief Rabbi replied:

No orthodox Congregation in the United Kingdom has introduced the Triennial Cycle; and its adoption is certainly not consistent with the liturgy of the congregation under the jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbinate. Should the proposal come before your congregation as a body, I must ask you kindly to acquaint them with the fact that I have the strongest objection to such a change.<sup>259</sup>

Cohen was not persuaded and argued, "Australian congregations already long using the Triennial Cycle have all the time been and still are 'under the jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbi'."<sup>260</sup> When the board raised the matter with him again in 1928, he gave much historical detail as to the background of the Triennial Cycle concluding that it was not in itself prohibited and arguing that the regulations governing Jewish worship in England did not automatically apply in Australia:



In Sydney, freedom to diverge . . . was from the first asserted by the decision of the original congregation (published in 1833) that here the Form of Service "shall be the same as read by the German Jews in England, subject to such curtailments, modifications and abridgements as may be found necessary by the committee"; and after the erection of the Sydney Synagogue in 1844, on the revision of its Laws in 1851, such local liberty was again asserted . . . The Laws of the present congregation limit reference to the Form of Service in the Great Synagogue to a restriction on the Chief Minister (Law 46) not to introduce or permit any alteration without the sanction of the Board . . .

It would accordingly appear permissible in our synagogue to consider the introduction of the Triennial Reading of the Law.<sup>261</sup>

Nonetheless the proposal was not proceeded with, presumably because of the combined weight of opposition from the Chief Rabbi in England and traditionalists on the local scene.

#### (d) *The Amendment of Kol Nidre*

The Day of Atonement commences at sunset with the solemn chanting of *Kol Nidre*, an Aramaic declaration that vows made to God which one is honestly incapable of fulfilling are regretted, repented and annulled. The passage was originally retrospective, as the present Sephardic text<sup>262</sup> has it, dealing with vows made from the last Day of Atonement to this; the version in use in the Great Synagogue incorporated a change made in the middle ages to give the formula effect concerning vows from this *Yom Kippur* to the next.<sup>263</sup> Cohen reported to the president early in 1931, soon after returning from a trip overseas in which he observed conditions in other communities, that he was worried that anti-Semitic suggestions that *Kol Nidre* demonstrated that one could not trust the word of a Jew, might damage the Jewish community of Australia:

I am afraid we must continue to endure unpleasant outside comment whilst the formula of the *Kol Nidre* . . . remain[s] in our Prayer Books in [its] present equivocal form, however different [its] real intention from the Gentile interpretation given to it.<sup>264</sup>

The point was argued in more detail in a subsequent letter:

In view of the deep feeling on the part of so many of our own people, that ground is given by our wording of the Kol Nidre to the idea prevalent outside, that Jews recognise mental reservations in entering into obligations, as evidenced even in friendly Australia by the recent comments on the Governor-General,<sup>265</sup> and last week a certain physician, taking oath bareheaded, some action is obviously called for. But I fear it would be inadequate to revert in our local ritual to the ancient form. Few of our people are Hebraists enough to recognise emendation of the text and a correction in one synagogue, however important, would as little meet the situation as do the explanations tucked away in certain editions of the Machzor.<sup>266</sup> If a General Meeting, on the other hand, were to carry a resolution referring the problem to the Chief Rabbi for consultation with the Conference of Anglo-Jewish Ministers, any emendation there recommended would be embodied in future editions, and meanwhile go out to all British Jewry with the desired effect of providing a public counterblast to a dangerous misunderstanding.<sup>267</sup>

*Kol Nidre* had indeed long been used as a weapon with which to beat the Jew. Jewish defence of the formula was made more difficult by the fact that great rabbinic authorities had their own reservations about it, though for Jewish legal and liturgical reasons that had nothing to do with the claims of the anti-Semites. The early Jewish reform movement expunged or altered it, retaining the melody but providing fresh words.<sup>268</sup> Cohen's suggestion was not nearly as radical. He did not favour a direct, more academic approach to the Chief Rabbi by himself, but instead "a letter from the Board . . . voicing in their own way the strong feeling among laymen as to the misleading effect of the present version."<sup>269</sup> The letter which was finally sent early in 1932 read in part:

Our laws, methods and customs are not so unalterable that a stigma on the followers of Judaism must remain for no other reason than that it had been allowed so to remain for a lengthened period. Our Holy Law continually directs us to observe the virtues of honesty, integrity, truth,



mutual consideration etc. etc. and where the reverse seems to be inculcated (as in the reading of the Kol Nidre prayer here under review) it obviously becomes the bounden duty of those in authority to have corrected what patently is an error which has crept in, or an impression created which was not intended, or that the translation does not convey the true meaning of the original. We Jews have surely more than enough to bear and the stigma on our religion created by the Kol Nidre prayer adds an additional unbearable burden.

It has been intensely humiliating to the Jews of this City that in a Law Court here it was expressed that no reliance could be placed on the oath of a Jew, which was of no value. When we are confronted with the Kol Nidre prayer how can this charge be refuted or justification presented? Whatever may be advanced as an explanation can have no force for no logical one can be formed.<sup>270</sup>

Copies of the board's letter were sent to congregations in Australia, New Zealand and England, as well as the Board of Deputies of British Jews. Relatively few replied. Of those that did consider the matter carefully, most favoured the present text with an explanatory note. The Chief Rabbi sent his reply in July 1932 and later published it as part of a note entitled "Vows and Vowing in the Light of Judaism", in the one-volume edition of his annotated Pentateuch and *Haftorahs*, explaining that these were the comments he had sent to an "overseas congregation".<sup>271</sup> His reply read:

### Kol Nidre

I am now in a position to deal with the important communication which the Board of your Synagogue communicated to me in regard to the above.

Proposed alterations in the Liturgy, even of its non-essential portions, such as those you refer to in your letter, call for the greatest care and consideration. The question of altering the Kol Nidre prayer especially bristles with difficulties. Chief among them is this: the prayer as it stands has for centuries been a weapon of malicious attack by

enemies of Israel. If, in consequence, the prayer is abolished, we are held as pleading guilty to their charges, and by our action seem to justify these charges. Historic Judaism has, therefore, ever braved these misrepresentations. Conscious of the sacredness and inviolability which attaches to an oath in Jewish Law and life, it indignantly repudiates the construction its maligners place upon this Prayer, and proclaims that the dispensation from vows in it refers only to those in which no other persons or interests are involved; that no private or public vow, promise or oath concerns another person, is implied in the Kol Nidre.

One further consideration. Recent historical studies have shown the Kol Nidre to be a unique memorial of Jewish suffering and repentance. It arose in Spain, as a result of the Jewish persecutions by the West Goths in the seventh century. Entire Jewish communities were then doomed to torture and the stake, unless they forswore their Faith, and by the most fearful oaths and abjurations bound themselves nevermore to practice any Jewish observances. In this way, even when better times came and the fury of the oppressor abated, the unfortunate members of those communities felt themselves perjured before God and man if they returned to their Holy Faith, or kept even the most sacred of its Festivals. It was to ease the conscience of these crushed and distracted men and women, that the Kol Nidre was formulated. In view of this origin of the prayer – which has only recently become known and which alone explains all its anomalies – various congregations on the Continent who had formerly abolished the Kol Nidre have reintroduced it, realising that the awakening of historic memories, and the forging of links with the past are vital factors in Jewish traditional life and worship.

However, this historical document of deepest human pathos has come down to us in two versions – one in the Ashkenazi ritual, and the other in the Sephardi. It is round the former that most of the misrepresentations cluster, especially the hideous



accusation "that in its present form the prayer directly suggests and advocates dishonest repudiation"! You fear the rise and broadcasting of these misrepresentations in your new land. Though I do not for one moment believe that any action you might take in regard to this or any other prayer would be able to stem the tide of hatred, should it – God forbid – beat against the shores of Australian Jewry, I am prepared largely to meet your desires in this direction. Should you, after you have received this letter, still desire to depart from your customary formula, I do not see any insuperable objection to your congregation adopting the Sephardi version.

With best wishes for the success and spiritual welfare of your community.

I am,

Yours sincerely,

(signed) J.H. HERTZ  
Chief Rabbi.<sup>272</sup>

Cohen gave the board an English translation of the Sephardi, retrospective version, which was viewed favourably though not in fact used that year.<sup>273</sup> Cohen later wrote urging that at least an annual announcement be made in explanation of the *Kol Nidre* which was about to be read, as "to raise a ritual question and then entirely drop it, results in unsettling the worshippers."<sup>274</sup> This appears to be the last momentum on the *Kol Nidre* question. Cohen died the following year and the board may have felt mild relief in leaving the matter in abeyance.

Cohen's innovations derived from one consistent motivation, expressed in countless letters, namely "the extent to which a policy of 'let drift' would threaten all that we Jews unite in holding dear."<sup>275</sup> With few exceptions – such as the time in 1922 when he told Jews they should not have Christmas trees but might at the same time of the year have trees called *Chanukah* trees<sup>276</sup> – the causes he advocated were such that he or his colleagues could have been comfortable in raising them with Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler, who died in 1911, even though not everything would have been conceded.<sup>277</sup> Why then did he seem to become more controversial as the years went on?

It may be that his thinking became less typical of Anglo-Jewish ministerial opinion, but this is not the whole story. The fact is that few rabbis in Anglo-Jewry had the scope for relatively independent action that he did. In England, for instance, religious decisions were made by



the Chief Rabbi and his *Beth Din* and local ministers lacked the power of decision. In his first decade or so in Sydney, Cohen correctly gauged the temper of his congregation and community. But, after the First World War, the community diversified, traditionalist elements increased and some of the ideas he believed in were almost anathema to such people. The traditionalist elements found a voice or an echo in the *Australian Jewish Chronicle*, founded in 1922 to espouse independent policies, in contrast to the long-established *Hebrew Standard* which, except for brief periods, was said to be under Rabbi Cohen's thumb.<sup>278</sup> It was the *Chronicle*, not the *Standard*, which declared in 1922:

Our congregations in Australia are nominally orthodox; that there is an element of the Reform movement about them which is hardly pleasing. Innovations that savor of Reform methods are introduced, and apparently there is no authority for them . . . The right cannot be conceded to any Minister or Rabbi, or to any congregation, to abolish any of these traditional laws which are the rock on which our religion is established . . . Weakening the foundations of our faith will effect no improvement; never was loyalty and steadfastness more needed . . . We believe that in Australia, also, the mass of the Jewish people emphatically favour the strict maintenance of traditions.<sup>279</sup>

The founder of the *Chronicle* was the Rev. A.T. Chodowski, who was on bad terms with Cohen, and it may be that he drew disaffected elements to his side, though in its editorials the paper never wrote disrespectfully about the rabbi and on occasion came to his defence.

Cohen's private correspondence, if it were available, would reveal the extent to which if at all he consulted other rabbis including the Chief Rabbi before formulating views and policies. It is known that at times he sought unanimity of policy between Melbourne and Sydney, such as on the question of conducting a service at a cremation.<sup>280</sup> Generally, though, he appears to have acted alone, though in his communications to his president and board he never laid down the law but argued a case and gave source references, thus taking his lay leadership into his confidence and often leaving final decisions for them to make on the basis of their perception of congregational needs. On questions of major importance he encouraged the congregation to write to the Chief Rabbi, though he often insisted that decisions from London were not binding in Sydney and local conditions required a different approach. There is indeed sometimes a suspicion in his letters that he believed the Chief



Rabbi had allowed himself to be swayed by right-wing pressure groups, though those who knew Chief Rabbi Hertz insist that he was not a man to submit to pressure.<sup>281</sup>

## 10 . ZIONIST CONTROVERSIES

**A**rguments for and against political Zionism – the movement which aimed “to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine secured under public law”<sup>282</sup> – embroiled the Sydney Jewish community in repeated controversies during both Cohen’s ministry and that of his successor, Rabbi Ephraim Moses Levy, though Cohen was a strong opponent and Levy a strong proponent of the cause. Cohen’s views echoed those of his mentor, Hermann Adler, though depending on the occasion he emphasised now one, now another, of Adler’s arguments. Adler favoured Zionism as a general idea. “Every believing and conforming Israelite must be a Zionist,” he said; “His heart cannot fail to beat with love and reverence for Zion.” However, for three reasons he opposed the political expression of this ideal: firstly, it was impracticable (he used terms like “fantastic” and “visionary” to describe it); secondly, it was impolitic and would “revive the false charges of incivism and lack of loyalty to our native country or the land of our adoption”; and thirdly, it was contrary to the teaching of Judaism which held that Divine intervention was necessary in order to bring about the redemption.<sup>283</sup>

In Australia there was some support for the movement, but Adler’s opposition influenced many against it. Thus in Ballarat in 1903 the Rev. I.M. Goldreich supported a motion which read, “That in the opinion of this meeting it is unwise to form a Zionist Society at the present time,” stating that “the Chief Rabbi, Dr. Adler, was among the great and learned men who were opposed to this movement.”<sup>284</sup> Alan Crown suggests that over and above any influence exerted by Adler’s opinion, Australian Jews were generally too comfortably settled to feel personally aroused by Zionist hopes.<sup>285</sup> Cohen’s predecessor, A.B. Davis, had neither supported nor opposed Zionism, but J.H. Landau opposed it bitterly.<sup>286</sup> Cohen’s position was known even before he arrived in Sydney in mid-1905. He wrote to the secretary of the Zionist League in 1904 that he was “not a political Zionist.”<sup>287</sup> This view was restated shortly after his arrival when a reception in his honour was held at the Manchester Unity Hall adjoining the Great Synagogue on 2 July 1905. Addresses of welcome were presented to him by the president of the congregation, Louis Phillips, and by all the local Jewish organisations, religious, social, educational and philanthropic. Eighteen addresses were presented in all. Acknowledging the welcome of the Zionists, he explained that his views did not accord with theirs.<sup>288</sup>

One of the major phenomena of his ministry was his influence



over the local Jewish newspaper, the *Hebrew Standard*. The paper had been established in 1895 and soon after Cohen's arrival it became his and the Great Synagogue's mouthpiece.<sup>289</sup> Cohen appears to have been responsible for the *Standard* altering its stance and becoming anti-Zionist. Years later, the editor unequivocally and proudly declared that the paper had always been anti-Zionist; not only had he forgotten the years before 1905 but he even forgot, though his statement was made in 1925, that a Zionist line had been followed earlier in that same decade by the then editor, Jonah Marks.<sup>290</sup>

For years the movement was cautious and moderate and opposition to it was low-key. For a time, Cohen supported the idea of territorialism, which advocated a Jewish settlement in the northern part of Australia or some other suitable place, and Alan Crown has suggested that the reaction to the territorial movement forced Cohen into a more actively-anti-Zionist position, though more evidence would be needed in order to substantiate this claim.<sup>291</sup> At times Cohen showed a relatively positive attitude to Zionism. He promoted the study of spoken Hebrew.<sup>292</sup> He attended memorial meetings for Theodor Herzl, founder of political Zionism.<sup>293</sup> He assisted the Young Men's Zionist Society in various ways including lectures.<sup>294</sup> He made representations to the Minister of Defence to allow funds to be remitted to the Jewish National Fund.<sup>295</sup> He assisted appeals for various causes in the Holy Land.<sup>296</sup>

But these were specifics. On the general principle he retained reservations. The third annual meeting of the Sydney Zionist Society inscribed King Edward VII in the Golden Book of the Jewish National Fund. The meeting deplored so many people's lack of enthusiasm for the movement and "much regret was expressed that the heads of the community, Rabbi Cohen and the other ministers, were antagonistic to the movement."<sup>297</sup> At a meeting of the Sydney Jewish Literary and Debating Society he said it was "most satisfactory to hear that the Zionist organisation was devoting itself mainly to practical work . . . [and] returning to saner thoughts."<sup>298</sup> His thinking, emphasising now one, now another argument, basically echoed that of Hermann Adler. He believed the top priorities should be local, not Zionist (though as time went on he was increasingly inconsistent, and in 1922 criticised his congregational board for failing to support an appeal for suffering Jews in the Ukraine.<sup>299</sup>) He stressed that Jewish redemption lay in the old paths of religion, not in "loudly advertised sectional nostrums."<sup>300</sup> He said, however, when Israel Cohen visited Australia to raise funds on behalf of the Zionist movement, that he was "still sitting on the fence, but was open to conviction." When the rabbi finally gave Israel Cohen £100 for the appeal, the emissary remarked that he "had evidently stepped down on the right side of the fence."<sup>301</sup> His



cordiality towards Israel Cohen may have had something to do with the fact that both had been students at Jews' College, though at different times; but as late as 1925 he was still saying of himself that he was "a neutral observer . . . neither a Zionist nor an anti-Zionist but simply a Jew concerned for the spiritual inheritance of Israel".<sup>302</sup>

The great turning point in the fortunes of Zionism came with the Balfour Declaration of 1917. It is said that though this statement in favour of the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine came from His Majesty's government, and even the *Hebrew Standard* permitted itself to remark on the importance of the fact of British support, Cohen did not mention the declaration from his pulpit for three years.<sup>303</sup> All he said by way of a hint that he knew there had been a Declaration was this comment in a sermon two weeks after the event:

We have heard much, in connection with the British advance in Palestine, about a restoration of that Land to an autonomous Jewish nationality. But we have heard too little about the revival or restoration of the Jews themselves.<sup>304</sup>

How Hermann Adler would have reacted had he lived to witness the events of 1917 one can only conjecture. However, Chief Rabbi J.H. Hertz, a full-throated Zionist, had boldly countered in a letter to the *Times* earlier in the year any impression that an earlier letter from two Jewish laymen who held anti-Zionist views was representative of Jewish opinion.<sup>305</sup> At a demonstration soon after the promulgation of the Declaration, he said:

The Declaration . . . fills our souls with gladness. For only on its own soil can the Jewish people live its own life, and make, as in the past it has made, its characteristic and specific contribution to the common treasure of humanity. A land focusses a people and calls forth, as nothing else can, its spiritual potentialities; and the resurrection of the Jewish nation on its own soil will re-open its sacred fountains of creative energy . . .

I consider it a rare privilege to swell the chorus of joy and gratitude at the broad humanity and far-sighted statesmanship of the men who wield the destinies of the Empire.<sup>306</sup>



The Balfour Declaration stimulated the morale of the Zionist movement everywhere including Sydney. The next few years saw the arrival of several fund-raising emissaries on behalf of the cause. One of them, Mrs Bella Pevsner, came to see Rabbi Cohen. He sent her on to his president, Samuel S. Cohen, who was also a past president of the local Zionist Society, saying:

I am from conviction not a Zionist, and I do not know why the Zionists sent this lady on to me . . . Seeing that in Brisbane, her first Australian stopping-place, she was . . . supported by the local Jewish President and the Jewish Governor<sup>307</sup> as well, I fear it would be quoted to the discredit of our Sydney community, non-Zionist as well as Zionist, if she were refused such opportunities here.<sup>308</sup>

Mrs Pevsner's endeavours appear not to have been fully successful, and the rabbi, informed that some had made him the scapegoat for her comparative failure, made certain he brought to his president's attention the fact that she had not done very well in Melbourne or Adelaide either.<sup>309</sup>

The conflict between the anti (or non-)Zionist forces spearheaded by Rabbi Cohen and the Zionist movement in Sydney was now coming into the open. That this was occurring is due to three factors:

1. Palestine had become prominent on the international stage and Jewish as well as non-Jewish interest was kindled in events there.<sup>310</sup>
2. The movement in Sydney was coming out of its (Cohen-induced?) lethargy, and the Zionist societies were becoming, at least sporadically, more active.<sup>311</sup>
3. Developments in the local Jewish press sharply focussed one, then the other cause. For five years the *Hebrew Standard* was edited by a Zionist, Jonah Marks, who did not hesitate to differ from the rabbi. Soon afterwards, the *Australian Jewish Chronicle* was founded, and took up the Zionist cause as part of its platform. The return of the *Standard* to anti-Zionist editorship coincided with the transfer of the *Chronicle* to a group of Zionist leaders, leading to the two papers publicly attacking each other over Zionist issues.<sup>312</sup>

The debates about Zionism were sometimes rational examinations of arguments such as whether Zionism fostered dual-loyalty accusations by implying that there was a conflict of interests between being a



member of a Jewish "nation" with a homeland in Palestine and at the same time being a loyal citizen of the country of one's residence; whether it was opposed to Jewish belief that redemption would come with the Messianic age; and whether it was substituting a secular for a religious emphasis in Jewish identity. Fundamentally these were the arguments that Hermann Adler had used and which in different ways were behind both classical Reform anti-Zionism<sup>313</sup> and the disapproval of some Orthodox "Protestrabbiner".<sup>314</sup> An interesting Australian tinge was given to the debate by a country Jew who wrote to the *Australian Jewish Chronicle* accusing "anti-Zionist clergymen" of adding to the spiritual burdens of Jews living away from the big cities by denying them "the great goal for which we are striving."<sup>315</sup> A paradox was pointed out by the *Chronicle*, obviously with Cohen and his followers in mind, when it said,

How, for those of us who are in the British Empire, the sneer of disloyalty can be thrown against those who believe in the creation of a strong Jewish Palestine which the British Government, by its official acts, wishes to see developed, it is hard to understand.<sup>316</sup>

The paradox was strengthened when in 1927 Sir John Monash, whom no Australian could accuse of lack of patriotism and British loyalty, became honorary president of the newly formed Zionist Federation, stating:

The British Empire has accepted the mandate for Palestine, and we who live in Australia have a double responsibility, both as Jews and citizens, to do our share in rebuilding the land of Israel and reviving the cultural and spiritual centre of Judaism.

Cohen's anti-Zionism was commented on in other countries. A Shanghai Jewish paper wrote,

It is rather strange that a community which boasts of having an orthodox minister should have been so lukewarm about Zionism. Are we to assume that the Minister is an anti-Zionist? That an orthodox Rabbi should be an anti-Zionist or even indifferent to the Zionist cause is anomalous . . . Judaism without Zionism or vice versa is unthinkable by Klal Yisrael.<sup>317</sup>



The issues involved were not all academic. Personal animosities played their part. Hinting at Cohen, the writer of a Zionist report said:

We have also our own Korah<sup>318</sup> with his followers, who are endeavouring to cause dissension among their brethren by spreading evil reports of alleged strong legal opposition and of injustice being done to the poor weak Arabs.<sup>319</sup>

Crown suggests that Cohen's attitude may have been hardened because leading churchmen such as Dean Talbot supported the movement,<sup>320</sup> but insufficient evidence is available to confirm or deny this. A more relevant factor may have been the energetic Zionist work embarked upon by Cohen's assistant, the Rev. (later Rabbi) L.A. Falk, appointed in 1922.<sup>321</sup> It has been said that Falk was "a red-hot Zionist, brought out by Morris Symonds<sup>322</sup> to counter Rabbi Cohen."<sup>323</sup> Cohen's letters certainly reveal repeated clashes with Falk, but almost always on synagogal matters and no matter how often they disagreed, Falk used to tell people, "I have a sneaking respect for the man."<sup>324</sup> Zionist questions did not cause open friction between them until some years later when, without mentioning Falk by name, Cohen said he was "less inclined than some of my friends here to consider the Jewish pulpit a suitable place for secular commemorations."<sup>325</sup>

Bearing in mind Cohen's lack of sympathy with "foreign" Jews ("his obvious dislike of those of us who spoke English with a foreign accent, a dislike which was even more accentuated if the speaker was a Zionist"<sup>326</sup>), it is important to point out that the Zionist/anti-Zionist conflict must not be seen symmetrically as an immigrants-versus-Australian issue. At least until the crisis of 1928, many of the Great Synagogue leadership, the heads of the "Australian" community, were associated with and some even enthusiastic supporters of Zionism.<sup>327</sup> Many of them, as well as all the other Jewish clergy, attended Zionist meetings from which Cohen usually absented himself, though at times he argued that his official duties took him all over Sydney and it was unfair to criticise him for not going to meetings when he was engaged upon pastoral calls to houses of mourning.<sup>328</sup>

Cohen did sense a deeper underlying significance to the conflict. He felt it raised the question of who was to govern the community, religious institutions and their leaders, or "those interested in . . . some particular angle only, usually a social, political or economic one."<sup>329</sup> He believed in addition that the religious institutions knew how to conduct themselves with dignity and did not believe in "the noise of propaganda".<sup>330</sup>

An incident on the Day of Atonement, 24 September 1928, threw the whole conflict into the sharpest of focus and for the first time posed a



direct, stark challenge to those who believed that Zionist aspirations did not create problems for citizens of the British Empire. That day, British mandatory officials in Palestine removed a partition which separated male and female worshippers at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. World Jewry joined the Jews of Palestine in indignation at this interference with freedom of worship. The Australian Zionist Federation conveyed to the government a resolution "deploring the action of certain British officials of the Palestine Government".<sup>331</sup> Rabbi Israel Brodie of the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation made a statement as president of the Federation and said:

Jews trust His Majesty's Government and know that Great Britain has always been the champion of justice. They appreciate Great Britain's friendship and help for the establishment of the Jewish National Home in Palestine, and feel sure that all necessary steps will be taken in order to remedy the deplorable mistake that has been made in Jerusalem [on the Day of Atonement].

Australia is far away from the centre of Jewish life, but its Jewry shares with their brethren in other countries both the feelings of gratitude to Great Britain and the mourning on the occasion of the happening described above. We feel sure that the Authorities of the Commonwealth will take the necessary steps on this occasion to communicate to the Home Government our feelings and requests.<sup>332</sup>

Rabbi Cohen, in a sermon entitled "The Law and the Flag", sought by implication to defend the British authorities by explaining that their action was justifiable by the prevailing Ottoman law. He informed the Prime Minister that a demonstration arranged by the Zionists to protest about the incident did not necessarily reflect the views of the Jewish community.<sup>333</sup> Some months later he wrote to his president, "No doubt the Communal leaders will take precautions against emotional aliens here misrepresenting all Jews as being angry with the British Government."<sup>334</sup> Max Freilich, a Zionist leader, states:

Morris Symonds, honorary president of the Union of Sydney Zionists, was president of the Great Synagogue that year and his strained relations with the Rabbi made his position difficult. The board of management consisted of Anglicised Jews who



shared the Rabbi's attitude but appeared to remain neutral in the clash between the Rabbi and the Zionists, an antagonism which was increased further after the tragic Arab riots in Jerusalem and the brutal murders in Hebron and Safed in the following year.<sup>335</sup>

The board did not however take up an official anti-Zionist policy. In September 1929, it joined the Zionist Federation in organising a meeting at the Sydney Town Hall, not in order to attack the British Government but to urge that the Balfour Declaration be fully implemented. Rabbi Cohen pleaded a long-standing lecturing commitment for that night but said he was "prepared to set aside all considerations excepting the good of the community and to fall in heartily with whatever solution the Board may arrive at."<sup>336</sup> The board thereupon passed a resolution asking him to open the meeting with prayer and to remain throughout the proceedings.<sup>337</sup>

Later in the month the Zionist Federation drew the synagogue president's attention to remarks made by the rabbi in addresses to a Rotary Club and the League of Nations Union, suggesting that "Rabbi Cohen's remarks have been misinterpreted by newspaper representatives, since it is hard to believe that he would cast the blame for recent Palestine disturbances on the shoulders of our fellow Jews in Palestine."<sup>338</sup> Cohen declared that Jewish people present when he spoke had considered his remarks "fair and impartial" and said that the Zionists were "always ready to misunderstand or even misinterpret whatever I may say."<sup>339</sup>

Resentment at the rabbi's views now led a group of members of the Great Synagogue to sign a petition to the president, asking for a general meeting to discuss a resolution:

That it be a recommendation to the Board of Management that no anti-Zionist references be made from the pulpit, whether openly or by innuendo, so as to avoid any possible dissension in the Community.<sup>340</sup>

The president invited the signatories to meet him and asked if they would withdraw their request for a general meeting if the board promise "to receive and seriously consider the recommendation". Subsequently the president prepared a note suggesting that the policy be that:

Whether the Rabbi has or has not offended in the past – I think we are all agreed with the recommendation that in the future no anti-Zionist



references be made from the Pulpit. If so, there only remains the method of acquainting the Rabbi with our feelings.<sup>341</sup>

The conflicts of recent years must have had their effects on the rabbi's health – he was by then almost 70 – as well as on his morale. In 1930 the president and board presented him with an illuminated address to mark the completion of 25 years in Sydney, and he went overseas for a trip lasting several months.<sup>342</sup> In his absence the board had the problem of pro-Zionist references from the pulpit by Falk; in October 1930 John Goulston, the vice-president, conveyed to Morris Symonds, the president, the disapproval of several board members “of portion of the Sermon delivered by the Rev. Mr. Falk in which he referred to a statement made on behalf of the British Government in reference to Palestine” (the Government statement was the Passfield White Paper which restricted Jewish immigration into Palestine).<sup>343</sup> It appears that conciliatory thoughts were spreading into the community, as the protest resolution passed at a public meeting in November expressed loyalty to the King but drew the attention of the government to its conviction that the White Paper was a breach of the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate.<sup>344</sup> The *Hebrew Standard*, however, argued that those present at the meeting were not representative of the community, “the majority believing in the British sense of justice”. Freilich points out though that the leaders of all sections of the community had attended the meeting and supported the resolution.<sup>345</sup> On his return from overseas Cohen muted his anti-Zionist utterances though he did not hesitate to write to his president about his concern at “a recent increase, both here and in Melbourne, of anti-British and anti-Empire propaganda among certain Jewish extremists.”<sup>346</sup>

After Cohen died in 1934 the synagogue appointed as chief minister Rabbi Ephraim Moses Levy, a cultured, erudite man and a passionate Zionist. It is suggested by some<sup>347</sup> that Levy's appointment was not renewed after the first three years because of an article he wrote, as president of the Zionist Federation, suggesting that even a “friendly Englishman would consider it absurd for a Jew to be an Englishman only” and that “there is a national bond between Jews the world over.”<sup>348</sup> Sir Isaac Isaacs and Sir Samuel Cohen both published rejoinders and considerable controversy ensued. But, the mass of correspondence that survives, between Levy and the presidents who held office during his ministry, indicates that there had been friction – over other issues – throughout the three years and the board had decided at an earlier stage not to renew the rabbi's contract.<sup>349</sup>

The Zionist battle had been joined differently in England. There the Chief Rabbi and the *Haham*<sup>350</sup> of the Sephardim were outspoken



Zionists; some of the lay leaders of the community opposed the movement and there was a successful campaign in the early 1940s to "capture" the Board [of Deputies of British Jews] for Zionist purposes."<sup>351</sup> There was, however, a controversy within the United Synagogue, which federated most of the London Orthodox synagogues, at the end of 1945. Hertz had sent all ministers a telegram proclaiming Saturday 6 October as a day of Jewish solidarity with the remnants of European Jewry, adding: "Jews of England expect Government keeping faith in regard to Palestine as only haven of refuge to survivors of Nazi bestiality." The president and vice-president of the United Synagogue sent a counter-telegram warning against the "introduction of politics into our religious services." After much internal debate and calls for the resignation of the lay leaders who had sent the second telegram, an "armed truce" came about. Then in 1948 when Israel came into being the new Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Israel Brodie, formerly of Australia, publicly renewed the commitment of Anglo-Jewry to the Zionist ideal.<sup>352</sup>

In South Africa the community was overwhelmingly pro-Zionist, with some proudly claiming to have been Zionists before Herzl.<sup>353</sup> Chief Rabbi J.L. Landau (and at an earlier period, Rabbi J.H. Hertz) promoted Zionism in Johannesburg. In Capetown, the Rev. A.P. Bender at first reserved judgment, calling himself "a humble worker outside the tent listening with unflinching patience, to the countless orations which may claim, at least, to have exercised a quickening influence over the Jewish consciousness." Bender's views changed after the Balfour Declaration and he thereafter served the cause with energy and dedication. The South African situation in regard to Zionism can be explained largely by the widespread suspicion of Britain as well as by the Boer love of the Bible which must have influenced sympathy for the restoration of Israel to the Holy Land.

In New Zealand, Zionism was always relatively strong and the two leading ministers, the Rev. S.A. Goldstein of Auckland and the Rev. H. Van Staveren of Wellington, supported the movement.<sup>354</sup>

In Australia, as we have seen, Sydney and to a lesser extent Melbourne had non-Zionist ministers early in the century. Rabbi Dr Abrahams of Melbourne considered himself a spiritual, not a political Zionist (though his successor, Israel Brodie, was outspoken in his Zionist opinions). Rabbi Cohen's younger contemporary, Jacob Danglow of St Kilda, was not a Zionist but until about the 1940s was well disposed towards much of what Zionism was seeking to do. In 1920 he had written:

We are expecting Israel Cohen to reach W. Australia on the 22nd inst. and Melbourne the first week in August. I am much looking forward to seeing him

again. Although not a member of any Zionist organisation, I am anxious to do all I can towards securing a good response to Israel Cohen's appeal, for I recognise that Great Britain's acceptance of the Mandate for Palestine is a pressing call to us all to try and ensure the success of the Jewish re-settlement there.<sup>355</sup>

In the 1940s Danglow shared Sir Isaac Isaac's antagonism to political Zionism, finally coming to terms with the movement after 1948.<sup>356</sup>



## 11 . CONCLUSION

Rabbi Cohen died in April 1934. His funeral was one of the largest ever known in Sydney. Thousands stood outside the Great Synagogue, unable to be accommodated in the building; there were large numbers waiting along the Parramatta Road for the cortege to pass; and some estimates put the numbers who attended the graveside service at up to 3,000. Cohen's visibility and articulateness as a Jewish leader and public figure led Jews to respect him even when they differed from his views, and brought him the admiration of leaders of the city, state and nation, as well as of fellow-citizens of all walks of life.<sup>357</sup>



*Rabbi Cohen's funeral, 1934 : the flag-draped coffin leaves the Great Synagogue.*



His ministry in Sydney had commenced with immensely high hopes. After five years he was still optimistic even though he remarked,

It is not due to my people that I look, as I am told, and sometimes feel, considerably more than five years older than when I came, but to the difficult conditions under which they and I labour.<sup>358</sup>

The "difficult conditions" were rendered relatively tolerable because it was still a more or less homogeneous community. According to the author of a silhouette in the London *Jewish World* in 1913, he occupied his office with "a confidence that does not exhibit even a perceptible quaver," and said he was genial to all; indeed it could speak of "the scintillating brilliancy of his graciousness."<sup>359</sup> Twenty further years of difficulty in reconciling a diversifying community to his views and his authority told on him. Acknowledging a seventieth birthday tribute in 1932 he wrote:

I would ask you to be good enough to convey to the Board of Management my warm appreciation of the kindly thought which prompted its Members to so amiable and graceful a commemoration of my seventieth birthday. This was all the more valuable and welcome because since my return to constantly accumulating difficulties here after observing the freer hand advantageously given everywhere to my colleagues in similar positions overseas, I had been more than once tempted to say with Macbeth that  
'All that should accompany old age,  
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,  
I may not look to have.'

The Board's kind gesture of appreciation and good will has entirely reassured me. Coupled with so many other friendly and even gracious expressions which have since been showered upon me, it leaves me not only very grateful, but also strengthened and encouraged for what future activity remains to

Yours always sincerely,  
FRANCIS L. COHEN  
Rabbi<sup>360</sup>

People's perceptions of him were partly influenced by the impact his personality made on them. One recalls him as warm, humorous and



sensitive, another as aloof, imperious and unsympathetic. The debates and disputes which surrounded his views did not entirely or even partially intrude upon the consciousness of very many families for whom he was a somewhat awesome but always benevolent figure whose ministrations in time of joy or sorrow were what they gratefully remembered. Many who heard his addresses, at Jewish or other gatherings, recall his dignity and diction without being too bothered to assess the validity of his views.

This study, however, cannot conclude without an endeavour at analysis of his thinking and approach in terms of Jewish self-perception. Cohen has been dubbed by some of his critics as an assimilationist whose policies would lead to the disappearance of Judaism. The problem of finding the right level of relationship with gentile society had become acute when the armies of Napoleon swept across Europe and the walls of the ghettos crumbled. Emergence into the modern world threw many Jews off balance. One attempt to retain Jewish identity at the same time as integrating into society was to alter the Jewish image in order to remove or play down elements such as Jewish ethnicity which might hinder or frustrate the desired integration. The Jewish Reform movement went much further than did Cohen when it both removed ethnic elements from Judaism and also purged the prayer book of references to Zion and Messianism; when it both sought to make Jewish worship decorous and dignified and also removed the binding authority of Jewish law from the pattern of Jewish life. Cohen retained the traditional prayer book, though he endeavoured to make services aesthetically attractive; he remained loyal to Jewish law, though he attempted, on the whole, to interpret it leniently. But he shared the conviction that gentiles would remain suspicious of Jews and not fully accept them into general society if they appeared to be in some sense a national group with loyalties that might be thought inconsistent with citizenship of the land of their residence.

Assimilation to non-Jewish cultural patterns in matters of language, dress, etc., was taken for granted by Cohen's critics, though in recent years some Jewish sects have attempted to resist even these superficial marks of acculturation. But it was a different type of assimilation which the critics found objectionable – the attempt to approximate the nature of Judaism to other religious groups and to argue that Judaism was neither more nor less than a religion (albeit an historically senior one) among religions.

The attempt to fit Judaism into a Procrustean bed and remove from it the dimension of peoplehood might be said to be, as Milton Steinberg says of the movement for Jewish emancipation as a whole, "the record of a continuous frustration."<sup>361</sup> As far as Cohen was concerned, it might be said that, in three respects articulated by Steinberg, his dream was frustrated:



1. It was "the result of a servility of spirit."<sup>362</sup> It implied that gentile ways were desirable and gentile disapproval to be avoided at all costs. Cohen himself had to admit that Jews had to retain (to paraphrase his own words) friendly independence of judgment.

2. It had to "gamble against a violent recrudescence of anti-Semitism."<sup>363</sup> Even in friendly Australia, as he called it, integration into society was no guarantee of security, though compared to other places "Australia . . . has no significant history of anti-Semitism."<sup>364</sup> The continuance of anti-Jewish feeling in other countries, and the emergence late in Cohen's life of the Nazi movement, indicated that there were limits to the faith one could place in assimilation.

3. Internal as well as external developments could, and to an increasing extent did, reject the Cohen type of emphasis in favour of "some atavism . . . some throw-back to old Jewish loyalties."<sup>365</sup> In Australia the post-war development of a multi-ethnic society has to a great extent quietened the old "dual loyalty" accusation and encouraged intense cultivation of Jewish commitment even at the expense of some measure of integration.

Nowhere, however, does Cohen entirely reject the existence of an ethnic element in Judaism, Nor indeed does he suggest that Palestine and Jewish re-settlement there lack significance and inspiration for the Jew. What concerns him most is the establishment and maintenance of an order of priorities in which religion will remain the crucial quality of Jewish identity, and religious teachers the authentic spokesmen and acknowledged leaders of the Jewish community. If the political Zionists are to be allowed to turn political action for a Jewish state into the major motivation of community life, and downgrade religion into an optional matter for the individual conscience, they will, he implies, take the soul and centre out of Judaism.

This question of emphasis explains why Cohen sometimes seemed anti-Zionist and at other times merely non-Zionist, prepared on such occasions to support practical projects in the Holy Land and to donate to Zionist appeals. Ben Halpern speaks of anti-Zionism as "not a constant but an episodic manifestation in Western Jewry."<sup>366</sup> On occasions when the ethnic doctrine had been proclaimed particularly forcefully and the pre-eminence of religious-based institutions challenged, anti-Zionism arose as a response. But when the political emphasis in Zionism subsided – either because of a Zionist defeat or a widely recognised Zionist victory – the anti-Zionist tide ebbed and was replaced by the more neutral phenomenon of non-Zionism whereby someone like Cohen could support Zionist projects whilst claiming to be sitting on the fence.

Cohen's basic assumption when so strongly arguing that a Jew must not compromise or fail to appreciate the blessings of British



citizenship was not only that Britain had been good to Jews and self-interest dictated that nothing be done which might jeopardise the security of the group, but also that British ideals and the British ethos were admirable and could enrich and enhance Jewish culture. On the organisational level there is evidence that British Jewry utilised British models. Himmelfarb speaks of what he calls Heine's Law. Heine was the reputed author of the witticism *Wie es sich christelt, so jüdet es sich*, roughly translated, "Like Christian, like Jew." Says Himmelfarb,

Without Heine's Law, how could we explain the basically episcopal organisation of Judaism in Great Britain? . . . The Board of Deputies is another expression of that Englishness: it is English to have quasi-corporate religious communities with some internal authority, and with official or quasi-official relations with that State.<sup>367</sup>

On a deeper level Cohen believed that a creative synthesis of British and Jewish ideas and culture would benefit both; the encounter with British society would be fruitful for Judaism, and if in the process certain liturgical forms were recast to make them more decorous and aesthetic, that was not reform for reform's sake but adaptation which in the long run would strengthen Judaism and its hold on its adherents. Cohen would have agreed with Cecil Roth that there is a difference between "clean" and "unclean" assimilation.<sup>368</sup> The latter attempts to submerge a minority culture completely so as to disappear into the majority culture, whereas the former holds on to the culture of the group but allows it to interact with the culture of the environment. Only in this "clean" sense would Cohen have called himself an assimilationist.

## NOTES

### INTRODUCTION

1. Francis Lyon Cohen (F.L.C) to president, 28 April 1904.

### CHAPTER 1

2. Harriet Cohen, *A Bundle of Time*, London, 1969, p.17.
3. Marriage Registers of the New Synagogue, London; the civil marriage certificate gives Woolf Cohen's father as Moses Cohen, though this may be an error since the Hebrew document calls him Katriel.
4. Obituary of Harriet Cohen (press cutting, source and date not known).
5. *Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter *JC*), 27 June 1856, p.637.
6. *ibid*, 29 December 1871, p.7, etc.
7. *ibid*, 5 August 1864, p.5.
8. *ibid.*, 12 October 1866, p.7.
9. Chief Rabbi to M. Phillips, 28 February 1884.
10. Cecil Roth, *Magna Bibliotheca Anglo-Judaica*, London, 1937, etc.
11. United Synagogue Visitation Committee Minutes, 8 November 1897.
12. *infra*, ch.4.
13. *Hebrew Standard* (hereafter *HS*), 27 May 1910, p.7.
14. *infra*, ch.4.
15. *JC*, 10 March 1876, p.805.
16. Isidore Harris, *History of Jews' College*, London, 1906, *passim*; Albert Montefiore Hyamson, *Jews' College, London, 1855-1955*, London, 1955, *passim*.
17. Harris, *Jews' College*, pp.cxcii-iii.
18. *JC*, 8 April 1904, p.18.
19. Harris, *Jews' College*, pp.lxx-iii.
20. *JC*, 18 February 1881, p.1.
21. *Jewish World* (hereafter *JW*), 8 April 1904, p.43.
22. Cecil Roth, *The Great Synagogue, London, 1690-1940*, London, 1950, pp.262-3, 269, 293.
23. *infra*, ch.3.

### CHAPTER 2

24. *HS*, 27 May 1910, p.7.
25. Bernard Shillman, *A Short History of the Jews in Ireland*, Dublin, 1945; Louis Hyman, *The Jews of Ireland*, London/Jerusalem, 1972.
26. Borough Synagogue Minutes, 10 January 1886; 4 April 1886.
27. *Lady's World*, February 1887, pp.132-33.
28. *Great Synagogue Congregational Journal*, April 1952, p.7.
29. *HS*, 28 October 1910.
30. Morris Rosenbaum, *History of the Borough Synagogue*, London, 1917, p.24.
31. Vivian D. Lipman, "The Rise of Jewish Suburbia", in *Transactions of Jewish Historical Society of England*, vol.21 (1962-67), p.91.



32. Borough Synagogue Report, January 1886.
33. Lipman, "Jewish Suburbia", p.91.
34. Rosenbaum, *Borough Synagogue*, p.7.
35. *infra*, ch.5; Anglo-Jewish tradition suggests that the patronage of the Duke of Cambridge helped Nathan Marcus Adler become Chief Rabbi in 1845.
36. Leviticus 21: 1 - 4.
37. H. Adler to Wardens, Borough Synagogue, 28 January 1886.
38. Numbers 6:22-27.
39. F.L.C to secretary, 8 January 1923.
40. F.L.C to president, 17 November 1922.
41. *Australian Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter *AJC*), 5 February 1925, p.6.
42. Lipman, "Jewish Suburbia", pp.97-98.
43. Raymond Apple, *The Hampstead Synagogue, 1892-1967*, London, 1967, pp.50, 109.
44. *JW*, 8 April 1904, p.43.
45. *infra*, ch.3.
46. *infra*, ch.4.
47. *JC*, 8 April 1904, p.18.
48. e.g. *JC*, 27 May 1892, p.12.
49. *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, 12 vols., New York, 1904, vol.7, s.v. "Jewish Lads' Brigade".
50. Sidney Salomon, *The Jews of Britain*, London, 1939, p.66.
51. F.L.C to president, 3 August 1904.
52. Borough Synagogue Minutes, 13 July 1891.
53. Olga Somech Phillips and Hyman A. Simons, *The History of the Bayswater Synagogue, 1863-1963*, London, 1963, *passim*.

### CHAPTER 3

54. *JC*, 8 April 1904, p.18.
55. Harris, *Jews' College*, p.clxviii.
56. Apple, *Hampstead Synagogue*, p.21.
57. Chief Rabbi's Office to Synagogues, 28 November 1887.
58. Published London, 1899, and often reprinted.
59. *infra*, ch.6.
60. *JW*, 18 October 1889.
61. *JC*, April 1904, pp.20-21.
62. Lazare Saminsky, *Music of the Ghetto and Bible*, London, 1934, p.212.
63. *HS*, 19 April 1907, p.8.
64. *JC*, 8 April 1904, p.19.
65. Alfred Kalisch, "The Jew and His Music", in H. Newman (ed), *The Real Jew*, London, 1925, p.231.
66. Isidore Freeman in *Jewish Guardian*, 24 April 1931.
67. *AJC*, 23 July 1925, p.12.
68. *infra*, ch.10.

### CHAPTER 4

69. United Synagogue Visitation Committee Minutes, 4 May 1892; 13 March 1893.
70. Borough Synagogue Annual Report, April 1893; Cohen's actual title, approved in October 1892, was Jewish Officiating Chaplain: *JC*, 22 April

- 1904, p.10.
71. *JC*, 18 April 1904, p.18.
72. *JW*, 15 October 1897, p.37; *HS*, 27 May 1910, p.7.
73. Cecil Roth, "The Jews in the Defence of Britain", in *Trans. JHSE*, Vol.15 (1939-45), pp.1-28; Lionel Simmonds, "For Sovereign and Country", *JC*, 27 April 1956, p.19.
74. *JC*, 22 April 1904, p.10.
75. *ibid.*, 22 April 1904, p.10.
76. *ibid.*, 25 January 1895, p.10.
77. *Daily Chronicle*, 9 December 1901.
78. *Daily Telegraph*, 25 December 1905.
79. *infra*, ch.8.

## CHAPTER 5

80. *HS*, 8 February 1907, p.8.
81. Israel Porush, *The House of Israel*, Melbourne, 1977, ch.7.
82. *JC*, 8 April 1904, p.19.
83. F.L.C to B.W. Levy, 27 March 1904.
84. Borough Synagogue Minutes, 6 April 1892.
85. *ibid.*
86. Apple, *Hampstead Synagogue*, pp.21-23; A. May to Borough Synagogue board of management, 18 August 1899.
87. *infra*, ch.9.
88. F.L.C to president, 3 August 1904.
89. *Israel*, May 1899, p.31.
90. Hermann Gollancz, *Personalia . . .*, Oxford, 1928, p.25.
91. *JC*, 1 July 1904, p.19.
92. *ibid.*
93. *JC*, 8 July 1904, p.21.
94. *ibid.*, 15 July 1904, p.18; 22 July 1904, p.18.
95. F.L.C to B.W. Levy, 31 July 1904.
96. F.L.C to president, 3 August 1904.
97. F.L.C to B.W. Levy, 30 March 1905; Chief Rabbi to B.W. Levy, 3 April 1905.

## CHAPTER 6

98. *JC*, letters from A.M.H. and D. Hudaly, 1 August 1947.
99. Stephen Sharot, "Religious Change in Native Orthodoxy in London, 1870-1914: The Synagogue Service", *Jewish Journal of Sociology* (hereafter *JJS*), vol.15, no.1 (1973), pp.57-78.
100. G.M. Trevelyan, *English Social History*, London, 1948, p.508.
101. *JC*, 12 January 1849.
102. Porush, *House of Israel*, pp.28-29.
103. F.L.C to president, 8 October 1928.
104. *infra*, ch.10.
105. *HS*, 1 March 1907.
106. *ibid.*, 24 August 1906, p.3.
107. President to F.L.C., 17 July 1922.
108. F.L.C. to president, 18 July 1922.
109. *infra*, ch.7.
110. *HS*, 4 December 1908.



111. *ibid.*, 15 January 1909.
112. *ibid.*, 12 August 1910.
113. *AJC*, 10 January 1924.
114. *ibid.*, 7 February 1924.
115. *ibid.*
116. *HS*, 26 February 1909.
117. Israel Getzler, *Neither Toleration nor Favour: The Australian Chapter of Jewish Emancipation*, Melbourne, 1970, *passim*.
118. *HS*, 27 April 1923, p.2.
119. *infra*, ch.7.
120. F.L.C. to secretary, 19 November 1931.
121. *JW*, 10 December 1913, p.11.
122. *infra*, chs 9 and 10.
123. Discourse.
124. Popular expositor of traditional books.
125. *HS*, 28 September 1906, p.7.
126. *AJC*, various issues in 1924.
127. *ibid.*, 21 August 1924, p.6.
128. F.L.C. to president, 17 November 1922.
129. M.H. Kellerman, *History of N.S.W. Board of Jewish Education*, Sydney, 1979, p.226.
130. *infra*, ch.7.
131. *ibid.*
132. F.L.C. to president, 27 January 1922.
133. *AJC*, 3 May 1925, p.1.
134. *HS*, 8 February 1907, p.3.
135. *ibid.*, 12 February 1909.
136. *AJC*, 16 October 1924, p.12.
137. *ibid.*, 13 December 1923, p.11.

## CHAPTER 7

138. President to board, 31 October 1921.
139. *HS*, 1 March 1907.
140. F.L.C. to president, 14 April, 1924.
141. F.L.C. to president, 23 May 1922.
142. F.L.C. to president, 15 October 1922.
143. F.L.C. to president, 26 January 1922.
144. Charles A. Price, "Jewish Settlers in Australia, 1788-1961", *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal* (hereafter *AJHS*), vol.5, part 8 (1964).
145. *HS*, 17 and 24 November 1917.
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## PIONEER JEWISH DOCTORS IN THE OUTBACK<sup>1</sup>

*Jenny Shub*

**M**y grandfather, Louis Leedman, was born in Russia in 1861, and orphaned at an early age. When he was little more than 12 years of age, he made his way to the coast and stowed away on board a ship bound for England. Endowed with initiative and an adventurous spirit, he emigrated to Australia at the age of 19 in 1880, landing in the city of Melbourne on board the *Ruisqarooma*. After a few months he moved to Sydney where he met his future wife, Jenny Cohen, who had been born in Liverpool, England, of Russian emigrés. Her family had also migrated to Australia in the year 1880 when Jenny was 13 years of age. Louis and Jenny were married in a synagogue in Surrey Hills on 29 April 1888, and their first child, Cecil Valentine, was born on St Valentine's Day 1889. Charles Herbert Leopold – an imposing name for a man who was never large or impressive in the physical sense – was born on 11 February 1891. The family faced an economic struggle and Louis was tempted by the gold rush in faraway Western Australia to seek a better future for his wife and two small sons. In 1893 he set off for the goldfields, when Charles was little more than a baby. He opened a small tailoring business in Coolgardie and later moved to Menzies, where he became the manager of Silbert and Sharp's grocery business, developing it into a thriving concern. It was five years before the family was reunited, together with his wife's parents, brother and sister. After the reunion, two more children were born – Ethel in November 1898, and Harry in February 1902.

### DR CHARLES LEEDMAN - EARLY YEARS

Charles began his schooling in Menzies before the turn of the century. He experienced an incident when there was trouble at the school with the local Aborigines. The police had to close the school until they persuaded the Pindinnie tribe to leave. He described the incident:

The bucks walked ahead carrying spears and nullas, while the gins trailed behind – many with piccaninnies strapped to their backs. Children of all ages and sizes



followed, with innumerable flies fighting for possession of their eyes, and around and among them were the mongrel dogs they prized so much.

Charles later wrote that it was the probability of our throwing a few lumps of diorite at the dogs which caused the school to be closed.

A very gifted student, Charlie won a scholarship to one of the two secondary schools which existed in Western Australia early this century, and in February 1905 enrolled at Christian Brothers' College in Perth. The move of a small Jewish country boy to a large Catholic boarding school in the "city" must have been a traumatic one, and in his memoirs he wrote of his initial loneliness. He adapted quickly, however, and soon grew to enjoy his schooldays in Perth. His friendly and endearing personality and his intellectual capacity no doubt helped in this early adjustment.

Tragedy struck the Leedman family in his first year away. His mother, Jenny, died suddenly on 6 August 1905. She was only 38 years of age, and her death was a shattering blow to the whole family. It was particularly difficult for Charlie, for he had to grieve alone, far from family and loved ones.

Matriculation examinations were conducted at this time through the University of Adelaide, for Perth did not yet have its own university. Charlie did his examinations at 16, and in March 1908 the Headmaster of the school came to him with the news that he had won a scholarship to study medicine in Melbourne. The news of the award had come late, and the first term in Melbourne had already begun. The only means of transport was by sea, for the interstate railway had not been completed at this time. The Head booked his passage as quickly as he could, and he set sail on the first available vessel, the *S.S. Grantala*.

The Registrar at the university found it hard to believe that Charles was 17 years old, and he wrote, "I could scarcely blame him, for even in long trousers, I looked far from it." Having overcome the hurdles of finding his own accommodation in what was to him a large city, and enrolling at the university, a larger obstacle had to be overcome. He had begun at the university very late in the term and a definite minimum of attendances at lectures was necessary in order for a student to be eligible to sit for the term examinations. He had no possibility of meeting this requirement.

His only recourse was to approach the senior professor of the year – a man called Orme Masson. He did this with some trepidation and explained his predicament. The professor smoothed his path and marked him present for the required number of lectures. He then asked what work he had done in the subjects from the first term. When Charlie told him that they were all new to him, the professor looked



surprised but said nothing. The educational grounding from CBC had been a good one and Charlie wrote in his memoirs that he had been able to forecast the probable questions.

His replies to some of the questions were so original, and none of his solutions appeared in any of the textbooks, so the professors called him up for an oral examination in order to clarify his answers.

"Why did you do that?" Professor Masson asked, about a chemical experiment which he had worked out in a peculiar way – all his own.

"That is the way I saw it, Sir," he replied. In an animal experiment he had accomplished the most difficult part almost to perfection, but had ignored the easy part – which every student knew. The question came –

"Why did you leave it out?." and his reply was that he felt it had no bearing on the problem asked. On the results of this examination the professors passed him – no doubt giving him full marks for his innovative approach!

He adapted to life at the university and grew to love the beautiful old stone buildings in the peaceful lakeside setting. They fitted in with the tempo of the life of the times, which was still pervaded by the influence of the Victorian era. Transport was by tram and the service was efficient and cheap. Prices of all commodities were vastly different – chops and steak were three pence a pound and cigarettes three pence a packet. (Of course wages were similarly low.)

In the first decade of the century the university fielded a strong football team and they played in the Victorian League. He related a tale of playing South Melbourne on their ground, when the supporters of the university team were set upon by the locals. The students – who had no wish to brawl – were rescued and led to safety by a mild-mannered professor who had previously received a bad time from the students. He wrote, "From that day on his lectures were a model of propriety!"

After his first year in Melbourne he returned to Menzies for the last time, and as the first of its children to venture forth and study medicine he must have been a celebrity in the town. He was sad to see that it was rapidly becoming a "ghost" town at the end of 1908, as there was no more gold to be mined.

Charlie wrote that his second year was cold, hard and down to earth. "At one fell swoop we were ushered into the drab, disgusting and serious business of dissecting the human body – a grim job, that was to be our boon companion for the next two years." They also began to walk the wards, and to be part of what was going on in the hospitals. There was an enormous amount of surgery going on at that time. He wrote:

Ether and chloroform were poisonous in themselves,  
and added to the shock of the operation. The surgeon



was forced to hurry, and that was productive of accidents and complications. It was amazing to see just how many did pull through, but how often at what a price. Many a day did I leave the wards, crestfallen and dejected at what I had seen.

In doing the rounds with the honorary, the students stood the chance of being grilled by him. If the student did not know the answer, and looked away, the honorary just glared, until asked, "Did you mean me sir?" "Yes I did", he would reply – "Do you think I squint?"

### POST UNIVERSITY DAYS

After his years at the university, Leedman sat for his gruelling final examinations at the end of 1912 and his telegram home spelt out just one word – "Doctor." The young medical practitioner returned to Western Australia to begin his career in the outback, and it was natural for him to go to the goldfields. In 1913 he began work at Kalgoorlie Hospital. The building contained over 100 beds and he was the sole resident surgeon there to gain experience. "Morning, noon and night it came my way," he wrote. "It became a full-time job, and spread over 24 hours each day." For this he received the princely sum of £3 a week.

There were accidents from the mines, urgent sick from the back country, maternity, men, women and children. Typhoid was not as widely spread as in the early days, but it still took its toll. He wrote, "They always managed to fill one ward, and we nursed them separately, for the disease is highly contagious." Recovery time from this scourge took from three to six months, and many died, for at this time there were no typhoid inoculations. There was also the problem of heavy drinking in the goldfields, and they had a padded cell for the drunks who became uncontrollable.

After some time at the hospital in Kalgoorlie, Charlie was utterly exhausted. He also felt the need to acquire some tangible security, and was anxious to move into the world of private practice. An opening was offered at Broad Arrow and he accepted the position. Broad Arrow had been so named by the early miners – for one of them had scratched broad arrows on the ground in order to mark the area for his friends who followed him. A large hospital at Broad Arrow acted as a centre for a mining practice, which covered a very wide area of the Eastern Goldfields and embraced the two mining towns of Comet Vale and Ora Banda. In each of these centres large mines were working. Distances were long and transport was slow and tedious in a very isolated region. The little town of Comet Vale lay about 40 miles north, along the railway line. It contained two mines, and the whole place lay among



deep sandy ridges. Ora Banda, on the other hand, was sited in flat heavily timbered country, some 20 miles off the railway line. In addition to the two centres, the tiny hamlets of Bardoc and Paddington were also in his territory.

Leedman was well provided for residentially, alongside the Broad Arrow Hospital, but when he saw the distances he would have to travel he was dismayed. The countryside was steeped in the traditions of the goldfields and was remote, barren and thinly populated. Rumours of a fabulous gold find just before the turn of the century had brought no less than 1,000 miners to the area. The alluvial find soon petered out, but an administrative centre developed and this remained long after the field declined. The little mining towns like Ora Banda, which had grown up some distance from the railway, depended entirely on the teamster and the camels for their supplies. The cost of living precluded any savings at all and the people lived a hand-to-mouth, primitive existence.

The little houses had two rooms, a bough shed and a big water tank. He wrote:

The bush shed was the child of the goldfields – without it I do not think we could have endured the heat of summer. It was a cool refuge, in parts which could not escape the searing heat which came our way for so many months. The walls were thick, made of brushwood; and the layers of small leafy branches, which gave them substance, made it cool, and allowed the air to circulate freely.

The distance from Ora Banda to Broad Arrow was about 20 miles of twin cart tracks which had been made by the iron wheels of the horse-traps through the heavy red soil of the mulga and scrub country. The route through the larger section of his district had an appalling variety of obstacles along its 40 miles and the grey-blue rock would rip to bits anything but the iron tyres on the slow-moving sulkies. There were also deep holes and ridges and miles of heavy red sand. Travelling by horse and sulky to accidents and emergencies was out of the question and Charlie despaired at the prospect.

He then thought of a motor bike – a brilliant idea. It must, however, be one that would run on kerosene since petrol was scarce and expensive. He managed to procure an English one which was delivered in its original packing from Birmingham. He fitted the three pieces together very easily but had to learn to stop the bike by falling off! The bike had a small tank, which held a pint of petrol, with which to start the engine before the kerosene took over.

Whenever he could find the camel pads he was assured of a smooth track through the bush. He wrote:



A familiar sight in those days was a string of camels, threading their way along – laden with supplies. They always walked in single file, led by the Afghans, who went ahead on foot. The big flat pads of the camels broke down the twigs and branches, which littered the ground, and smoothed out a nice narrow track, which I knew would be free from spikes and stumps. These camel pads made ideal bike tracks, but unfortunately there were none on the way from Broad Arrow to Comet Vale. I was stumped, until I found that I could ride the railway line. This was made possible by the way the ballast was laid down to carry the rails, where a thin strip of ballast forms a narrow pathway, just outside the actual sleepers.

He was able to see the banks well ahead, but the bridges and culverts which came up suddenly were a danger, particularly at night. Punctures were always a problem, and changing the spare tubes at night, with the dingoes howling around him, was never a pleasant experience. However, he felt that he had no alternative and this was how he reached his patients.

His hospital at Broad Arrow had a matron who proudly told him that she had been one of Florence Nightingale's original nurses. She was a very old woman and Charlie resolved to hospitalise only his most urgent cases and, where possible, to treat the others in their own homes!

When he had seen his patients for the day, he repaired to the dispensary to mix his medicines. His training in pharmacy had been very elementary and he wrote, "I was not happy when I had corked my bottle of mixture, to watch it explode. Nor did I appreciate it, when I made it one colour, and it changed to another. Still, I learned. The patients were patient."

A sobering experience with his bike followed a long, lonely and exhausting ride to a mine at Woolgar at night. He attended his patient and then spent the night at the home of the English mine manager. He was amazed to be given a huge four-poster bed in which to sleep, and then breakfast from an English sideboard – all in keeping with the grandeur of the four-poster bed! Unfortunately, he left Woolgar late and the February weather was extremely hot. In the middle of the day his bike stopped and he was unable to start it again. He tried and tried, until he was exhausted. He wrote:

Not only was I paying the price of ignorance, but I had committed the unforgivable sin in the bush, of having ventured out without water. I knew that a



goods train would be passing during the day, and it would stop to pick me up, but to attract the driver's attention I would have to remain alongside the rails, in the blazing sun. There were plenty of trees for shade outside the railway fences, but I dared not move away, in case they did not see me. I had to wait in the scorching sun, alongside the rails, and by the time the train appeared, my tongue was so swollen, that I could not speak. The crew stopped the train, placed my bike on the engine platform, and took me into the carriage. They fed me some water – slowly, and how heavenly that felt! I was grateful to the crew when I left the train at Broad Arrow, and I had learned a lesson in bushcraft that I would never forget! Never again would I venture out in the bush without water.

The practice at Broad Arrow came to an end and he moved on to work at Westonia, being appointed there at the founding of the town. This was an interesting experience, for he witnessed the clearing and building of the main street and the emergence of the town. He began more work with families in a small, closely-knit community. He worked there throughout 1915, "but the war, which we had all confidently imagined would be over in a few months, began to assume a new significance. I became increasingly restless – the AIF was composed entirely of volunteers, and I wanted to be with them."

### EXPERIENCES IN THE AIF

He had been courting Brightie Morris, the daughter of a well-known Jewish family in Kalgoorlie, for three years, and as soon as he joined the army he sought out the warden so that he and Brightie could be married by special licence before he went away. Little did they dream that it would be three long years before they saw each other again.

The AIF training camp at Blackboy Hill was in the Darling Ranges, 15 miles from Perth. The camp was a large one and filled to overflowing, when they were struck by a severe epidemic of measles. "The complication of pneumonia became common, and then the illness was life-threatening. The boys from the country were particularly liable to it, and went down by the score. We buried many a lad, who had not thought in his wildest dreams, that he was sacrificing all that he had in this world, only to die of measles." To add to their woes, a more terrible disease came to the camp – meningitis. "It was so deadly, and so quick that it left us stupefied." It stayed with them throughout their period in



camp, and followed them – not only into the transports but actually into the trenches as well. They were quite unable to cope with it and it took a dreadful toll. The transports took them to England, and shortly afterwards to the battlefields of France.

They were in the trenches in Flanders and the forward area was a sea of mud. They marched into this morass, to find a single layer of duckboards in the trenches, to take up the Regimental Aid Post, in what was considered a “good” working position for the company stretcher-bearers, who were out in front of them. Going along in the dark in single file, it was easy to fall off the boards, and then the mud was up to their knees and filled their boots and puttees. It had a high clay content and was hard to scrape off. The mud in the fields was heavily laced with manure which caused great or small wounds to become septic and filled the hospital beds for long periods.

The soldiers lived in the dugouts which punctuated the trenches and the enemy which had been ousted from these trenches had left behind their lice. Although the soldiers killed them by the millions, they lived in the damp, in the cracks of the timber and tormented them in their sleep.

When major battles were taking place the RAP soon became choked with wounded and they had to be protected as best they could from enemy shelling. Dr Leedman often had to make the difficult decision of whether or not to risk the lives of the stretcher-bearers and would not do this without good justification. These men took everything in their stride and received very little recognition. To Dr Leedman they became the unsung heroes of the war.

That grim winter on the Somme, with millions of men under arms, facing each other across a belt of impassable country from which neither side could dislodge the other, the war dragged on. More than 35 years later Charlie wrote: “Time clouds over many memories of the horrors of war, but it fails to blur some of the worst things that came my way, which no length of time could erase.”

Late in the war his battalion was in open fields near the town of Villers Brettoneau. The enemy had begun to concentrate a mass of artillery over a small area and one morning the men of his own group were the victims of an early morning attack. By sheer chance, the signals officer had called Dr Leedman away at the critical moment and from about 100 yards away they watched in horror:

Our comrades were all ruthlessly killed before our very eyes. It was all over in two minutes, but they all lay dead – everyone with whom I had been so closely connected. All were gone, and with them the very heart of me. Nothing would be the same again.



On a lighter note, he described a more than welcome leave which he and a friend spent in England. Their hosts had a grand home and breakfast there was a little different from that of the trenches. They were confronted by a huge sideboard, covered with a battery of silver domed dishes. When they returned upstairs the family butler was waiting to lay out their clothes. He was ready to polish their spare boots, which he could not find. This was with good reason, for they had none!

The leave was all too short and they had to return to the front. While waiting for their train they were looking for seats when they were approached by an English Staff-Colonel. "Gentlemen," he said. "You want a reserved compartment? Here you are." They asked no questions, but seated themselves in comfort, while the crowd struggled for seats. They knew that the Staff-Colonel had not given them this privilege for nothing and, as the train moved out, he handed them a bundle of papers with the order to Albert – "You are the C.O. of this train," and to Dr Leedman – "You are the Adjutant." The two men threw the papers up on to the rack and enjoyed the comfortable journey. The Colonel did not realise that for this job he had selected two medical officers, who could not be put in charge of combatant troops. They knew that at this time General Birdwood was policing this rule of the Hague Convention very strictly and were very happy about it.

At Dover, as they were preparing to leave the train, they were approached by a Senior NCO at the head of 300 other NCOs and asked, "What instructions, Sir?" Albert eyed him coldly and said – "You can go to hell!" These unusual instructions would have fazed any but an experienced English sergeant but, after all, they were Australians, so he just said, "Very well sir," saluted and left. The enraged authorities descended on them but could do nothing about it. Dr Leedman wrote – "Never did General Birdwood have two such grateful and ardent supporters. It had been a most fitting end to a wonderful leave."

As the war approached its climax, the Germans began the "big push". They had developed a new shell which burst on impact, without making a hole, and this caused enormous carnage. They also began their gas attacks and some of the mixed gases had an adverse affect on the heart and men needed to be stretchered out, for if they walked they were likely to drop dead. After the Germans began to use gas, Dr Leedman wrote:

I lost count and touch and just worked on automatically. It was not possible for me to work all the time in my gas mask, and the splashes of liquid mustard gas fouled our clothes and the ground around us. My luck had stood for a very long time, but this time my number was up, and in the end I simply lay



down where I was. By sheer good luck, I was picked up by an ambulance party.

He woke in a cot on a hospital ship in the Channel and was beyond caring. He was temporarily blind and it took many weeks before he regained his sight. (In the last years of his life his eyesight was again affected by this damage of earlier years.)



*Dr. Charles Leedman (right) on leave in Dublin in December 1917, wearing the ribbon of the Military Cross.*

In his writings Charlie fails to mention anywhere the fact that he was awarded the Military Cross – with Bar – and that he was also mentioned in dispatches. He was essentially a very modest and self-effacing man. He ran into no-man's-land and dragged a wounded man to safety under fire and also operated in the field under fire without ceasing for almost 48 hours.

### THE INTER-WAR YEARS

When Charlie returned to Australia early in 1919 he was reunited with the bride he had left three years before and they began their life together.

Their first home was in Westonia and he was soon back at work, fighting the deadly pneumonic influenza, which had spread throughout the entire world. In Westonia the disease was in its worst



form, and the town was decimated. The disease spread to Southern Cross where there was no doctor so that he was called on to help there as well.

With the dwindling population at the mines in Westonia he had to seek another medical practice and moved to Kellerberrin, a town which was becoming the centre of a rapidly expanding agricultural district. Here they owned their first home, a small wooden bungalow, and in Kellerberrin their first child was born.

Soon after his arrival in the town he saw the need for a hospital. Initially they equipped a small house, which filled almost as soon as they were ready to take patients. Soon they needed both a large district hospital and a maternity hospital and the district rallied to the cause, building both.

They remained in Kellerberrin until the beginning of 1927 and in many ways were sorry to leave to live in Perth. By this time the family was complete, with the births of their two daughters. Charlie had pioneered a huge and well-respected practice, and they were sadly missed after they left. He had enjoyed the enormous challenges of his years in the country and wrote: "We stood on the threshold of the wonderful medical discoveries that were to make this life safer and happier for so many. The sulphur drugs, insulin and penicillin all came later."

After two years of suburban practice, Charlie sought new horizons and the family went to Scotland, where he gained his Membership of the Royal College of Surgeons. Upon his return he became one of the leading surgeons in Perth and worked in this capacity for well over 30 years. In the inter-war years he became active in Legacy, joining in 1934 and retaining membership until his death some 38 years later.

## **WORLD WAR II AND THE REMAINDER OF HIS LIFE**

He enlisted in the Second World War and in August 1941 was asked to develop and take charge of a Casualty Clearing Station which was situated north of Perth. He remained full-time in the army until late in 1943 and held the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

He was an Honorary at Royal Perth Hospital, a Consultant at Hollywood Hospital, lectured to trainee nurses and examined them for their finals. Always a great contributor, he worked until the last years of his life and passed away in August 1972 at the age of 81.

After his death the tributes flooded in, for he was an enormously popular, respected and loved man. Unassuming, resourceful, intelligent and with a wonderful warmth and enthusiasm, Charles Herbert Leopold Leedman was a credit to his family and an immense asset to the community and country in which he lived and served so well.



## SAMUEL FINKELSTEIN – EARLY YEARS

Now to the story of my father, Samuel Finkelstein. He was born in Metulla in Palestine on 21 July 1900. His mother, Miriam Selik, arrived with her family in Jerusalem from Lithuania when she was a young girl and she grew up in an observant Jewish home in that city. In 1899, when she was seventeen, she married my grandfather, a widower with two small children.

Shimon Finkelstein – whose name was incorrectly translated as Sam when he came to Australia – was born in Bessarabia, Rumania in 1874. His family moved to Palestine and his first wife died in childbirth. When his second child, Saul, was twelve months old he married my grandmother. She was eighteen when Dad was born and his brother Bill came into the world just eighteen months later.

Grandad was a saddler by trade, but in Palestine he worked on the Metulla vineyards owned by Baron Hirsch. In this desolate and barren place on the Lebanese border the family lived a harsh pioneering existence.

One night, when Dad was less than three years of age, the elderly Arab guard of the vineyard was brutally murdered and his dismembered body was left in a sack, as a warning to the people of Metulla. My grandmother, fearing for the family's welfare, put pressure on my grandfather to leave and to begin a new life. The only countries which encouraged immigration at this time were Australia and America – thus the family set out for this land in 1903.

Although Grandad would have preferred Melbourne, where a Jewish community flourished, as a destination, lack of finance precluded this and they disembarked at the nearest port, which was Fremantle.

Without money or knowledge of the language or the country, the early days were hard indeed. Work was scarce and my grandfather tried to eke out a living collecting and selling bottles and bags. Grandmother helped out a little by making trousers at sweated rates for a tailor and by knitting socks.

Their financial situation was desperate when Grandad was offered a job by "Blind Hyman" Samelowitz. This involved driving a horse and cart laden with vegetables and other foodstuffs from Menzies to a small outlying town in the goldfields called Davyhurst. At this time Menzies was still a thriving town, about 90 miles from Kalgoorlie in the heart of the goldfields. This enabled the family to move to Davyhurst to begin a new life in outback Australia.

Grandad's visits brought him in touch with Louis Leedman, who at this time was the manager of Silbert and Sharp's well-established wholesale grocery business. Although by this time Louis was successful and secure, he identified with the struggling, gentle man and the two men quickly became firm friends.



After some time a produce business in the neighbouring town of Mulline became vacant – its owner had left, following a fire – and Louis suggested that Grandad set up a business in Mulline. He offered to act as guarantor and provide him with provisions. Thus, the little business opened in 1906.

The house was a simple dwelling with an earthen floor. One of its chief assets lay in the fact that it contained a cellar underneath, in which the perishable food could be stored. Finkelstein obtained eggs, butter, vegetables and other foodstuffs from Menzies. The eggs were packed in bran in barrels and the butter came in a large block to be cut into pounds. They were sent from a place called Colac in Victoria – shipped by sea to Esperance, travelled overland to Kalgoorlie and subsequently to the surrounding mining towns. With the unbearable heat of the goldfields in summer, it is difficult to imagine how they preserved their perishable products.

My grandfather would drive from Mulline in the morning with a cart and two horses and stop at a half-way house between the towns to spell the horses. He would complete the 30-mile journey by evening and load up with his provisions, leaving at daylight the following day in order to be home before nightfall.

Mulline, which is now a “ghost town”, was a small gold-mining town in Dad’s early childhood. It boasted one street, containing two hotels and two shops and had two gold mines. There were insufficient children to warrant a school and so Dad and his brother Bill had two years of freedom roaming the countryside.

When he was eight years old, a man came to work at the government battery, which used to crush the ore for the prospectors. This man had five children and this boosted the child population sufficiently for a school to be opened. The first teacher in the little bush shed was an eighteen year-old monitor called Albert Schorer and he remained there for two years. My father was not the oldest child in the school and English was not the language of his home, but he was a keen and outstanding student from the outset.

Their second teacher, Mr Bellany, was a sailor who had injured his right hand on the ship’s rigging and could no longer ply his trade. He became a teacher and was sent to Mulline school. Dad became his unofficial “assistant”: he would sweep out the school and fill the inkwells.

Occasionally, on a Monday morning, the children would arrive at school to find no teacher. Dad would timidly knock on the door of his one-roomed hut to ask for the school key. A bedraggled Mr Bellany would appear and say, “Sam, send the children home – I’m not feeling very well today.” Needless to say, the children were delighted to have such days of freedom. Their teacher was one of many people in the goldfields who sought solace from the bottle. Nevertheless, with the aid



of both Mr Bellany and my father, my grandfather learned to read and write in simple English.

My father has many recollections of the early years of the century – transport was largely by horse and cart. A large wagon came to Mulline once or twice a year, drawn by 20 or 30 donkeys, and even on one occasion by camels. One year there was great excitement when a politician called Buzzacott, who was electioneering, came to Mulline in a car – the entire population assembled to gaze in wonderment at this marvellous contraption! In fact they were far more impressed by the car than they were with the politician.

Another memory was of Halley's Comet in 1910. The local aborigines were frightened, anxious and wailing. The people of the town had risen in the night and listened earnestly to the teacher explaining the phenomenon.

Dad also recalled the problems of drunkenness, which affected so many in the goldfields. One single miner found a large nugget of gold, lived at the hotel like a lord until his money ran out, and was then tossed out into the street to sober up and begin again.

My grandmother's brother wanted to come to Australia from Palestine and she built him up in the children's eyes. They expected to meet a most impressive man. They stayed awake and were up early to welcome him on the morning of his arrival. Dad recalled: "He was four foot nothing – no bigger than I was!" What a disappointment. He was a religious Jew from Jerusalem with a large beard. The little man wore a flat black hat and a long coat – even allowing for the mixed population in the goldfields at that time, his appearance must have aroused some interest and curiosity.

Grandma was an observant Jewess and Dad remembers the samovar, which was left on all day on Shabbat. He also recalls her trying to use an Aboriginal woman to help out as a "Shabbas Goy". He did not understand the Aboriginal population – the children did not attend school and his attitude towards them was coloured by the prevailing one of the European community. He was, however, fascinated by the way they survived in the bush, their bushcraft and their very different dietary habits.

Sometimes he accompanied his father when he visited Menzies to replenish his stores. On these visits he would listen to the conversation of the two men. Louis would talk about his son Charlie, who was studying medicine in faraway Melbourne. He decided then and there – if Charlie Leedman could escape and leave the goldfields to pursue such a calling, so could he! His mother supported him in this ambition and was undoubtedly his driving force in helping him to realise this ambition.

Grandad developed a desire to own land and had a stroke of luck. Some of his customers paid their bills with mining shares and he



was given a half-share in the Young Australia mine. This yielded him sufficient money to commence farming at Shackleton, together with two of his brothers. Grandma and Grandad left Mulline for Shackleton in October 1912 and Dad and Bill remained in the town to complete the school year. Dad's uncle Harry, who came out to Australia with his father and his uncle Ben, took up three blocks, one for each family.

Shackleton at that time was just a water tank along the railway line. The country had to be cleared yard by yard with axes and they were indeed pioneers on the land. They employed a man to help them with this work and paid him 30 shillings an acre. With a feeling of hope and pride, Grandad named the farm "Young Australia". Enterprising Harry built his own home and Grandma and Grandad lived with him while theirs was being built.

The land was allotted in 1,000 acre lots and the family bought the cheapest kind – the sand-plain country. In the early years the countryside was plagued with poison plants and a severe lack of water. This precluded the rearing of sheep and wheat and oats were the first crops. Grandad began farming with a plough, a cultivator and four horses. In the early years wheat brought in one shilling and tenpence a bushel and wool fivepence-halfpenny a pound – a little different from the prices of today!

Early in 1913 Dad and Uncle Bill went to Perth and gazed in wonderment to see Boans lit up at night. To the boys who had grown up in Mulline but were to live in Perth for their schooling, it really was a different world. They boarded with the Rosen family in Queens Crescent and each day walked to James Street School and back.

Although shy and inarticulate, Dad was determined and his goals were firmly set. When they began at the school, he approached the Headmaster and told him that he wanted to take a scholarship so that he could attend Perth Modern School and later study medicine. For his "chutzpah" he was placed in an industrial class. He worked his way to the next level – the commercial class, and as he showed prowess was moved up to the scholarship class. He shared a desk with Thomas Logan Robertson, a redhead whom they called "Ginner". He developed a great affection for "Ginner" who, with him, won a scholarship to Perth Modern School. He later became Director General of Education and maintained contact until the end of his life.

Dad began his four-year course at Perth Modern School in 1914 and went home to the farm for the August holidays. It was a drought year. The season was bad and the family's financial position was, to say the least, precarious. When it was time to return to school he refused to go. It was only on the insistence of his mother, who forced him to return, which prevented him from remaining on the land and becoming a farmer.



He appreciated and enjoyed to the full his years at "Mod", for he realised that this was his passport to the future. He was very proud of the fact that he was elected Captain of Spinx Faction in his final year of school.

### **BECOMING A MEDICAL PRACTITIONER**

Upon matriculation, Dad attended university in what was called "Tin-Pan-Alley" – the temporary premises, before the University of Western Australia was built on its beautiful site in Crawley. It was a difficult year for him, for chemistry, biology and botany had not been taught at Modern School. The chemistry was especially difficult and he had to literally teach himself.

It was many years before Perth was to gain a medical school and he was accepted at Melbourne University. His living conditions there were in the very cheapest accommodation and he lived in an attic and studied by candle light. The fact that he had almost no sight in one eye was a further handicap.



*Samuel Finkelstein in 1922, at the age of 21.*



The Industries Assistance Board allowed his parents a small grant to help finance his course, but it was still a big struggle for them. In the long summer holidays he worked non-stop at the wheat bins in order to save enough to pay for clothes and books for the following year.

These were the years when he was courting my mother, Ethel Leedman. Ethel had also been a student at Perth Modern School and was now teaching in Kellerberrin.

When Dad qualified, he had to find work at once. At the age of 23, lacking the hospital experience which is mandatory for young doctors today, he set out to make his living in the country.

The first necessity was a vehicle, for this was basic to the needs of a doctor who had to travel long distances as quickly as possible. He borrowed £100 from his future brother-in-law, Charlie, as a deposit, and bought an Essex 4, with the arrangement that he would pay off the remainder in monthly instalments of £66 a month. With minimal advice from the salesman in Perth, he drove the car 140 miles to the farm at Shackleton, pulling off the road every time he saw a vehicle approaching and waiting until it was out of sight before driving on. The journey must have been a very slow one indeed! On the following morning he drove 21 miles to the nearest police station at Bruce Rock. On hearing that he had driven from Perth on the previous day, he was promptly issued with a licence!

Dad would have liked to begin practising medicine at Corrigin or Quairading to be close to the family, but there was no opening at either place. He was invited to a town called Trayning, by a small hospital committee, with a guarantee of £1,000 a year and began his first practice there.

He commenced in a very humble way and his first consulting room was in the front room of the local grocer's home. In the surgery was a second-hand examination couch and three upturned kerosene boxes on which he arranged the drugs which he had obtained from Felton, Grimwade and Bickfords for £360. He had to dispense all his own medicines, as the big towns were many miles away and the roads at that time were poorly maintained, often being impassable in winter. In all his years in the country he always dispensed his own medicines. This, added to the fact that he never had a nurse or a secretary, must have made his task a mammoth one indeed.

He lived at the hotel in Trayning until June 1924, when he and my mother were married and they moved into a rental home.

All hospital cases had to go to Merridin, Wyalkatchem or Kellerberrin and most of them were transported by my father. He was not only not paid for the journeys; he was not even reimbursed for the petrol. For him it was all part of the job.



## LIFE IN KUNUNOPPIN

In April 1925 their first son Frank was born and when he was just three weeks old they moved to nearby Kununoppin. The Hospital Committee in Trayning had been unable to fulfil its promises of providing a nurse and medical premises in the town. The Silver Chain Association had built a four-roomed structure as a convalescent home in Kununoppin, a town situated three and a half miles from Trayning, on the road towards Merridin. With the help of the Kununoppin Hospital Committee and the approval of the State Premier, the convalescent home became the hospital. It contained one two-bed ward for men, one two-bed ward for women, a kitchen, a matron's room and outbuildings.

In the early days the accommodation was so limited that it became quite inadequate when there were accidents or emergencies. They simply ran out of beds and the patients had to be placed on mattresses on the verandas outside. Later on the verandas were enclosed, giving three more beds on each side of the hospital.

In our home in Kununoppin the wall telephone was just outside the surgery door in the passage. This was opposite my parents' bedroom. As Dad had to be on call 24 hours a day, after 6 p.m. the postmistress plugged our telephone through to the main line. My parents became used to sleeping through the constant ringing of the bells, but both woke instantly if their own distinctive call came through.

From the outset Dad set up a medical service, based in three neighbouring towns, within a wide radius of home. On Wednesdays he drove 25 miles north-east to Mukinbudin and held a clinic there in a room in the hotel from one until 6 p.m. Thursday was the day he visited Nungarin, which was only sixteen miles away due east and held surgery for five hours in the afternoon. Friday afternoon were reserved for Bencubbin, which was situated about 25 miles north, slightly to the west.

When he returned home, he worked until late in the evening to make up the prescribed medicines, which were to be delivered on the following day. This was done by the police or the men who worked for the Industries Assistance Board. A large number of farmers were displaced civil servants and they were willing but inexperienced workers. These were the depression years and their lives were a real struggle. One woman patient told Dad that she was reduced to making underclothes from flour and bacon bags.

Married couples received £12 a month, on which to feed and clothe themselves – little wonder that medical bills received a low priority. Many farmers paid "in kind", with farm produce, and one farmer's wife presented him with a beautifully decorated cream sponge. He placed it carefully on the back seat of the car and when the vehicle



passed over a particularly rough stretch of road, the cake flew up and finished on his head – what a sight that must have been!

In those days the roads in the country were unsealed and in winter they became quagmires. He was bogged many times in the mud and had to resort to bags and boughs under the wheels, aided by a shovel, to get the car moving again. His car was a Godsend to many – he took and brought patients from hospital so that the car acted as an ambulance, for there was no such vehicle available to them at that time.

In his years in the country he had no such thing as an X-ray machine and he took great pride in the fact that he set limbs very well indeed. His method of setting limbs was to set them with splints and elastic bandages, which were not removed for some weeks. (He said that limbs which were ill-set with plaster of Paris often became malformed.) His hands were expert in the gentle handling and dressing of wounds. I can personally vouch for his neat, firm bandages and for his almost painless injections!

In his Kununoppin years he was called upon on a number of occasions to perform veterinary services – once saving the life of a valuable dog which had a bone stuck in its throat and at other times tending to injured horses. His techniques, if innovative, were successful.

In the Kununoppin years there were no antibiotics, no relaxants, no intravenous injections, no tranquillisers and no intravenous blood transfusions. His only help lay in his wits, and normal saline injections. For operations he would have to induce the patient with Ethylchloride and then use anaesthetic ether from a drop bottle to keep the patient asleep. This was usually done by a probationer and Dad would have to supervise her, as well as operate on the patient. His greatest worry was to maintain sterile conditions in the hospital and this was often very difficult. It was difficult to recruit competent nurses, for life in a small country town offered few inducements.

The first matron at the hospital was elderly and inefficient. The next was ill-educated and elderly. She had been issued with a certificate in the goldfields, where she had been a chambermaid. She had no idea of sterilising procedures. Once, while assisting at a minor operation, she dropped the forceps and then proceeded to wipe them on her apron, which was none too clean. My father was appalled! She was a sympathetic soul and devoted to the people in her care – it was a pity that she lacked both intelligence and training. The advent of an outstanding matron, called Davenport, made a great difference. Before she came, he had to visit the hospital frequently to supervise staff and to make sure that medications were actually given.

Prior to the building of the hotel in the town, friends and relatives of patients in the hospital had nowhere to stay when they came to visit patients. My mother often provided meals for farmers when their wives



were in hospital, or when they brought patients in and were held up in the town. Our home became a real haven and with my mother's superb cooking and ready hospitality, eating at the doctor's was considered a treat.

In the 1930s a small "Rest Home" was built opposite the hospital and I think that my father was a pioneer in this aspect of maternity care. He would arrange for the mothers to come in and stay at the home for two weeks before the birth of the baby and then to remain there for two weeks after they left hospital. In this way he could monitor the progress of both mother and child for a longer period of time. There were no such things as infant health clinics and it must have been very difficult for some mothers, particularly after the birth of a first child.

The government "Baby Bonus" was £5 for each child and most had to pay the hospital bill with this – the doctor often received no payment at all. As part of the service, he often brought the woman to Kununoppin before the birth and returned her home with her baby afterwards. Electricity was not brought to Kununoppin until 1936 or '37 and there were only pressure lamps or kerosene lamps for lighting. We lived in the dry Eastern Wheatbelt and also had to depend on rainwater tanks for our water supply. Until we invested in a kerosene refrigerator – also in the mid-1930s – we used the old Coolgardie safe and canvas water bags to keep food and water cool. The weekly train from Perth brought our "fresh" vegetables.

Although medical colleagues were few and far between, a conference of surrounding doctors was held every three months at Northam, a larger town, which was situated almost half-way between Kununoppin and Perth. Dad found the meetings immensely helpful, for doctors could exchange ideas and discuss problems. The thought that this support system was available must have been some comfort, although most of the time he worked alone and unaided.

Apart from his roles as doctor and pharmacist, he was called on once in an emergency to remove a badly decayed tooth from a patient. He did this so gently and competently that even in later years, when a dentist visited some of the outlying districts, many patients preferred my father's ministrations. On one occasion he extracted the teeth of two women patients. He sent the impressions down to the dentist in Perth for the false teeth to be made. When the teeth were returned, he carefully fitted the teeth for the first lady. She pronounced them fine and went home. After a few days of absolute misery, she returned to the doctor with a very sore mouth. Somehow the teeth had been labelled wrongly and she had suffered accordingly! This was not his most successful exercise in dentistry!

In 1938, after an impossibly heavy work load, Dad sold the practice in Kununoppin and he and my mother took a holiday in America, before moving to live in Perth.



Some years later he received a small book entitled "Rural Rhymes", with a covering letter, which reminded him of his associations with Kununoppin. On page six of the book was a long poem – "A Lay of Kununoppin". Before the poem the author had written the following:

A much loved country doctor, who served a very large area of country districts, in some cases under most primitive conditions, eventually had cause to retire. His departure caused almost consternation amongst a large number of people, whose family life, problems and sicknesses he treated with such deep understanding.

After the poem his postscript said: "To refresh your memory of me – you removed my appendix, delivered my son, extracted all my teeth, dealt with many family ailments and performed a near-miracle on my brother-in-law after a tractor accident."

### LIFE IN PERTH

Shortly after moving to practise medicine in Mt Lawley, Dad joined the Militia. The war began before the end of 1939 but he failed the medical to go overseas. He became a medical officer at Swan Barracks in Perth and throughout the war spent one or two days a week examining and attending soldiers there. He also became an assistant physician at Royal Perth Hospital, for outpatients. His suburban medical practice grew rapidly and for many years patients from the country saved their ills for a visit to Perth to see "Doctor Finkie". Over the years he gradually reduced his workload and by the time he was well into his seventies, decided to take on no new patients.

On the 150th anniversary of the founding of Western Australia, in 1979 he was asked to write his memoirs for the State Archives, for he was the oldest practising general practitioner in this state. He continued working until June 1984, when medical investigation revealed that he had developed a serious heart condition. Shortly afterwards there was a half-page article about him in *The Sunday Times*. It was headed "Dr Finkie Hangs Up His 'Scope'". The family approved the article, but Dad was upset because it did not mention that his retirement was due to ill-health. "My old patients will think I have let them down," he said.

An incident in hospital in 1984, where his role was now that of a patient, is worth recalling. In the bed opposite was a man who had received bypass surgery. A friend visited the bypass patient and asked how he felt. "Fine," replied the patient – "Look at this!" He bared his chest and, at the sight of the horrific scars, his visitor fainted on the



spot, hitting his head on the foot of Dad's bed as he fell. Ever the doctor, my father got out of bed, examined the visitor and then rang for the nurse. "He'll need to spend the night here under observation, but otherwise no damage has been done," was his earnest verdict.

There is much, much more that I could tell you of the lives of both Uncle Charlie and my father, but lack of time precludes this. Both men had humble beginnings and overcame great odds to reach their goals in life. Both of them were true pioneers as Jewish doctors in this state and their long and unswerving allegiance to the Hippocratic Oath did credit to them, to the Jewish community, and to Australia.

## NOTES

1. In October 1991 I was invited to present a paper at the Western Australian Branch of the Jewish Historical Society. This was based on information from my father, the late Dr Samuel Finkelstein, and my mother's brother, the late Dr Charles Leedman. Most of the material that I have on my uncle was gained from a manuscript of the first half of his life. This was written by Charlie himself in the early 1950s, and much of my paper will be in his own words.

## DR. SIDNEY SOLOMON ROSEBERY

*Lionel Rosebery*

**S**idney Solomon Rosebery was born at Stanmore, a suburb of Sydney. He was the youngest of the family with three brothers and a sister. His father had arrived in this country as a young man from England in the 1850s, and at the time of Sidney's birth on 28 April 1887, was an executive of one of Australia's largest wholesalers Hoffnungs & Co. Before her marriage, their mother, Rebecca Hyam had been born and raised on a farm at Jamberoo in the Shoalhaven district of New South Wales. Her father Michael Hyam received a grant for this land from the governor in the 1830s for his part in exploring and opening up the district.

Sidney was educated at the "Woodford Academy" in the Blue Mountains, as a boarder, and he not only played Rugby Union for the school, but was picked to play for Penrith. However, several years later his father bought the Steyne Hotel on the ocean beachfront at Manly, and it was decided that the family would live on the premises. Sidney transferred to Sydney Grammar School gaining his leaving certificate in 1904. He got a job at his father's old firm as a commercial traveller, for five years, saving enough money to enable him to fulfil his lifetime ambition. He travelled to Scotland and enrolled as a medical student at Edinburgh University where the medical school was regarded as one of the world's finest.

Shortly before his graduation, he travelled to London, where he was introduced to the beautiful Dorothy Altman, whose full length portrait had just been exhibited at a London Art Gallery. Sidney fell head over heels in love and after a whirlwind courtship they were married in London on 31 August 1914. World War 1 had just broken out and the newly weds realised that they would have to travel north to Edinburgh, where Sidney could resume his final studies at the university. After a brief honeymoon they caught the Flying Scotsman from Victoria Station and travelled to Edinburgh where they rented a small cottage at 84 Marchmont Road, not far from the university, and on 29 May 1915 a son was born and named Arthur Lionel Rosebery after two of his uncles.

On his graduation at the beginning the 1916, Sidney Rosebery, who had recently changed his name from Rosenthal by deed poll, became a resident at the Metropolitan Hospital in London, where he removed a



bullet from the brain of a wounded soldier who was conscious throughout the operation and completely recovered. Sidney Rosebery then enlisted in the British Army and was commissioned as a captain serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps, where he was posted to the 2nd East Anglia Field Ambulance, then serving in Palestine, under General Allenby's command. British Infantry led by the Australian Light Horse were battling against the Turkish forces and casualties were heavy.



*Dr. Rosebery in 1914, during World War I,  
in the Royal Army Medical Corps.*

Captain Rosebery served throughout the campaign in Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia from 1916 till after the armistice and in 1918 he was twice commended for bravery and mentioned in dispatches. He was later recommended to receive the Order of the British Empire. A daughter named Beryl was born in London in August 1917. Later on Major Rosebery was posted as senior medical officer of a wing of a British Military Hospital in Mesopotamia, where one of the patients was a captured German medical officer who was reasonably fluent in English and the two doctors conversed together on several occasions, exchanging cigarettes and enjoying a drink together. This was in order because the armistice had just been signed.

Before this German medical officer was repatriated he presented his field glasses to Major Rosebery, as a gesture of good will. This ex



German medical officer arrived in Sydney in 1938, as a refugee from Hitler's brutal regime and he was told by the Jewish agency to contact Dr. Sidney Rosebery in Macquarie Street, who might be able to advise him on the procedures to set up practice in Australia. As he entered the surgery, Dr. Rosebery said "I know your face, we must have met before" - the doctor, Dr. Glasser who had just arrived from Germany said "that is impossible, I have just arrived in Australia" - whereupon Sidney Rosebery went to his cupboard and producing a pair of binoculars said "these were yours, you gave them to me" - Ah! Major Rosebery what an amazing coincidence ".

Whilst he was in charge of a 500 bed military hospital at Tel el Kebir in Egypt, Major Rosebery encountered a considerable number of his patients who were suffering from dysentery, so he decided to treat some of them with a solution of chlorine water. After about a week, there was a marked improvement in their condition. He continued his treatment of these patients using chlorine water on those with both bacillary and amoebic dysentery with considerable success. He included his clinical notes in a paper submitted to the *British Medical Journal* for publication and a report was forward to the Director General of Medical Services at British Army Headquarters.

About this time, he resumed his "old" hobby of painting to which at one time he had seriously considered devoting his life. He had studied under Gerald Fitzgerald whose work had been hung in the Paris Salon and the Royal Academy and one of Sidney Rosebery's first watercolours to be exhibited received very favourable comments from the artistic critics of the day. Whenever he could find the time during his active service, he painted, and several of his Cairo street landscapes are still in existence. Art seemed to have been an inherited talent, as both his maternal and paternal grandfathers were artists.

Before returning home to Australia after the Armistice of World War 1 and after his discharge from the British Army, he worked as a senior medical officer at the Shoreditch Infirmary in London where he found that a number of children were suffering and some dying from dysentery. Again Dr. Rosebery used chlorine water as the treatment and the majority of cases recovered in between four to five days; and the more severe cases in up to ten days. This research and its subsequent trials became the basis for the thesis in 1932, when he successfully sat for the degree of Doctor of Medicine (M.D.)

In 1921 he and Dorothy with their small family and Daisy White, who was Dorothy's life long friend set sail on one of the world's superlines the *S.S. Megantic* a White Star Line, diverted from the Atlantic run to repatriate Australians who had been engaged on war time and post war work for the government ; sailing down the west coast of Africa and calling in at Cape Town and Durban to refuel. The *Magantic* sailed onto



Australia where at Melbourne the Rosebery's disembarked. Sidney Rosebery travelled by train to Sydney where he intended to find out how he, with only deferred pay, could set up in private practice in his old home town of Manly.

Dorothy Rosebery with the two children, Arthur aged seven and Beryl now five went to Bendigo to visit her brother Samuel Altman and his family. Sam who had served with the A.I.F. in France had been wounded towards the end of the war and had been invalided home. After the death of Sid's father Morris Rosebery towards the end of the first world war and having sold the Steyne Hotel facing the ocean beach, his widow Rebecca Rosebery had recently purchased a large house at the corner of Sydney road and James Street. It occupied a very prominent position on the top of a hill and was ideally suited for a medical practice.

Sidney Rosebery arranged to rent this from his mother, who had promised to leave this property to him in her will. She arranged to move to a very nice private hotel at the bottom of James Street called "Earls Court".

Dorothy, Daisy and the two children arrived from Bendigo, and a comfortable home was established as well as a surgery and waiting room. Sid started off with a couple of patients, and as he could not afford a car, he either walked or took a tram to make his home visits and yet this was to become one of the largest private practices in Sydney.

For a number of years before and during the war, a family of doctors called Thomas had been practicing in Manly and with several other medicos and had supplied the visiting medical staff for the Manly Cottage Hospital, which acted as the main hospital for the district. When Sidney Rosebery approached the hospital board, he was told there was no possibility for him to send or attend his patients at the hospital. The clique which controlled the hospital resented the newcomer who had the temerity to arrive back from the war and just "squat" without buying into an existing practice.

Without a hospital to which he could send his sick patients, the situation looked difficult, until he heard that three sisters named Davis who had newly arrived from the country were looking for jobs. All three were registered nurses, whilst the eldest had occupied the position of matron of a country hospital. Together with Sidney Rosebery, they arranged the necessary finances to buy a large house in Lauderdale Avenue Fairlight, overlooking the harbour which became the Fairlight Hospital.

In June 1921, a third child was born to the Rosebery family. She was called Ruth Rachal and was both fair and beautiful. Dorothy and Sidney decided that they needed extra help in the running of this busy household, so a maid and a cook were employed, as extra accommodation had just been added to the house.



From 1921 until 1932, Sidney Rosebery built up a very large practice which included many of the poor people of the district, whose lifestyle had been affected by the Great Depression of 1929 to 1934. Australia's unemployment rose to the second highest in the world and many of these unfortunates in the Manly district were living on the "bread line". Sidney Rosebery helped them in any way he could, not only refusing payment, but paying for their medication and in some cases their food and clothing. He was truly known as the "good doctor".

He became one of the founders and trustees of the Manly sub-branch of the Returned Soldiers League and the Soldier's Memorial Hall as well as the Manly Historical Society. In addition he was on the medical staff of some eighteen of the twenty four "Friendly Society Lodges" in the district and was honorary medical officer of the Dalwood Children's Home, The Manly Rugby Union Football Club and the Queenscliff Surf Life Saving Club, a tennis club was named the Rosebery Tennis Club in his honour.

The Roseberys had "settled in" well in the district and it was with the great help and devotion of "Aunt Daisy" White to "her family" that Dorothy Rosebery was able to contribute her time and effort to a number of charitable institutions, as befitted the wife of one of Manly's most prominent doctors; she helped to found and became the first president of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Returned Soldiers Club, as well as a member of several charitable organisations. In October 1926 a fourth child was born, a girl whom they called Marian Olive.

In 1930 Sidney Rosebery decided to study for postgraduate degrees, and to specialise in cardiology as well as to become a general diagnostician, which would mean moving into Macquarie Street Sydney. He began to look around for somebody who could buy his practice. Several weeks later, negotiations with Dr. Norman Davis started and it was arranged that Sidney would spend some time acquainting Dr. Davis with the practice.

In 1931 he arranged a passage on the *S.S. Port Campbell* as ship's surgeon to travel to England and thence to Edinburgh to further his postgraduate studies. On the eve of his departure Dr. Sidney Rosebery was farewelled at a large and representative gathering at the Town Hall of Manly. On behalf of the citizens of Manly, the Mayor presented him with a large cabin trunk and an attache case both suitably inscribed. The Town Hall was really inadequate to accommodate his many friends and well wishers who wanted to pay tribute to this wonderful man. The gathering consisted not only of the Mayor and councillors, the State and Federal members of Parliament including several ministers and many other well known citizens including the clergy of both Catholic and Protestant denominations, as well as hundreds of his old patients from amongst the poor of Manly.



The family consisting of Dorothy, Aunt Daisy and the four children moved into a small house in Oswald Street Cremorne, where Arthur and the girls continued their schooling. Arthur was still at Sydney Grammar School, Marion was at Redlands whilst Beryl and Ruth were enrolled at the Moss Vale Convent boarding school.

Sidney Rosebery first gained the degree of Doctor of Medicine, submitting as his theses, his research and clinical work which he had carried out during World War 1 and afterwards in a London hospital on dysentery and his method of treatment by chlorine water. Having gained his M.D. degree, he next applied to sit for the examination of membership of the Royal College of Physicians, there being no similar body in Australia at that time. Several months later the degree of M.R.C.P. was conferred upon him. This time his thesis dealt with his work on a method for the determination of blood sugar in diabetes and in April 1935, a paper was published in the *Medical Journal of Australia* detailing his research on "a permanent standard in the determination of blood sugar in diabetes". He became on his return to Australia Senior Honorary Physician at the Prince Henry Hospital, the largest hospital in N.S.W. at the time with 680 beds. He was also physician in charge of the diabetic clinic at the N.S.W. Community Hospital. His consulting rooms were at the B.M.A. Building in Macquarie Street. Various testimonials as to his character and his research resulted in his election as a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, a great honour as the number of Fellows of this prestigious college was limited to one hundred throughout the world.

Once again he returned to his art as a relaxation and he painted many scenes at Narooma, Bermagui and the surrounding district which were exhibited at the annual exhibitions of the Royal Art Society. This seems to have been an inherited characteristic, as his paternal grandfather Lewis Gluck Rosenthal had been a successful portrait artist in the 1830s. There are several of his portraits hanging in Windsor Castle, one dated 1844 of Queen Victoria and one of Prince Frederick. He also painted the Duke of Wellington. His maternal great grandfather David Hyams' occupation was also as an artist. When he lived at Manly on his return from the war he regularly exhibited at the annual exhibitions of the Royal Art Society of which he was a member, and he continued doing this throughout his career as a busy medico.

Shortly after his son, Arthur, enlisted in the AIF in May 1940, Sidney Rosebery, who had been on the active list as a militia officer, put his age back several years and transferred to the A.I.F. and was posted to Darwin as second in command of the 119th Australian Memorial Hospital. Throughout the savage Japanese raids, his work under fire was magnificent and on the day of the first raid when the hospital was bombed and machine gunned, Major Rosebery assisted by Corporal



Gorman evacuated 59 sick and wounded soldiers from the wards, one of whom was fatally wounded as Major Rosebery had tried to protect him with mattresses from the beds. For this he was recommended by his commanding officer for bravery. In between medical duties and Japanese air raids he painted a few pictures including one featuring the first Japanese fighter plane shot down near the hospital.

Several months later he was transferred to the hospital ship *Manunda*. Through the sweltering New Guinea and Islands campaign,



*World War II : Major Sidney Rosebery.*



he worked as a surgeon for 36 hours in mud and slush and often under fire, operating on wounded soldiers at Milne Bay. One night a Japanese warship sailed into the bay and shelled the shore, where they were working, shells whistled over the operating tents. Sid Rosebery painted during any lull and his scenes like the loading of wounded on to the barges to be taken aboard the hospital ship *Manunda*, and the landings at Tarakan and Balikpapan were part of a series of his wartime paintings used by John Sands, one of Australia's largest printers and featured in a calendar in 1943.

Doubtless it was this long and gruelling experience on a man who had put his age back a number of years to enlist and this continued for nearly six months after Japanese surrender, that took the final toll upon his strength at the age of 59. Sidney Rosebery died on 1 February 1946, as he would perhaps have wished, still in the service of his beloved native land.

Arthur served in the A.I.F. artillery unit in the Middle East and the South West Pacific theatre. Beryl was a flight sergeant with the W.A.A.F.S., Ruth became an A.C.W. Group 1, Class 1 specialist photographer also with the W.A.A.F.S. and Marian served with the W.R.A.N.S. During this period, Dorothy gave her time establishing a canteen service for troops on leave or in transit. Every member of the family was in uniform serving their country.

## MAX CHAIKIN'S CENTENARY

*Morris Ochert*

**E**arly in 1980, in my capacity as an honorary Jewish social worker, I was called to the RSL's Home for Veterans at Caboolture, a small town about a three-quarters of an hour's drive north of Brisbane. For several years Max Chaikin<sup>1</sup>, a Jewish man who had led a remarkable life, lived there. As he was soon to turn 100, he wished to talk to someone about his will and funeral arrangements. Chaikin celebrated his centenary on 12 January 1980 with a small private party. A few days later he was the guest of honour at a large public function attended by local personalities, many of the people living in the home and all of its staff. Letters of congratulations from the Queen and the Governor were read and he delivered a dignified and intelligent address. He passed away on 7 December 1981.

I found that Chaikin was very proud of his Jewishness and that his Hebrew name was Mordechai ben Israel. He was small of stature, wiry and very fit. He read and wrote without glasses and spoke many languages.<sup>2</sup> His parents were both circus performers who had originally lived in the environs of Odessa in Russia where a strong Jewish community existed.<sup>3</sup> His earliest memories were of his parents being constantly on the move since they were circus performers. They travelled all over Russia and Europe. It was while they were on tour in England that Chaikin was born at Tilbury Docks in 1880. Thus, he started his life with dual citizenship which was to serve him well during World War I.

Already when he was an infant, Chaikin performed in Hyde Park, London, under his parents' guidance. Later, he developed his own act and by the age of 22 he was touring Europe, North and South America and Australia with various circuses. His main acts were as an aerialist, a dancer and acrobat upon the tight rope. He was also a trapeze performer.

When the First World War broke out, he was in British Honduras and, since he was born in Britain and was a British subject, he was called up to serve in the British Navy. He hardly spoke any English at the time since he had been employed in circuses where he only needed to speak in Russian. However, once in the navy he quickly learned English and soon he was able to serve as an interpreter and intelligence officer. He served in Gallipoli and later in other parts of Turkey.



After the war, he served for a period of time in the Russian Navy, before revisiting Australia 'because the people here were so friendly'. He resumed his acrobatic career, visiting all parts of Australia. He mainly worked with the Ashton Bros. Circus and the Ashton family valued him greatly, not only for his showmanship which they described as 'superb and professional', but also for his wide knowledge of circus affairs and his willingness and ability to guide younger circus members in their careers. He was by nature a mature counsellor, something which was very much needed in the unsettled life of a circus performer. After a period in Australia, Chaikin moved to the United States where he worked mainly with the renowned Ringling Bros Circus. He was much in demand and he told me how he accumulated a small fortune from his work.

Then he met and married a former Queenslander and in 1928 they returned to Australia. From then on, Chaikin's career was not as spectacular as it had been when he performed under the 'big top' in the USA'. Initially he became a court reporter and interpreter in Sydney. Although he was 59 years old when World War II commenced, he was in perfect health and was accepted for active service in the 2nd/2nd Field Workshop of the AIF. Events moved quickly and he travelled with his unit to Egypt where he was again appointed as an interpreter with the rank of Sergeant, a rapid promotion.

Chaikin was not sure what happened after the war, since he suffered a stroke and could not recall details of his life. Doctors attributed this to a stroke resulting from the falls which, it seems, are endemic to the calling of an aerialist. From the end of World War II until his admission to Nambour Hospital and later to Caboolture Hostel, he could recall little except that he 'farmed, mined, gravelled, learned more languages, lost most of his goods and money and gradually grew older'. His first wife died and he re-married at the age of 88.

Max Chaikin had great charisma and a magnetic personality. He read widely and enjoyed discussing any subject raised. Among the languages which he spoke were English, Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, German, Italian, Spanish, Turkish and French. He had a great knowledge of the Jewish religion and regretted that, due to his itinerant existence, he had not lived closer to his co-religionists. He liked to quote the saying from Psalms, 'Separate not thyself from the congregation', and was always keen for news from Israel. He recalled that early in his life he was imprisoned in Siberia for anti-Tsarist activities, but did not remember any details of this experience.

Max Chaikin was very popular at the Hostel, so much so that even as I write this article he is still remembered with affection for his sense of humour, whimsicality and wisdom. Affectionately, the staff at the Mahome called him 'Mr Chicken'.





*Max Chaikin marching with other World War II veterans  
in the Anzac Parade of 25 April 1971.*

Just before his death, Max Chaikin outlined his philosophy of life, drawn from his interesting and unusual professional work:

- We are all aerialists, for life is like a tight-rope, a swing.
- Some dance high, some not so high.
- Some dance well, others barely can perform.
- Some are scared and should never climb that rope ladder.
- As you proceed along that narrow pathway, try to make no sudden or unnecessary moves, starts or stops, but if you must do so, adjust your balance first. Do not delay such an adjustment until you are already swaying.
- Remain calm. Take short, well-planned steps.
- The rope must bounce and sway, so don't fight against it. Bounce with the rope and sway with the rope, so that it is always pressing against the soles of your feet. Remember you can't fly!
- Never change your mind — keep your mind on your destination and carry no negative thoughts.
- Concentrate on your performance. You are up there to entertain, not to die.
- There is no place for a clown up on the rope. Leave the clowns down there on the sawdust.
- Keep your head high, your shoulders back, your eyes wide, your



bowels clear and breathe deeply.

- Leave earthly worries far below. Up on the rope you must soar like an angel.
- Don't look down or it may come up to meet you. Only look ahead.
- If you do not love a partner never step upon the rope or the trapeze with him/her for you have each others' lives in your hands.
- Never smoke or drink alcohol.
- Eat frugally and keep below your minimum safe weight.
- Always be in control.
- On the big swing — the trapeze — watch the eyes, the hands and the mind of your partner. Remember that only one of you may call the moves.
- Believe in your own ability and if you do all these things, you may live 100 years, or even a little more, by reason of strength (*Pirkae Avot, Sayings of the fathers*)

Soon after, this inspiring trouper passed away. His story reflects the diversity of Jewish experience and shows that Jews are involved in a wide range of occupations, in Australia as well as overseas, which do not fit into the traditional stereotypes of a Jew.

## NOTES

1. I acknowledge the assistance of my colleague Earle Hoffman, president of the Canberra Branch of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, who found the photo of Max Chaikin. I also acknowledge the assistance of the *Canberra Times* for permission to reproduce the photo, for which they hold copyright. Mr Hoffman noted that the *Times* understood the surname was 'Chikin', while the FAJEX publication, *Australian Jewry's Book of Honour, World War II*, edited by Gerald Pynt with the co-operation of NAJEX historian, Jack Epstein, gives his name as: Chaikim, M. Sgt, NX27099, on p.153. The *Caboolture Times*, which wrote about Chaikin's centenary celebration, used the spelling Chaikin, as did the hostel and this is most probably the correct spelling as both Max Chaikin and his second wife Ellen nominated that spelling.
2. While assisting Max Chaikin, he told me his life story. I found out that there were gaps in his memory, but in the main he had very clear recall.
3. My own parents came from Odessa
4. Interview with Max Chaikin, 1980.

## A RICH HERITAGE COLLEEN RICH AND HER FAMILY CIRCLE IN AUSTRALIA SINCE 1853

*Louise Rosenberg*

“**M**an is diminished if he lives without knowledge of his past.” In a quiet street of a leafy suburb of Sydney in New South Wales lives a gracious lady, Colleen Rich, who is old chronologically — having reached the age of 97 years — but clinically and intellectually able to hold up her head with most 60-year-olds. Alert and well informed, she is still reading without glasses since having had an eye operation in 1989. This is probably understandable when it is realised that Colleen’s family — both on her mother’s side and her father’s side — has been blessed with longevity. Colleen is a granddaughter of Jacob and Annie Hollander and the last surviving grandchild of Samuel and Rosetta Cohen of Ulmarra. Her mother, one of the ten children of Jacob Hollander and his wife Annie (nee Goldberg) was 103 when she died in 1972. Colleen’s maternal great-grandfather, Rabbi Moses H. Hollander of Birmingham, died at the age of 94, and was still in office at the Singers Hill Synagogue at the age of 92. She treasures a photograph of him taken in January 1899. This article has been written because of the importance of recording family history. It is a positive reaffirmation that Jews in this part of the world have contributed significantly to the development of Australia.

Stories such as these help to preserve values, keep alive traditions and give us an awareness of our past. They reinforce for our children a sense of faith and belief in their heritage. In the case of the Hollander/Cohen/Herzberg families, it is almost as if an amalgam of genes has produced generations of talent and longevity in greater measure than usual, and has imparted an especially strong sense of social justice, which contributed to the development of both Australian society as a whole and also to the growth of Australian Jewry.

This paper is not so much a resource as a chronicle. It is, however, intended to present a picture of Colleen Rich with, to a greater or lesser extent, some of her kinsfolk in her Cohen and Hollander background. This will mean noting some facts about her parents and their siblings, and several other descendants of her grandparents, both paternal and maternal. Nonetheless, it is difficult to restrict oneself only to those details which may not detract from the central theme of this particular article.



Perhaps this may best be achieved by having a cut-off for detail at Colleen's generation — namely, the grandchildren of Samuel and Rosetta Cohen and Jacob and Annie Hollander — a section that briefly illustrates that the tradition of service and upright citizenship has been maintained in later generations. This said, however, I would like to include in some detail several later -say, fourth and fifth generation — descendants of Samuel and Rosetta who have been awarded honours and will be mentioned merely as examples.

This is not intended to be an exhaustive, comprehensive family history, but mention should be made, briefly, of such people as they will later be appearing in their chronological order. Sir Richard Kingsland (born Julius Allan Cohen); Judge Sam Jacobs, A.O.; Peter Baume; Andrew Wells, A.O.; Doreen Bridges, A.M.; Dr A. Marcus Hertzberg, A.O.; Keith Millingen, his brother Colin and sister Margaret. So many were nation-builders, and have left their mark in ways that will be found to have been decisive in our history, when our successors look back on the 20th century. Also, most of us bring to our adulthood the outstanding characteristics of our home environment and of our forebears; in this case it would seem that intelligence, a capacity for sustained energy, and a love of social justice play a significant part.

### THE SAMUEL AND ROSETTA COHEN DYNASTY

In August, 1853 Colleen Rich's paternal grandparents, Samuel and Rosetta (nee Menser) Cohen, sailed from England, undertaking the four months' journey to Australia. Shortly before their departure, they had been married on 30 March 1853 in the New Synagogue, London. Samuel, son of Aaron and Rachel Cohen, was born in London on 14 July 1829; Rosetta was born on 15 October 1830, also in London.

After their arrival in Australia they settled initially in Sydney, in a house on the corner of Pitt and Market Streets, until the birth of their first child, Rachel (1854-1939), named after Samuel's mother. Both Samuel and Rosetta had grown up in London, but were sufficiently adventurous to decide to leave city life and travel by steamer to settle in Newcastle on the north coast of New South Wales, then little more than a convict settlement. Their household goods were sent up by bullock wagon and Samuel opened a store there. Three more children were born to them at Newcastle: Louis (1855-1857), Algernon Aaron (1856-1925), and Michael (1858-1899). After that, they moved north from Newcastle to Grafton on the Clarence River where Samuel opened another store. There, their fifth child was born. He was John Jacob (1859-1939). In 1860 they took their children (the youngest a babe in arms) and travelled the ten miles (sixteen kilometres) down river to Ulmarra, a village in a prosperous dairying district. Their



home was to be in Ulmarra for many years, and there eight more children were born to them: Benjamin on 1 November 1861 (died 1926); Rebecca, (1863-1928); Miriam (1867-1943); Barnett Keith on 18 January 1869 (died 15 April 1944); Annetta (1870-1953); Frances (1872-1943), and Julius, the twelfth child, (1875-1955). Another child, Henry, was born in August, 1866, but died at the age of two months and twenty days; he is buried at Grafton. His tombstone reads: "Henry, infant son of Samuel & Rosetta Cohen, who departed this life at Ulmarra on Sunday October 1st, AM 5626, aged 2 months and 20 days." (He is buried in the same plot as an infant son of Louis Loewenthal.)

Samuel Cohen was the proprietor of the Ulmarra hotel, but he continued as a trader as well, buying up maize, cedar and other products from the local farmers. He had a ship built on the Manning River — a schooner named the 'Rachel Cohen', after his mother. In the *Memoirs of John Jacob Cohen*,<sup>1</sup> written in 1939 towards the end of his life, edited and published posthumously by a friend, he wrote of his father's ship:

She was a sailing vessel...and used to trade regularly between Melbourne, Sydney and Clarence. The vessels always came in ballast and loaded maize from the wharf. The ballast was thrown on shore and was used to prevent the erosion of the bank of the river.

The Manning shipyards were building steamships of a smaller size, but still sufficiently large to travel between Sydney and Melbourne, as well as being capable of carrying sugarcane from Ulmarra to the mills and timber to Sydney. A number of other Jewish businessmen were also having their ships built in the area at that time. A typical ship of the period might be 92 feet long, 25 feet beam, and 14 feet from the deck-line to the floor-line of her hold, with a displacement of about 270 tons. The *Rachel Cohen* was launched on 24 August 1871. The 1870s had seen a marked increase in new steamship tonnage registered in the area, from 5,663 tons in 1865-1869 to 14,498 tons in 1879. Between 1865 and 1899 Sydney built three-quarters of the local steamship tonnage. There was a general ship-building boom on the northern rivers in the 1870s in which wooden steamships were built at Brisbane Waters and the Richmond, Macleay, Manning, Clarence and William rivers. Between 1875 and 1879 the Manning alone built 1,482 ships.

The home of Samuel and Rosetta Cohen and family was actually on the banks of the Clarence River at a point where it was half a mile wide. The house still stands. The name 'Ulmarra' is an aboriginal word variously translated as 'bend in the river' or 'beautiful lake'. We are



fortunate to have a splendid word picture and detailed illustrations of both interior and exterior examples of the house as it was featured in *The Daily Examiner*.<sup>2</sup> From this we learn that it was built especially for Samuel Cohen in the 1860s. It is built of brick and has a coach-house, cellar, servants' quarters and separate kitchen. There are throughout four fireplaces, and a wide veranda and high, ornate pressed-tin ceilings. We also learn that, as Mr Cohen was a cedar merchant, he "decked his home with cedar throughout". It was named "Silverweir".

The younger children had a governess named Miss Bergin; the older ones, on their walk to school, needed to pass an aboriginal camp. They made friends with the children there and were often invited to watch their corroborees. Some of the Cohen children took music lessons from a Miss Parsons who lived several miles beyond the school. Miss Parsons's mother would show students waiting for their piano lessons how to make tallow candles, how to skim milk, and how to churn butter. Their music lessons were important to them and welcomed; their mother, Rosetta, was a gifted pianist who sang both for her family and at musical evenings in the town. It was a wonderful life.

Samuel Cohen was a religious man and an observant Jew — a scholar of high order. He strictly observed the Sabbath and High Holy Days, closing his shop and refusing to open any mail until the Sabbath or Festival was over. All mail was placed on the mantelpiece until after Havdallah, the prayer said to mark the end of the Sabbath, even if he knew it required urgent attention. He was closely involved with the commercial life of the district as a member of the local school board, a Justice of the Peace, and the first mayor of Ulmarra. He arranged for a Sepher Torah to be sent up from the York Street Synagogue, and persuaded all the Jewish families in the area to attend communal worship, the services for which were held in his home. He prepared each of his sons for their Bar Mitzvah himself. In 1870 Samuel, together with Louis Samuel Loewenthal and Lewis Jacobs, applied for a grant of land on which to have a synagogue erected at Grafton. In November, 1870 the grant of one acre at South Grafton, "in the Parish of Great Marlow, County of Clarence, bounded on the north side by Oliver Street, on the west by Queen Street, on the east by Alumny Creek, and on the south side by a line cutting Section 50 of the Town Plan", was dedicated for a synagogue and Cohen, Loewenthal and Jacobs became the trustees of it. However, the land was never utilised for its original purpose and, in December 1937, the Board of Management of the Great Synagogue in Sydney, as the perceived trustees at that time, agreed to relinquish the site — some 65 years after it had been granted — when approximately £50 was owing for rates. As the land adjoined the local public school, the Department of Education acquired it.



The eldest child of Samuel and Rosetta Cohen, Rachel, married Charles Samuel Van Millingen in 1877. Some of their descendants today include Professor Peter Baume, former politician (1974-1991), and a Minister of the Commonwealth Government; now an academic and, since November 1994, Chancellor of the Australian National University, Canberra; Keith Millingen who lives in Tasmania; and Margaret Bennett (nee Millingen), who was for almost twenty years Administrative Secretary of Social Studies at the University of Sydney.

Louis, the Cohens' firstborn son, died at the age of two years. About the year 1874 their third child, Algernon Aaron, went to England to study Medicine, since there was no medical school in Sydney until 1881. After matriculating in London, he went on to Marshal College in Aberdeen where he obtained his medical degree, and then to Guy's Hospital, London, to obtain his M.R.C.S. He married an English girl, Priscilla Cohen (no relation), and practised for several years in Kent before returning with his wife and three children to Australia. Their youngest child, Fanny (1887-1975), was born in Grafton. She grew up to become Dr Fanny Cohen, Headmistress of Fort Street Girls' High School in Sydney for 22 years. She became a member of the Senate of the University of Sydney, serving that august body for twenty years. For her services to education Fanny Cohen was awarded the King George VI Coronation Medal in 1937, the Queen Elizabeth Coronation Medal in 1953, and in 1962 the OBE. After her retirement Fanny Cohen learned Braille to enable her to teach it to sighted people who were prepared to transcribe books into Braille for the blind. She died in 1975 aged 88 years. Her brothers were Sidney, Arthur and Leo (known as Lister). Michael, the fourth child of Samuel and Rosetta, grew up to marry Maud Solomon.

Michael and Maud Cohen had three sons and a daughter: Roy, Leslie, Errol and Cecile. Roy married Mara Hart; Leslie married Susan Solomon; we know that Errol's wife was Bella, and Cecile married Bert Lipman.

Errol and Bella's marriage produced Julius Allan and Beryl. Julius Allan Cohen became famous as a fighter pilot during World War II. He rescued Lord Gort, Allied Commander-in-Chief, and Duff Cooper, Britain's Minister of Information. Those two men had been captured in French Morocco whilst trying to make contact with the French Resistance. Lord Gort and Duff Cooper's project failed and they were captured by the enemy not long after they landed. Julius Cohen, in his rescue mission, made a secret visit in one of the Sunderland bombers to Rabat on the River Bou Regreg. The story is told of how the young flying-boat pilot "coolly walked into Rabat with a gun, shot up the local jail, and grabbed the brass from under the French



colonial noses.<sup>3</sup> Julius Cohen was sent by the RAAF to England to help ferry to Australia some Sunderland flying-boats purchased for Australia's defence. Instead, he became attached to the RAF and soon found himself a member of the famous No. 10 Sunderland Squadron, the first Dominion squadron in action. He chased U-boats in the Middle East and other war zones; he flew Winston Churchill and Anthony Eden to Africa, and that was only the beginning of an exciting career.

He had begun flying when he was sixteen; at eighteen he got his wings — one of the youngest of Australia's pilots. He was only 23 when he effected the rescue of Lord Gort and Duff Cooper, and for his part in that operation he received the Distinguished Flying Cross. He was knighted in 1978 for his work as First Secretary with the Department of Veterans' Affairs. In later years he adopted the name of his stepfather, and today, living in Canberra, he is known as Sir Richard Kingsland.

All of the children of Samuel and Rosetta Cohen were of outstanding ability, but probably their fourth son, who was their fifth child, John Jacob Cohen, was to become the best-known of them, at least in Australia. He was, as has been noted, born in Grafton. His actual date of birth was 20 December 1859; we know from his posthumously-published *Memoirs* that he was, at the age of fourteen years — in 1874 — attending the Grammar School of the Reverend F. R. Newton in Villiers Street, Grafton. But before that, John Jacob and his younger brother Benjamin would rise before 6 am, prepare their own breakfast and leave for school (the Ulmarra East Public School) at 6.30. Before he was twelve years of age John Jacob was rising even earlier, at three o'clock, to row his father the five miles to bring back 200 bags of maize, after having assisted with the weighing of it. Writing in his *Memoirs*, he recalls his father, Samuel, thus: "He was a very big man, wonderfully active and often would row several miles at a stretch." Samuel Cohen was a J.P. and often sat on the Bench at Grafton. He was the person generally selected to propose the candidates for Parliament.

About the same time as Algernon Aaron left for England, John Jacob, then almost fifteen, came to Sydney. His father made frequent visits to Sydney during these years, partly for business reasons. On one such visit he negotiated the purchase of two more station properties on the Clarence River.

In the early 1880s John Jacob Cohen went to Mackay in Queensland where he set up practice as a surveyor. Of his years in north Queensland, years later John Jacob remembered attending the local dances at Mackay, where one of his favourite dancing partners was a girl named Miss Nellie Porter Mitchell who, when she was 21, became Mrs Charles Nisbett Frederick Armstrong, otherwise known as Dame Nellie Melba.





*Samuel Cohen - rear centre, with his son Barnett Keith Cohen seated on the left; Judge John Jacob Cohen back row on the right; and his other sons.*



On 12 March 1889 in Sydney, he was married to 'Bertie' (Bertram) Hollander, the second daughter of Jacob Hollander. (It is of interest here to note that two of the Cohen brothers were to marry two of the Hollander sisters, and two of the Cohen sisters were to marry two brothers Herzberg.) John Jacob Cohen and his wife had two children, Cedric Keith and Colyn Keith. Cedric Keith was born in Brisbane in 1890 and died in Sydney in 1952. He was to become a distinguished ophthalmologist in Sydney. When he was two years old, in 1892, the family moved to Sydney. Colyn Keith, the second son, was born in Sydney in 1896. He became a solicitor, practising at Newcastle, chaired two important Royal Commissions and died at the age of 82 in 1978.

When the J.J.Cohen family moved to Sydney from Queensland in 1892 John Jacob commenced studies in Law. He was admitted to the New South Wales Bar on 31 May 1894. In 1898 he entered Parliament when he was elected as member for Petersham in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly. He won the election by 42 votes. He was in Parliament for nineteen years, serving as Chairman of Committee for three years. In 1917 he became Speaker of the House, an office he held for two years. John Jacob Cohen was intensely interested in the Federation movement. He was a hard-working supporter of Federation as a member of the Australasian Federation League's literary committee. Cohen was an ardent monarchist and when, in 1912, he roundly denounced two Labor members of the House who had refused to remove their hats during the playing of the national anthem, his words received sounds of approval. He was at first a member of the Liberal Party and, later, of the National Party.

When John Jacob Cohen resigned as Senior Judge in the Metropolitan District Court on Friday, 20 December 1929, his old friend and colleague, Sir William Cullen, wrote to him: "It was a surprise to me to read that you had rounded 'Retirement Bend' because the gods who love youth bestowed it so plentifully upon you that you carry no wintry signs upon your countenance..." John Jacob Cohen died at the age of 79 on 23 March 1939, shortly after he and Bertie celebrated their golden wedding."

Samuel and Rosetta's fifth son, Benjamin — their sixth child - never married. He was a 'sporty bachelor' who spent much of his working life employed by A.M.Herzberg & Company in Brisbane. There is in the Grafton Museum a trophy which carries the inscription "Ulmarra Jockey Club Members' Purse won by B. Cohen's 'Apollo', April 6, 1889."

Rebecca May, the second daughter of Samuel and Rosetta, married Joseph Mandelson Davis (born 1853) of Goulburn. The marriage was celebrated at the home of the bride in Ulmarra. The Reverend A.B.Davis



travelled from Sydney to perform the ceremony. Soon after the wedding J.M. Davis and his wife moved to Brisbane where their two children were born. Their son, Cecil Morton Davis, was born on 31 July 1886; his Bris was performed by the Reverend A.P. Phillips. The Davis's daughter, Gladys, was born on 3 October 1897. The minister at the naming ceremony of the child was by then the Reverend A.T. Chodowski.

Miriam, the third daughter of Samuel and Rosetta, was known throughout her life as Minnie. She was one of the two Cohen sisters who married into the Herzberg family. Miriam married Adolphus Marcus Herzberg on 11 June 1886. Adolphus Marcus Herzberg (1852-1917) was living in Roma, Queensland, when the couple first met. It was Miriam's brother, John Jacob Cohen, who introduced them. Their wedding also was held at the home of the bride in Ulmarra, with the Reverend A.B. Davis again making the journey from Sydney. After the wedding the couple travelled back north over the 303 kilometres to Brisbane from Ulmarra. Adolphus Marcus Herzberg was a prosperous merchant who first went to Roma in 1867 to join his uncle, Behr Raphael Lewin. Much could be written about Behr Raphael Lewin by his great-great-nephew, Dr A.M. Herzberg of Sydney. He was one of Australia's first professional photographers who arrived in Melbourne in 1848 and subsequently travelled to Roma via Deniliquin in 1859, almost certainly taking photographs en route. He was one of the founders of the Toowoomba Jewish community. Miriam's husband Adolphus Marcus had already been elected several times mayor of Roma and was a fine musician — he played in the Roma Brass Band. He and Miriam went straight from Ulmarra to Brisbane to live, as it seemed a good time then, in the late nineteenth century, to move to the larger centre. They had four children, three boys and a girl. Their second son, Arthur, however, died aged five years in 1894. Their eldest son Marcus, born on 2 April 1887, and died in 1972, grew up to marry Stella Louise Marks. Their son, Dr A. Marcus (Mark) Herzberg of Sydney, is a scientist working with the Sugar Division of C.S.R. (Colonial Sugar Refineries) Ltd. He commenced as a research chemical engineer with CSR in 1949. Dr Hertzberg is the widower of Nancy Keesing, the author and poet. His sister, Vanda Phillips, is the wife of Sydney architect, Orwell Edward Phillips.

Miriam and Adolphus Marcus's third son, Raphael Lewin, known as Ralph, was obviously named after his highly-respected great uncle and died in 1960. The daughter, Olga, married Roland (later Sir Roland) Jacobs of Adelaide. They in their turn became the parents of Doreen Bridges, A.M., the distinguished musician, now of Sydney; and Samuel, now Judge Jacobs, A.O., recently retired from the Bench of the Supreme Court of Australia; Olga and Roland Jacobs' second daughter, Eleanor, is married to former Justice Andrew Wells, A.O.



The family home of Adolphus and Miriam Herzberg was on the corner of Bowen Terrace and Langshaw Street, New Farm, a rather select Brisbane suburb. They named the house 'Minmorah' -which derives from Min, Marcus, Olga, Ralph, Adolphus, Herzberg. It was a large home with three reception rooms — sitting room, drawing room and dining room — besides a smoking room and spacious servants' quarters. The library was housed in the sitting room. A detailed account of the household and its layout is recorded in Nancy Keesing's paper, 'The Story of Miriam and Adolphus Herzberg — An Interesting Sidelight'.<sup>4</sup> An excellent picture is drawn in it of the milieu in which our pioneering Jewish ancestors lived and loved in Australia a century ago. For example, Keesing writes of the library and the drawing room:

A list of the books in the library includes one set of prayer books in Hebrew and English, one set of prayer books in Hebrew and German; one hundred and thirty-five volumes of assorted literature...In the drawing room was a 'Lipp' upright piano and a music stool. There were nine books of flute and piano music and songs. . .

It appears that Minnie was the musician as the children were growing up; her husband gradually gave up his practical interest in music. This is not surprising when it is realised the tremendous involvement he had as a high-profile member of not only the commercial world, but of the communal and academic life in Brisbane as well. He was president of the synagogue, a member of the first Senate of Queensland University and Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Queensland. He had been instrumental in forming the Rafael Masonic Lodge, E.C. At 65 he was still active in the firm he had founded 30 years earlier and which bore his name. He represented the Government on the Board of Management of the Brisbane General Hospital; he was President of the Chamber of Commerce, besides being a member of the Metropolitan Water and Sewerage Board and a foundation member of the Rhodes Scholarship selection committee. He was a Justice of the Peace from 1876. The [Brisbane] Telegraph of 26 January 1917 printed an extended editorial feature on his life when he was 65. It described him as "one of the better known public men outside the political arena in Queensland."<sup>5</sup>

Frances, the Cohens' fourth daughter, married Abraham Herzberg, a brother of Adolphus Marcus. Abraham was born in Prussia in 1860, eight years after his brother, Adolphus, and he died in Brisbane on 25 January 1941. He joined his brother in Queensland as a young man. He was a scholarly, public-spirited citizen, and was highly



respected. His great-nephew, Dr A. Marcus Hertzberg, recalls with a mixture of pride and embarrassment how, as a small boy, he would walk with the old gentleman in the city, and the policeman in point duty on one such occasion stopped the traffic in all four directions to let them cross the road. Dr Hertzberg said, "He saluted as we walked past and said, 'Good morning, Mr Hertzberg', and Uncle Abraham raised his hat and replied, 'Good morning, Constable.'"<sup>6</sup> Abraham Hertzberg was a trustee of the synagogue. His wife, Frances (or Fan as she was always called), was born in 1872 and died in 1943. Abraham and Frances had a son who died shortly after birth in May 1895. They had a daughter, Pauline (born in 1876), by all accounts a very lovely girl who married a 'dashing war hero', A. McKenzie, who died from war wounds at an early age. Pauline died tragically in 1932.

Barnett Keith Cohen married Florence Hollander in 1895. They were to become the parents of Colleen Rich, their only child. There will be more of this branch of the family in the section on the Hollander dynasty, later in the paper. For the present, it might be mentioned in passing that the reason Barnett Keith Cohen was known as Keith Cohen was, members of the family explain, that Burnett Cohen of another family lived in Brisbane at the same time and there was the distinct possibility that some confusion would develop. So it was decided to insert the name Keith as a distinguishing factor. This trend was adopted by the older kinsman, John Jacob Cohen, when naming his two sons, Cedric Keith (1890) and Colyn Keith (1896). Later generations continued the tradition as a part of the family name for that line, including Colleen who was known, before her marriage, as Colleen Keith-Cohen.

Annetta Cohen was born in 1870 at Ulmarra and died in London in 1953. She married Phillip Mitchell, who was a prominent Sydney businessman, a principal of the food wholesalers, David Mitchell and Company. Annetta and Phillip had an only daughter, Madge, who married Sam Kelsey of the Salmon and Gluckstein families who established the Lyons tea-house chain in London. Sam and Madge Kelsey stayed at their home in London during the war years, enduring much of the blitz, as did Madge's mother, Annetta. This branch of the family was very close to Herman and Helen Hertzberg. Herman was a brother of Adolphus Marcus and Abraham, and he managed the London branch of the Queensland firm A.M.Hertzberg and Company.

The youngest of the children of Samuel and Rosetta to survive into adulthood was Julius who married his cousin Daisy Lipman from Grafton in 1904. Daisy's parents were Abraham and Rebecca (nee Menser) Lipman. Their children were Roy, Peter, Joyce, Arthur, Frank, Betty



and Margaret. Frank was killed in an air crash some 50 years ago. Roy was an obstetrician. Peter and Arthur (the latter had been a POW) worked in the Commonwealth Bank and the Bank of New South Wales, respectively.

Samuel and Rosetta continued to lead busy, useful lives well into their old age, prospering in the district of Ulmarra, with their married children then living in various areas of eastern Australia. Samuel employed pit-sawyers and furniture-makers at his sawmill. He was a trustee of the local Jewish cemetery, a director on the Board of an early sugar mill, after the industry was thoroughly established in the Clarence district. He was on the Board of Management of the Clarence and New England Steam Navigation Company and was one of the first to sign a petition requesting the New South Wales government to declare the area a municipality. This was achieved in February 1872. He took up selections in the names of his children whilst free selection existed. He hoped the children would eventually 'go on the land', as it was a condition of the grant that the owner must live in the district. Of all his children, however, Michael was the one who did stay in Ulmarra. He became one of the local heroes during the disastrous Grafton floods in 1876, when he helped rescue a number of people and their livestock. One of Michael and Maud Cohen's sons, Leslie Francis Cohen, became a prominent accountant in Sydney and was for many years honorary auditor for the Great Synagogue and for a number of Jewish philanthropic organisations. He was one of the founding members of the Temple Emanuel in Woollahra.

Rosetta Cohen was known as 'the village doctor' because so many of the local residents would come to her for advice and treatment for their ailments. In his *Memoirs*, John Jacob Cohen recounts one incident when there was an epidemic of smallpox in the district and his mother stepped in when the doctor was unable to get there, vaccinating first one of her own children with the serum from a calf. From that child she was able to use the lymph to inoculate twenty of the local children. She was the midwife at the birth of most of the district's babies. Since her husband was the first mayor of Ulmarra, she had the responsibilities which came with being mayoress.

Soon after the turn of the century Samuel and Rosetta decided to come to Sydney to live, as most of their family was then based there. They made their home at 49 Macleay Street, Potts Point. In his retirement Samuel became active in numerous Jewish communal organisations. He was on the Sydney Jewish Education Board; was elected on to the Committee of the Board of the Sir Moses Montefiore Home in 1893 — even before he came to live permanently in Sydney; he would travel to Sydney for Board meetings. After the death of its president, Henry Solomon, he was elected to that office. Rosetta died in 1910 and Samuel died on 16 September 1918 — on Yom Kippur.



## THE MOSES HIRSCH HOLLANDER AND HIS WIFE HANNAH (NEE ABRAHAM) DESCENDANTS

With the Hollander family, two brothers Cohen married two sisters Hollander. First, John Jacob Cohen (known within the family as Jack) married Bertie Hollander in March, 1889; then the younger brother, Barnett Keith Cohen, married Florence Hollander in 1895. Barnett Keith and Florence Cohen, at the suggestion of John Jacob, by then a successful architect in Queensland, made their first home in Brisbane where there was an excellent opening for an up-coming young solicitor. Barnett and his new wife did not regret settling in Brisbane, but eventually, in 1902, they made their permanent home in Sydney. They made the move south when their only child, Colleen, who was born in 1898, was four years old.

To understand fully the confluence of the Cohen/Hollander families it is necessary to outline the story of Rabbi Moses Hirsch Hollander of Birmingham. As a young minister of the Birmingham Hebrew Congregation in the mid-nineteenth century, Moses Hollander exercised a profound influence both on his own sizeable family and on his congregation, as well as beyond the confines of his community. It would appear that he had a depth of integrity, a diversity of skills and a profound commitment to his faith. In this he resembled Samuel Cohen, his contemporary in Australia, almost certainly as yet unknown to him. Moses Hirsch Hollander was born in 1810, one of the sons of Yoel Hollander (born 1770) in Dobreen, near Plotsk, Poland. When Moses Hollander was about fifteen, in 1825, he and one of his brothers were about to be drafted into the Russian army of Czar Nicholas I and it was decided that the two teenagers should try to escape to England. Moses's brother did not manage to complete the journey. Part of the route took them across the River Vistula, where his brother drowned.

Moses Hollander made his home in Birmingham in the 1850s when the population there numbered 232,638. The Jewish community at that time was approximately 730. By 1871 the general population had increased to 342,787, whilst the Jewish population rose by over 200%, mainly because of immigration from Russia for the same reasons that brought Moses Hollander to England.

In Birmingham Hollander began teaching at the Hebrew National School established in 1843, originally in Hurst Street. When the Singers Hill Synagogue was built in 1856, more commodious premises were provided for the school at its rear in Ellis Street. The Reverend M.H. Hollander, by the end of the 1850s a highly respected scholar and teacher, began his ministry at Singers Hill Synagogue.

In 1875, when Hollander was the Second Reader at the synagogue and conductor of the school choir, the school applied for a grant under



the annual 'Payment by Results' system of allocating state grants. The report of Her Majesty's Inspectors' examination of the school in 1875 was not good. The failure of the standard of the infants' department was attributed to "Miss Esther Harris's defective teaching." The adverse report was too much for Miss Harris, so she resigned to follow the 'more favourable course of marriage'. The same report refused to give student-teacher, Mr Levy, his certificate and condemned the whole of the school's teaching of arithmetic as "well below accepted standard". The only good comment was on the singing which earned the full grant "Owing to the excellent instruction given by the Second Reader, the Revd. M.H.Hollander." This story is fully supported by copies of the published report retained by the family. A fair pass in the annual examination earned a grant of £2 per pupil, while a good pass earned £3. It might be added, too, that the report for the year 1880 was so good that the school earned 92% of the total grant and received the sum of £212.5.0. This was the milieu in which the Reverend Hollander lived and worked beyond the age of 92 years.

The home of the Hollander family in Birmingham was at 124 Bath Row, and Moses and Hannah's eight children were Joseph who married Sarah Moss; Louis who married Annie Silberberg (this family came to Australia to live); Juliet who married Simon Jacobs; George who married Anne Rosetta Bernstein; Esther who married Asher Lesser; William who went to New Zealand; Jacob who married Annie Goldberg (they too came to Australia to live); and David who married Jenny Levy. We have considerable data on all these descendants of Moses and Hannah Hollander, but for the purposes of this paper, we shall concern ourselves only with Colleen Rich's grandparents, Jacob and Annie Hollander and their families.

Jacob and Annie came to Australia from Liverpool, England in 1871. By that time they had four children: Dora, Abraham and two year-old twins, Florence and Leopold. When they went from Liverpool to Birmingham to bid farewell to the family, Jacob's father said to his son, "Remember, the Bible gave us our identity, and even though we may never see each other again, I believe you will keep this principle in mind. And bring up your family in that distant land where our Jewish heritage may not be as strong as it is here, to feel that way." These words which his father pressed upon Jacob must surely have been taken to heart. In 1873, two years after their arrival in Ballarat, a branch of the London-based Anglo-Jewish Association was formed and Jacob Hollander was a foundation member of the committee. In an extant Ballarat Hebrew School record from 1874 we learn that Abraham Hollander was "one of the highest scorers in an interschool cricket match." In September 1881 he led a choir of fourteen boys and four men at a ceremony



of re-consecration, in preparation for Rosh Hashana 5642, whilst his sister Bertram accompanied on the organ. The family of Jacob and Annie lived for almost 20 years in Ballarat, Victoria, where nine more children were born, three of whom died in early childhood. The surviving children were Bertram, Juliet, Minna, Lilla, Netta and Anys, who together with the four older children made a family of ten. However, soon after the birth of the youngest, Anys, Annie Hollander died. This may have been the deciding factor in Jacob and his ten children moving to Sydney to live in 1890. An imposing mansion, 'Maramanah', was purchased from a Mr Spark. It was to become not only the family home for the next four generations of Hollander, but also the extended family home as several of the married children moved in too.

Almost from the beginning of their life in Sydney, Jacob became involved in communal life. In June, 1901 a meeting was held at the Synagogue Chambers in Castlereagh Street to consider the establishment of a Zionist movement. As a result of that meeting, a provisional committee was formed to meet six months later on 15 December 1901 at the home of Jacob Hollander at which the Zionist Society was formed with 25 members each agreeing to pay 2/6 subscription. Jacob Hollander was on the committee; within two years he became a vice-president; and in 1904 he was elected the society's president, an office he held until his death in 1905.

Jacob Hollander's home, and the background in which his children and later his grandchildren and even his great-grandchildren lived, need to be described in some detail. The children were brought up in a world of expensive girls' schools, governesses, maids and other household staff. They were all talented musicians, the Hollander children and moved in a comfortable social circle which was conducive to making favourable marriages. They mixed with and entertained both local and international celebrities at 'Maramanah', with its gracious corridors, its high, vaulted ceilings and high, wide windows, and its large ballroom. The house was the scene of many musical evenings and recitals so that the families enjoyed a lifestyle of pleasing elegance. During the latter years of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century the Hollander family became renowned throughout Australia for its musicianship. All of the girls and some of their friends formed an orchestra and a chamber music group. By 1894 three of the daughters were singing in the Great Synagogue choir.

Jacob Hollander was a businessman, yet he found time for the furtherance of Hebrew culture. He imparted his love of books and culture in general to his children. Looking briefly at each of them: Dora became the wife of Samuel H. Solomon who was a City Councillor and



Treasurer of the City of Sydney for a record 40 years. There were two children by their marriage, a son and a daughter, Kenneth H. Solomon and Lyndall. Kenneth Solomon was a quite exceptional young man, a poet and composer of Hebrew songs. A small volume of his poems was published in Oxford where he was studying Law. At his Bar Mitzvah, on Shabbat Shuvah, the Sabbath between New Year and Yom Kippur, 1901, he read the whole of the Sedra as well as the Haftarah. Such a thing had not ever been done before at the Great Synagogue. When the First World War broke out he joined the 11th Gloucester Regiment to become a Lieutenant. He was gravely wounded at Gallipoli and died on Kol Nidre Night, 1916, in the Naval Hospital at Devonport. He is buried in the London Jewish Cemetery. Some of his most cherished possessions were a book of Hebrew melodies by his great-grandfather, the Reverend Moses Hollander, and another, containing two Biblical dramas in Hebrew, composed by Moses Hollander, 'Joseph and His Brethren' (1896) and 'Cain and Abel' (1897). The latter is dedicated to the Reverend Hollander's great-grandsons, Kenneth Solomon and Cedric Cohen, both of Sydney. There is a copy of this work in the L.A.Falk Memorial Library. Rabbi L.A.Falk, who had been in attendance at the funeral of Kenneth Solomon in London in 1916, said of him later:

He was perhaps the only Australian-born Jew in that period who could compose a Hebrew letter or an essay. This mystery of a native-born Jewish young man of that period being able to write in Hebrew can be solved by the fact that his grandfather (Jacob Hollander) brought from Poland two excellent Hebrew scholars for the purpose of training his grandson in the knowledge of Judaism and the Hebrew language. One of these teachers deserves a special mention. He was the late Isaac Rottenberg. He was a scholar of a high order.

Kenneth's mother, Dora Solomon, never completely recovered from the shock of her son's death. Before she died she made many bequests to charitable institutions, including a legacy to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, in memory of her only son. Her daughter, Lyndall, married Dr Jim Eakin.

The next daughter of Jacob Hollander was Bertie, who became the wife of John Jacob Cohen. She has already been dealt with in some detail above in the section entitled The Samuel and Rosetta Cohen Dynasty.

Juliet, who married Harry Morris Cohen of Newcastle, had no children. H.M.Cohen was for many years a treasurer of the Newcastle



Hebrew Congregation. He was a partner in the firm of solicitors Braye & Cohen of Newcastle; the firm, incidentally, to which Colyn Keith Cohen — Juliet's nephew — was articled. After the death of her husband, Juliet moved in with her other widowed sister, Dora Solomon. They lived together until Juliet was killed whilst crossing the road just outside their home in Darlinghurst Road, Kings Cross.

Of the two Hollander sons, we know that Abraham, the elder one, never married. He was always known as 'Spot' because of his keen interest in billiards; 'spot' is a term used in the game. He was a Hebrew scholar and a gifted musician; he had a fine baritone voice. It was he who made himself responsible for his grandfather's Hebrew books. Leopold, known as Luke, married Ella M. Brodziak in October 1902. Ella was a daughter of Adolphus Myer Brodziak. Luke and Ella Hollander became the parents of Hazel Hollander, the well-known actress. Hazel, like most of her cousins, was brought up in the family home, 'Maramanah'. She attended Ascham Ladies' College which was relatively close by. She took a course in dramatic art and performed in amateur productions which raised funds for various charities. After the death of her father she became a professional actress, making a career in radio dramas.

The other four Hollander daughters, Minna, Lilla, Netta and Anys, never married. In 1965 Dora and Samuel Solomon's granddaughter, Lyndall's daughter, Robin Dalton, published a book entitled *Aunts Up the Cross*, in which she refers to her great-aunts as 'The Stern Gang'.<sup>7</sup> They apparently seemed to her an anachronism; and they undoubtedly would have seen her lifestyle as contrary to their principles. As they grew older, the Hollander sisters arranged to have the family's beautiful mahogany and rosewood furniture sent to Israel, together with Minna's Amati violin. They established a scholarship in Israel for promising young musicians.

Lilla Hollander died on 20 June 1949, aged 71. Netta died on 16 July 1959, aged 76. Minna died in 1963, and Anys, the youngest of the family, died in 1972. It has already been noted that their older sister, Florence, who also died in 1972, lived till the age of 103. The old home, 'Maramanah', was sold to the City Council to be used as a community centre. Later it was demolished to make way for a public park and library, which today is known as Fitzroy Gardens, featuring the El Alamein Fountain.

### THE STORY OF COLLEEN RICH

Colleen, the only child of Barnett Keith and Florence (nee Hollander) Cohen, was born in Queensland on 10 April 1898. She was born in what is now the inner-city suburb of Hamilton. A century ago it





*Large family group at the Hollander House, "Maramanah."  
Colleen Rich is standing at the front far right behind the two girls sitting on the ground.*



was known as The Hamilton Reach of the Brisbane River, or simply, The Hamilton. She is today, as far as is known, the last surviving grandchild of Samuel and Rosetta Cohen. Talking with her now, it is possible to gain a sense of the world of our grandparents when the concept of time was something different. As a child and a young woman Colleen enjoyed a serene and secure life in the family home with several generations of her kinsfolk, both Cohen and Hollander before her marriage in 1921 to Dr Vivian Rich.

Soon after her parents married they went to Brisbane to live. They left Queensland to come to live in Sydney because it was felt there were greater opportunities in Sydney for the young solicitor, Barnett Keith Cohen. He entered a practice in Martin Place, Sydney. Colleen grew up in Macleay Street, Potts Point, in an atmosphere of music-loving adults and she soon exhibited a strong proclivity for music herself, with a rare talent as a pianist. Her parents encouraged this and she studied with the finest teachers. When the internationally-famous pianist Pintel was visiting Australia in 1914 and found himself obliged to remain in Sydney during the war years, he heard her play and was greatly impressed. He was himself a pupil of Alfred Cortot, and gave lessons to students he regarded as having sufficient potential to warrant his tuition. Beatrice Tange was another of his pupils. He eagerly accepted Colleen as a student. She practised four to five hours a day and it was generally accepted that she would become a concert pianist. Then, when she was in her late teens, she strained her heart whilst pacing a woman swimmer. All hope then of specialising in solo performances had to be abandoned. She continued with her piano studies, however, and was able to join with her mother's sisters, the Hollander girls, in amateur performances.

Among the many celebrities who visited 'Maramanah' were the singers Dame Clara Butt and her husband, Kenley Rumford. The Rumfords had three children, and of these, their second daughter, Joy, became the life-long friend of Colleen — they were like sisters. Dame Nellie Melba was another visitor, as were Mr and Mrs T.H. Kelly whose large Florentine villa 'Glen Ascham' in Darling Point was, during the 1930s and 1940s, the scene of Sydney's liveliest social life. Ethel Mollison Kelly was a leader of society, and her husband, the brilliant cellist, also played violin. He was the first desk violinist for the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Together with three colleagues, Stahl, Graves and Grice Carter, they formed a quartet which frequently had Colleen as their pianist. The group's repertoire included some of the finest classical chamber music. They held rehearsals almost every Sunday afternoon, and Mrs Kelly would organise recital evenings at her home. These events were a regular feature of Colleen's life from the time when she was still a schoolgirl. Meanwhile, she continued her studies with



Lawrence Godfrey Smith and Winifred Bursten. People who remember those days tell how she would refuse to play sport or participate in her friends' excursions — after she strained her heart — preferring to practise the piano, revelling in her contribution to the interpretations of Beethoven and Schubert.

Another person who was highly relevant in her formative environment was her father's cousin, the musician Arthur Leslie Benjamin. Arthur was the son of Abraham and Amelia (nee Menser). Amelia was one of the sisters of Rosetta Cohen. Although Benjamin was a first cousin of all the children of Samuel and Rosetta, he was a contemporary of the next generation. He was born in Sydney in 1893, five years before Colleen, and when he was six years old his parents moved to Brisbane. Soon after this, he made his first public appearance as a pianist. At the age of nine he began formal training and in 1907 he went with his parents on a tour of Europe where he continued his musical education. On his return to Brisbane he completed his schooling. Much of his adult life was spent in England, where he composed, taught at London's Royal College of Music and gave performances. In 1919 Arthur Benjamin returned to Australia to become Professor of Piano at the NSW Conservatorium of Music in Sydney. Although he spent much of his time abroad, his periods in Australia were spent in close contact with his Sydney relatives at 'Maramanah', where he greatly enjoyed the companionship of his Aunt Rosetta's children and grandchildren. It was here and during this period that Colleen and her aunts and their kinsman Arthur Benjamin shared many a learning experience, producing unbelievably beautiful harmonies which seemed to bring them all a unity, a new level of mutual respect. And Colleen found herself an heir to a tradition which found satisfaction and harmony for the rest of her life.

Colleen Vaughan Keith-Cohen and Vivian Morris Rich were married on 22 July 1921 at the Great Synagogue, the ceremony being performed by Rabbi Francis Lyon Cohen. Even after her marriage, Colleen continued to play with the chamber group, both at their Sunday afternoon rehearsals and at the recitals held at the home of T.H. Kelly and his wife, Ethel. The marriage of Vivian and Colleen Rich was a good one; theirs was a great love. He was a kindly, warm man who gave his wife understanding and cooperation, but Colleen always retained her own integrity.

In 1922 their first child David was born. David became an ophthalmic surgeon; he has recently retired. Being an extraordinarily versatile man, with a restless curiosity about new and exotic experiences, he has at one time or another explored various diverse activities. At one time it was the study and cultivation of bonsai, which took him into the examination of its origins in Japan. He learned the art of pruning



the roots and branches of trees in such a way that they would grow in miniature. He was not satisfied until he had mastered the skills of this process to perfection. Photography and China, its people and culture, were among his other interests. He was eventually to organise tours to the country to explore at first hand the Chinese way of life. Now he paints and is a superb artist. In all of these undertakings he would take infinite pains to reach a degree of perfection before relinquishing interest in them. David and his wife, Joan, have four children: Andrew, Anthony, Adrian and Rosemary.

Colleen and Vivian's second child, a daughter, Rodney-Margaret, was born in 1924 and today lives in Perth, having moved there in 1987. She and her husband, John Van Proctor (ex-Royal Navy), were married in Sydney soon after the war. They have a son and a daughter. Their daughter, Jenny Van Proctor, lives in Sydney and teaches sight-impaired children. Rodney-Margaret, following the example of her illustrious kinswoman, Dr Fanny Cohen, daughter of Algernon Aaron and Priscilla, became deeply involved in working for the sight-impaired. She took a special course in the reading and transcription of Braille before going to work for the School for the Blind. When the school at Wahroonga was taken over by the Education Department, Rodney Margaret transferred to its new quarters at North Rocks where she transcribed textbooks. Later, she offered her services to the Montefiore Home, helping to have special equipment installed through the Royal Blind Society, as well as giving practical help to such residents at the Home as needed it.

From Colleen Rich's six grandchildren, she has three great-grandchildren; the eldest, fourteen year-old Caryn, is developing into a brilliant mathematics scholar and is a source of great pride to her great-grandmother. Caryn's brother, Mark, is thirteen and the youngest great-grandchild is seven years old.

Colleen and Vivian's younger son, Trevor Hamilton, never married; he lived mainly an expatriate life. Two tragedies have touched the otherwise relatively serene life of Colleen Rich. On 15 April 1958, her beloved husband died, and she experienced the depths of heartache. At least, she told herself, she had been with him at the end, and she had their three lovely children around her. But exactly 33 years later, in April 1991, Trevor died in England and his death was made all the more stressful for Colleen because her own health at that time would not permit her to travel to be with him when he was dying. Trevor's death was especially hard for her; there had always been the greatest bond between them because of a mutual love of music — Trevor also had been an accomplished pianist. Every year previously whilst living overseas he had made a point of returning to Sydney to wish her happiness personally on her birthday. This had always been a major



statement of affection between them. But Colleen recalls that, on 10 April 1991, his strong, cheerful voice on the phone from London had reassured her as he said, "Happy birthday, Mother darling." That was her last contact with him. She has had a memorial plaque commemorating his life attached to the double headstone which is prepared for herself beside Vivian's grave at Rookwood. She reflects sadly that, whilst her birthday is on 10 April, all of her dearest loves have, in different years, died within a few days of that date. Her grandfather, Jacob Hollander, died on 15 April 1905; her father, Barnett Keith Cohen, died on 17 April 1944; her husband, Vivian, died on 15 April 1958; and now her most beloved son, Trevor, has died on 16 April 1991.

Colleen Rich was one of the first people to read on to tapes for the Books for the Blind. It was not unusual for her to read well into the night — often into the small hours of the morning — so that she could take the tapes down to the Post Office first thing next day. She found this work most rewarding, and recalls with a great sense of satisfaction how this contribution of hers helped a young blind girl, Leah Wilson, who was studying for a B.A. in Music. Colleen had read on to the tapes Leah's textbooks. She did this for two years, and the girl was subsequently awarded her degree with honours. Thus encouraged, Colleen did the same thing for a young sight-impaired boy, Bruce MacGuire, and this time, she included in her readings examples of piano music as illustrations to help him with his Higher School Certificate. It was a most gratifying experience for them both when Bruce passed his exams with high honours. Colleen was vice-president of the Woollahra Branch of the Red Cross during the war, and for a number of years afterwards. It is these memories, now, which bring her the greatest pleasure, she says. She feels that, having led a privileged lifestyle herself, she was obliged to find a fulfilling role in society.

So, this is the history of one family, actually a combination of families, which has contributed generously to the building of our cultural foundations; a family which has proved its credentials many times over. It has produced three Supreme Court judges and a District Court judge, and numerous men and women who have found various ways to contribute to social justice. Out of that history also has grown a proud, gracious lady of 97 years of age. As she sits quietly at home with her dog, 'Treasure', and a wonderful companion housekeeper of more than a decade, she recalls many rewarding incidents in her family's century and a half in Australia: the friendships which have been forged in her own lifetime, the opportunities grasped and those missed. She smiles when it is suggested that it might well be said of her, as of her uncle, John Jacob Cohen, "...because the gods who love youth bestowed it so plentifully upon you...you carry no wintry sign upon your countenance."



Of her grandmother, Rosetta Cohen, Colleen recalls with deep affection, "We all adored Granny. She was a darling. As an old lady, I remember, she was always knitting, and there was always someone to knit for." If Colleen only realised it, she in her way is a piece of history, a piece of wonder, and still, at 97, well in touch with what life is all about. She is one of those who are not prepared to take everything and give nothing back to posterity, to ensure that something will resonate beyond this century.

## NOTES

1. John Jacob Cohen, *Memoirs*, 1939
2. *The Daily Examiner*, 22 May 1993, p.13.
3. This tale and his further exploits are recorded in *Australian Jewry's Book of Honour World War II*, edited by Gerald Pynt.
4. Nancy Keesing, 'The Story of Miriam and Adolphus Herzberg — An Interesting Sidelight', *Australian Jewish Historical Society Journal*, volume 7, part VII.
5. *The Telegraph*, Brisbane, 26 January 1917.
6. Interview with Dr A.M. Hertzberg.
7. Robin Dalton, *Aunts Up the Cross*, London: Anthony Blond Ltd, 1965



## BOOK REVIEWS

### YERRANDERIE - STORY OF A GHOST TOWN

by Jim Barrett, 1995, pp 72. Available from 65 Brook Street,  
Glenbrook, NSW 2773. \$10.00 plus \$1 postage.

During the 1980s, this Society assisted Mr Ron Mills with his research into the Yerranderie story. That research has been given to Jim Barrett for this task and he has acknowledged Ron Mills' efforts thus: 'The putting together of this story of Yerranderie would not have been possible had I not had access to the research material of Ron Mills of Hoxton Park'.

*Yerranderie — Story of a Ghost Town*, has something for everyone: history, drama, pioneering adventure, romance, a breadth of information, scholarship and an excellent presentation which makes it a joy to possess. Within its 72 pages, besides its immaculate text, are splendid reproductions of photographs and location maps. The book traces the history of the town and its demise during the 1950s to permit the flooding of the Burragorang Valley for the building of the Warragamba Dam Water Catchment Project. The book is almost unreservedly recommended and it would be churlish to regret its lack of an index, or to wish that a little more attention had been given to the (relatively) sizeable Jewish presence in the area during the latter years of the last century and the early decades of this century. There were about 20 Jews out of a total population of 2000 at the peak of the township's development in 1910. Included in the group of Jewish settlers were Mark Rosenberg and his employees and Alfred Harris and his brothers-in-law and other members of his family, as well as eight or ten single men who contributed significantly to the development of the town's civic, commercial and cultural expansion.

The name, Yerranderie, given in 1905, comes from the name of the last 'king' of the Burragorang Aborigines, who died in 1914. Silver was discovered about three miles from the town in the 1970s and Galera, a heavy mineral or lead sulphide, in the 1880s. The first serious attempts at mining in the area began in the 1890s and a Jewish presence began about 1900. Yerranderie is about 40 miles from Camden, and the same distance from Katoomba, but the main access was from Camden.



Mark Rosenberg was the proprietor of the largest commercial establishment, The Peaks Co-operative Stores, built in 1900, a two-storey building with two shops and a dwelling. One section of the building was rented as the Post Office Agency at 10/- per week. Alfred Harris was a storekeeper there from 1908 until 1913. He and his father, Henry Harris, founded the *Hebrew Standard of Australasia* in 1895. When Alfred Harris died in 1944 he was a member of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, as were Mark Rosenberg and his wife.

It was men like Rosenberg and Harris who headed the petition to the Inspector of Public Instruction in 1911 to have the school upgraded. Other Jewish people who signed the petition were Fred Schindler, aged 17, grocer; H.C. Schindler, mine blacksmith; Louis Golding, miner; J. Stein, miner; F. Stein, miner; T.C. Stein, miner; Mr Emanuel; and a Mr Martin who included the fact that he was a Jew, born in Hungary. A poem by Lawrence Collinson entitled "The Future — Boy Levy" (A True Story), published in *the Overlander*, referred to the young Jewish lad who worked in Mark Rosenberg's stores.

The Yerranderie site has been classified by the National Trust and the Commonwealth Heritage Commission as an historic mining area. Jim Barrett believes this is to ensure that Yerranderie will 'assume an honourable niche in Australian pioneering history'. This seems to suggest there is a pressing need for a detailed history to be written by our Society on the Jews of Yerranderie. There is certainly a wealth of material available for such a history.

Louise Rosenberg.

## A NEW AUSTRALIAN, A NEW AUSTRALIA

by Paul Kraus. Sydney, Federation Press, 1994

Paul Kraus is proud of his Bachelor's degree in History and Master's degree in Education, which he gained despite having left school early. His sense of achievement is obvious in this mid-life biography. This is not just the story of a migrant family and their adaptation to a new life in a new country. It sets the events in solid historical context and relates them to the changing socio-political milieu to which the family had to adjust from 1949 to 1989. The excellent bibliography attests to the background research of this work.

Kraus skims over the horrific events in Europe which preceded this Jewish family's arrival in Australia because it is the chronicle of events in Australia which are important in the story. Mention is made of time in Nazi labour camps and Paul's own birth in one, but it is more



as a background to the personality of his parents. His father was a hard working, innovative man, made old before his time; his mother also hard-working, embraced the religion of Jesus to the disappointment and bitterness of her husband; the children aware of prejudices and differences at school, followed their mother's lead to assimilation which brought them acceptance and peace. Paul Kraus' dedication is to his mother in gratitude and to the cherished memory of his father. I feel the book is a sort of catharsis in which Paul can ask forgiveness of his father for not understanding the anguish caused to him by his wife and children. Paul also dwells on his own introverted personality in comparison to his more extroverted and better adjusted brother. He seeks understanding of himself and his predicament as a Christian of migrant Jewish parents. He does not mask his feelings about Australian attitudes to newcomers, but the book is not all gloom and doom and there is plenty of light relief.

The story begins with the family's arrival in Melbourne on Melbourne Cup Day, 1949. This Jewish European refugee couple with their two small children, having suffered in Nazi camps and been humiliated on the Greek ship which brought them to Australia, experienced the culture shock common to most European migrants of this period. Australia may have been the promised land, but it was indeed an alien land. They were welcomed by friends who assisted them. Paul's father decided to apply for a position which was a turning point in his life and which ultimately led to the establishment of his own successful business producing anti-rust chemicals. Paul's mother started work as a dressmaker and soon established herself, while the children attended the local schools and gradually adjusted to Australia, despite its insularity and distrust of foreigners. The family eventually assimilated into main stream Australian life. The essence of the story appears to be a typical story with a happy ending, but this is much more. The book traces the hardships, the spiritual struggles and the constant need to adjust to change or succumb to failure.

Kraus' writing is interesting and readable. He creates a sense of nostalgia for anyone who grew up in Australia in the 1950s. The detail depicted of life in suburban northern Sydney over forty years of immense change is evocative of the political and historical events.

A foreword by Professor Bruce Mansfield, formerly of Macquarie University and an introduction by Andrew Riemer, himself the author of a book addressing the issues of migrant adjustment, set the tone for Paul Kraus' quest in understanding and chronicling his own migrant experience.

Helen Bersten



## ERRATA

- Morris S. Ochert, "Jewish People of Cooktown". Vol XI, Part 6, 1993, page 951, six lines from bottom of the page should read 'Solomon Lyon Marks' (not S.L. Solomon).

Middle of page 954, the Hebrew word *Metzeiva* means monument.

- Morris S. Ochert, 'Saul (Sali) Mendelsohn - Balladeer', Vol XII, Part 2, 1994.

page 327, title and in manuscript page 328: since writing this article, Mr Ochert has ascertained that 'Sali' is a well known diminutive form for Betzalel, Sali Mendelsohn's given name (not Saul).



## GENEALOGICAL ENQUIRIES

KIVERSTEIN, Geraldine

JOSEPH, Isaac Israel

DeKROMME, Jonas (John) - ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS DECRAMER/  
DEKROMME

HART, John AND LARRA, Sara married 13 February 1788, Descendants  
sought.

SHAPPERE, Solomon, Rose, Isaac.

EICHENBERG, Franz - Dunera Internee

HART, Joseph, Married Sarah PARKER in Jericho, Tasmania, 1842.

LEVY, Nathan AND Louisa — Descendants sought

JACOBS, Henry — storekeeper. BRAIDWOOD, 1840-1860.



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**Morris Ochert**, OAM, ASTC, (MechEng), MIE Aust, CP Eng., Queensland correspondent for the AJHS, researcher and author of a series of articles on Brisbane Jewry, a retired engineer and honorary life member of the Institute of Engineers of Australia.

**Arthur Lionel Rosebery**, Fellow of the Advertising Institute of Australia and a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Ran a fully accredited advertising agency from 1945 until 1972 when he retired due to ill health

**Louise Rosenberg**, a member of the AJHS for thirty years. Honorary Secretary for 25 years, including 11 years as Secretary/Treasurer from 1966 to 1977.

**Jenny Shub**, born in Perth. Graduate of UWA (member of Guild Council, secretary of the Arts Union). Worked as an educational psychologist for 26 years, interrupted by four years on a moshav in Israel and the birth of children. Educational chairperson of NCJW for past eight years; has been national chairperson.







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A person donating an amount of not less than \$250 in one sum may be elected by the Committee a Benefactor Member of the Society. The category of the Life Membership is no longer available.