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## Western Australian Jewry, 1829-1897.

### PART III.—The Goldfields.

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*(Read before the Society, 16th December, 1946.)*

For many years prospecting parties had explored the back country and the North-West searching for gold. The Government had offered rewards to the first successful prospector, and the hope of finding riches had helped support the colonists in their darkest days of drought and famine. With the early history of the quest for gold, which dates back as far as 1846, we are not here concerned. If there was any special Jewish contribution to this phase, no reference to it has come down to us. The probabilities are that there was none except from the side of mere financial support.

The first important discovery on the present-day goldfields was that at Eenuin in January, 1888, and this was followed by finds at Southern Cross in July of that year. It will be recalled that by this time a small congregation had been founded in Fremantle, and the Jewish development of Western Australia had begun.

In later years Southern Cross grew into a prosperous town, and contained some small Jewish businesses. There was, however, nothing in the nature of the communal development that took place in Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie in the 'nineties.<sup>194</sup> While Southern Cross was in the throes of a paralysing strike in September, 1892, the news arrived of a rich find of gold some 120 miles to the east, at a place known, after the name of the finder, as Bayley's Reward, the modern Coolgardie.<sup>195</sup> From that date the gold fever in Western Australia began. This was not a new phenomenon in Australia. Similar scenes had occurred forty years before on the fields of Ballarat, and

had led to a prosperous Jewish community springing up in the town.

The years 1892 to 1894 were the years of frantic rushes. Hopeful diggers flocked to the fields from Perth, from the Eastern States, from Europe—among them a number of Jews. Those two years saw no actual Jewish development, but it was during that period that the mining towns took pride of place among the attractions of Western Australia, and drew to themselves many of those Jews who were soon to form the organised community. To see the growth of the Jewish community of Coolgardie against its true background, some attention must be paid to the general conditions of the goldfields. Life was hard, amenities were few, water, food and housing scarce, money plentiful, hopes high and failure common. "Business was carried on," says an old identity, "in the crudest of habitations—tents and hessian buildings, rough sheds, and in fact any kind of covering which would protect goods."<sup>196</sup> The vast majority of the Jewish population of Coolgardie was in business. There were few Jewish miners or prospectors, and those few took little part in communal affairs. The conditions under which they worked and traded were sufficient to break all but the strongest spirits, but they carried on and, despite their hardships, clung to their faith.

By the High Festivals of 1894 there were sufficient Jews in Coolgardie to hold a service, and the first Jewish service on the goldfields was held on New Year's Day, 1894. It was not held in any well-appointed Synagogue, not even in a hall rented from some established organisation. It was held in a tent—typical of the rough conditions of the early days.<sup>197</sup> It may have been primitive, uncomfortable, uninspiring, but that tent is the symbol of the fight the men of the goldfields waged against adversity. It was the first germ of the Jewish community. There were eleven men present, the forerunners of hundreds who were working hard, battling against odds, but staunch in their Judaism.

With this New Year service as a starting point, the Jews began to organise themselves. On 10th May, 1895, a meeting decided to attempt to obtain a grant of land for the building of a Synagogue. This, it will be re-

membered, was some four months after the Perth Hebrew Congregation had commenced negotiations for its grant. By now the town had begun to take shape. It had been surveyed and planned; a few substantial buildings were being put up, and, though views of the town at that time show it as a sprawling collection of iron huts, there was considerable development and the promise was there of a worth while town. A year was to pass before the railway reached Coolgardie, but there were plenty of hotels. One of the first four hotel licenses in the town was granted to Max Mandelstam, a son of Victor, who became one of the most active members of the little Jewish community.<sup>198</sup>

The Coolgardie community did not last long, but it began vigorously. On 13th May, 1895, a group of men wrote to the Minister for Lands :—

At a meeting of the Jewish residents of this town held on 10th instant, we were deputed on their behalf to apply to you for a grant of a quarter acre allotment to erect thereon a Jewish place of worship.

On making enquiries we find that allotment No. 188 has been reserved, and we pray that you will grant this site for the said religious purposes.

At the same meeting Messrs. Henry Fein and Edward Nathan Marks were appointed Trustees, and we are ready immediately we obtain the necessary site to proceed with the erection of a building.<sup>199</sup>

The letter was signed by Fein and E. N. Marks, who are mentioned as Trustees, and by E. M. Marks, who is described as Honorary Secretary of the Jewish community, as well as by Max Mandelstam and Henry Levy. This little group represented the workers of the Jewish residents and provides a useful cross section of the type of man who led the community. Mandelstam, as we have already seen, was a hotelkeeper, who came of a family well known in Western Australia for its Jewish endeavour. Fein was another hotelkeeper, who had reached Coolgardie somewhat later than Mandelstam, and was at this time the licensee of the Cremorne Hotel. Yet another Jewish hotelkeeper was Judah Lipman, the proprietor of the Grand Hotel in Coolgardie, and later (1896) of the Freemasons' Hotel. Both E. N. and E. M. Marks, who were brothers, were sharebrokers, a type of business which was both common and lucrative in the goldfields towns which were always prone to violent speculations on the stock and gold market. Levy was the owner of the Cafe de Paris,

one of the show places of Coolgardie and the leading cafe on the fields.<sup>200</sup>

Unfortunately the lot asked for by the trustees was a Government reserve and not open for selection. The Government, however, was anxious to assist, and the trustees tried again. On 9th July, 1895, a letter was sent to the Under Secretary for Lands asking for the grant of a piece of ground opposite the Wesleyan Church. This letter, which was signed by E. M. Marks, as Honorary Secretary, gives us a glimpse of the speed of life on the goldfields. Marks writes :—

As the Jewish holidays are the latter part of next month<sup>201</sup> my committee are anxious to erect a place of worship without delay and pray you will grant them the ground now applied for.

Evidently it was contemplated that a Synagogue, small but complete, could be erected in two months. Perth took a year to build theirs, but life on the goldfields moved quickly and buildings were not so pretentious. However, the committee's hopes were not realised, for the Under Secretary, in a letter dated 25th July, 1895, told them that the land applied for had not been completely surveyed and was not open for selection.

In August, however, the tenacious committee asked again for the same piece of land (Lot 386). Again they were refused, this time in a letter dated 5th September. The Government now made a counter-suggestion that Lot 405 might be suitable. No formal application for this land appears to have been made at this time, but reservation of the land was approved for Jewish purposes on 2nd October, 1895. The day before, the Town Clerk of Coolgardie (now sufficiently settled and substantial to be a municipality) had written to the Under Secretary for Lands supporting the application for a grant. His letter shows us something of the standing of the Jewish residents of the town :—

By direction of the Mayor I have the honour to inform you that the Council desire to support the application of the Jewish residents of Coolgardie for the grant of a site on which to erect a synagogue.

This denomination is rather strong here, and it is understood that the people are anxious at once to utilise the site for the purpose stated.

A specific site was mentioned, but the suggestion was

received too late to be of any effect, as the decision to grant Lot 405 had already been taken, and was communicated to E. M. Marks in a letter from the Under Secretary dated 4th October. No action appears to have been taken by the community either to arrange for the land to be



**ALFRED LEON SIMON.**

From "Kimberleys" (Western Australia), in the Mitchell Library, Sydney.

vested in trustees or to commence the erection of a Synagogue for some time. It was not until 14th March, 1896, that a formal letter of thanks for the land was sent to the Government. In that letter, which was signed by I. M. Myslis, now Honorary Secretary, the request was made that the land be vested in Lesser Levinson and Henry Levy;

who were unanimously appointed as trustees. Levinson was one of the most picturesque personalities of the gold-fields. If there is anything in the claims that some make that they can deduce a man's character from his signature, readers of character could make great play with the flourishing, vigorous lines of Levinson's signature. It is as striking as the man himself, who was "one of the characters of the town."<sup>202</sup> His feats of horsemanship, his race from Coolgardie to Menzies, his coach and twelve all combined to make him a public figure. The letter of 14th March went on to say :—

I am requested to point out that all religious bodies received a grant of two lots, excepting ours, and have to request you kindly to lay this before the Honourable the Commissioner of Crown Lands for his consideration as we purport (*sic*) building a school and will require another allotment, and trust the Commissioner will see his way clear to grant us an additional lot.

They were, however, treading on dangerous ground. For years there had been conflict over the question of aid to denominational schools, and the Government flatly refused to do anything which might precipitate the controversy once more into the realms of practical politics. In addition, the Government now required a formal application for the vesting of Lot 405 in Levinson and Levy, and on 23rd April, 1896, the Under Secretary wrote to Myslis :—

In reply to your letter of the 14th instant, I have to inform you that if you make application on the accompanying form for Lot 405 in the names of the Trustees mentioned in your letter, it will be favourably considered.

With regard to your application for a second Lot on which it is proposed to build a school, the Minister directs me to state that the Government cannot give free grants for schools, as that would be reviving the assisted schools question; therefore your application cannot be entertained.

To this letter there was no reply from the community for many months, though it seems that the Government had misinterpreted the request, which was not, in my opinion, designed for the purpose of building a day school comparable to the great Church schools, such as Hale and Guildford Grammar, then rising to prosperity, but merely for the purpose of housing a Sabbath school. Even this would probably have been regarded by the Government as a revival of the assisted schools controversy, but they had

raised no objection to the Perth scheme which envisaged a school building (though one was not built as early as this). The matter was raised again by Coolgardie on a slightly different footing in August, 1896.

Life on the goldfields had by April, 1896, grown rather more settled, but it was still subject to recurrent bouts of fever as new discoveries were made. The Jewish population grew with the general population. Passover of that year was celebrated with the usual services, and matzos were made available through the efforts of the Perth congregation.<sup>203</sup> The infant community was showing signs of strength, but that strength was wholly dependant on the general prosperity of the town, as was natural with a group of traders. If the Coolgardie mines should cease to be prosperous, then so would Coolgardie Jewry. At this time, however, it was riding high on the waves of gold and could confidently look to the future.

For some reason not apparent, it was decided that the whole committee of the congregation should act as trustees of the new land instead of merely Levinson and Levy, and on 14th July, 1896, the new Secretary, Malcolm Jonas, wrote to the Under Secretary asking for the formal grant of land to be made to Lesser Levinson, Judah Lipman, Henry Fein, Henry Levy, Isaac Joseph, Harris Levy and Edward Nathan Marks as trustees. Levinson was the President and Lipman the Treasurer of the congregation. The grant was ultimately issued on 29th July, 1896, and the congregation were now at liberty to commence building a Synagogue.<sup>204</sup>

The community was, however, still set on obtaining a second block of land. To this end the President, Levinson, wrote on 31st August, 1896, to the Hon. J. Howard Taylor, M.L.C., one of the goldfields representatives:—

On behalf of the Jewish community of Coolgardie I am desired to draw your attention and request you kindly to lay the matter before the Minister for Lands, viz. — that all denominations received from the Government two blocks of land, including the Salvation Army, and when we apply only one was granted. Although the Minister promised to reconsider the matter<sup>205</sup> so far we are without his decision.

I therefore kindly desire you to interview the Minister on our behalf and obtain for us another block.

P.S. I may draw your attention that our block is too small for the synagogue about to be erected.

Following on this appeal, Jonas wrote on 14th September to the Minister, but received a definite refusal on 25th September.

By this time the congregation, which now called itself the Goldfields Hebrew Congregation (a trifle unfair to the Kalgoorlie community, which had also begun to function), had commenced its Synagogue—which to some extent spoils the point of Levinson's postscript. Extant photographs of the Synagogue show it as a square, weather-board building with a curious double-domed roof. How it seemed to contemporary Coolgardie can be gleaned from a newspaper description of September, 1896 :—

The frame of the new Synagogue has been put up. The building is situated on the northern side of Shaw Street, near the corner of Hunt Street. Messrs. Moline and Summerhayes are the architects and Messrs. Philp and Royle the builders. The elevation is to be in the Moorish style of architecture and will be surmounted with a cupola and gilded dome. Inside the building is to be 36 feet square on the ground floor, breaking into an octagon at the height of the gallery. Excellent provision is made for ventilation by a large octagon ventilator in the ceiling.<sup>206</sup>

The Synagogue was open for public worship for the New Year services.<sup>207</sup> It was a considerable achievement for a small community, and, whatever one's views may be as to the aesthetic properties of a gilded dome, it expressed the wealth and flamboyant tendencies of the goldfields men of the time. It is a monument to the energy of the committee and the generosity of the numerous subscribers, who included a few non-Jews.

We have already had a glimpse of some of the men who worked to organise the community, but there were others whose names must be mentioned. Myslis, who was Secretary of the congregation from March to July, 1896, was caretaker, usher, and court crier of the local Court House. A large, burly man of strong physique and character, he would seem the ideal for the thankless task of keeping order in a court where the tempers of the irascible miners and traders would be strained to their limits. It was Myslis who acted as reader for the Holy Day services in the new Synagogue in 1896. Despite the distance from the larger and better organised communities, there was no departure from the rules of strictest orthodoxy—no one who married out of his faith was permitted to be called to the Reading of the Law, and the whole

service was carried out in the traditional manner. Pride of place was accorded to "four bearded miners who had straggled in from some distant diggings."<sup>208</sup>

The vexed question of marriage outside the fold of Judaism was one of considerable importance on the goldfields, where, even as late as 1899, Jewish men outnumbered Jewish women by more than three to one.<sup>209</sup> In earlier days their disproportion would no doubt have been greater. The problem for those who wished to marry a Jewess was much the same as that which confronted the early settlers of New South Wales if they wished to marry at all. The women were simply not there. The magnitude of the difficulty can be gauged from the fact that it was not until July, 1897—almost five years after the beginnings of Coolgardie—that the first Jewish wedding took place on the goldfields.<sup>210</sup> This ceremony, the wedding of M. L. Caro to Miriam Atherdon, was celebrated by Rev. Moses Saunders of Perth. It received considerable publicity in the local press, though naturally the newspapers did not comment on the fact that so long a period had elapsed before two Jews were enabled to marry.

After the refusal by the Government of a second block of land (September, 1896), the community gave up the attempt and confined its activities to maintaining what assets it had. There was no shortage of financial support, and some of the Jews on the goldfields, especially the mining men like Simon and Kaufman, were extremely wealthy. So, too, was Levinson. But, even if certain individuals were to retain their wealth, the general prosperity of Coolgardie was on the decline. The rise of the Kalgoorlie goldfields spelt the downfall of Coolgardie, and the fond hopes of its townspeople that Coolgardie might become the capital of the colony instead of Perth died with many other high aspirations. The Jewish community died with them.

Unlike a similar decline in fortunes which we have seen in Fremantle, the fall of Coolgardie Jewry was swift. At the end of 1897 the Jewish population was 55, made up of 40 males and 15 females. The official figures do not state how many of these were children, but, as the goldfields habit was for all parents who could afford it to arrange for their children to live in Perth, it is probable

that the number in Coolgardie was small. The published statistics show that there was one Rabbi in the town. This is wrong, but, as we have seen in connection with both Perth and Fremantle, there was considerable carelessness in the compilation of the figures in relation to Jewish ministers, and this error need not cast doubts on the general trustworthiness of the official statistics. There is, however, one peculiar statement which must make one doubt them. The total population is given as 55; the number attending week-day (i.e., Holy Day) services is stated to be 100. This inconsistency could be explained by saying that the figure 55 refers to the settled population of the town, while the higher figure includes both those and the additional people who would make the holiday journey from nearby towns such as Southern Cross, Menzies, Kanowna, and other smaller centres where there were Jews. It is certain that some did. It may have been as high a number as 45. Services were being held in Kalgoorlie at this time, and there are some unconfirmed recollections of elderly people which would indicate that occasional services were held in Menzies, but it is not certain that these recollections refer to a time as early as 1897. The statistics show that for that year there was one burial, no marriages (which is wrong—there was at least one), and no Barmitzvh ceremony. No reference is made to a Sabbath School, and it would appear that what Jewish education there was in the town was done wholly by parents.<sup>211</sup>

At the end of 1897, then, there were 55 Jews in Coolgardie. By the middle of 1899 the congregation was so small that those who were left were unable to meet the interest payments on the mortgage debt for the Synagogue. An attempt was made to transfer the land and building to a Masonic Lodge, but the Government refused its consent owing to the opposition of a small party within the few remaining Jews. It was not until 1905, by which time Coolgardie was a sleepy relic, that the Government consented. The property was sold to the Loyal Orange Institution of Western Australia, and the Jewish community was dead both officially and in fact.<sup>212</sup>

The little congregation had had a romantic existence, as romantic as the search for gold. Its importance is not

to be measured by the length of its life, but by the good it did during its term. It kept Judaism alive in unpromising soil; it brought together a group of people who jointly could make a contribution to the welfare of their town that they could not have made individually; it allowed many men to satisfy their urge for communal work on Jewish lines. But instead of ending the Coolgardie story with the disappearance of the community, let us rather end it by discussing the work done for the general community by some of its members, for it is by their contributions to the general welfare that Jewish communities are judged.

In the eyes of the public, the outstanding Jew of Coolgardie was Lesser Levinson. This was not due entirely to his vigorous personality, but just as much to his public service. As the man who had done more than any other towards the discovery of water near the town, as head of the local Fire Brigade, and as a Town Councillor, he had a strong claim on the public gratitude.<sup>213</sup> Levinson was an Englishman who hailed from Newcastle, but the public benefactors that were Jews were by no means all English. Indeed, we could well say that the group of foreigners whose names are now forgotten, the owners of the little businesses that supplied the necessities and the comforts of life, are just as much deserving of praise as the well-known public figures who owned mines or represented overseas mining interests.

Two important men in that latter category were Alfred Leon Simon and Charles Kaufman. Both were representatives of wealthy mining syndicates financed by overseas capital, and both contributed fully to the development of the goldfields. Simon, who arrived in December, 1894, was a Frenchman from Alsace Lorraine, a trained geologist and mining engineer, and a Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Zurich.<sup>214</sup> His public standing can be gauged from the letter that was written to him by the Secretary of the Perth Congregation in September, 1896, when a search was being conducted for a suitable Jewish citizen to lay the Synagogue foundation stone:—

We have no other suitable representative of our Race and Religion in the Colony to perform the ceremony with as much éclat as your could.<sup>215</sup>

Even allowing for the necessary flattery on such occasions, it is clear that Simon was a well-known figure who would be a worthy representative. His work for the goldfields was, of course, chiefly bound up with his work for his own syndicate, but he, like many another local agent for these syndicates, was a great power for good—a breath of that overseas culture which could, and did, tone down the harsh life of the fields.

In a tribute to him in a contemporary history of the colony, it was said of him that he has very materially assisted in fostering the prosperity of the colony. . . . In the business and commercial life of the colony he takes a prominent part, and his straightforward manly conduct is well known. In Coolgardie he held (1896) the important office of President of the Chamber of Mines. In the public affairs of Coolgardie Dr. Simon has shown a sympathetic and sustained interest.<sup>216</sup>

Kaufman entered rather more into the public life of Coolgardie than Simon did. He was an American, at first a representative of overseas capital, and later interested on his own account in the Ivanhoe Mine.<sup>217</sup> He was a member of many of the local committees, and was always well to the fore on social occasions. He, too, was one of those asked by the Perth congregation to lay a foundation stone, and it was after his refusal on the ground of absence from the colony that an invitation was sent to Simon.<sup>218</sup> He was a large subscriber to the Building Fund of the Coolgardie Synagogue<sup>219</sup> and charitable in all directions, both Jewish and non-Jewish, on the fields.

There were Jews who controlled or represented capital, who owned petty shops, who were hawkers, who were miners, who supplied the wants of the residents in dozens of ways. Of the hotelkeepers something has already been said. One of them, Lipman, branched out still further and started the Lion Brewery in Coolgardie.<sup>220</sup> Henry Levy, as we have already seen, was one of the leading cafe owners. Running him close in the public esteem as a purveyor of food was Saul Epstein, who came to Coolgardie in 1894 from Poland after spending a few years in Tasmania. His cafe, says one writer, was "The Trocadero" of the fields.<sup>221</sup> His two nephews, Samuel and Harold Epstein, helped maintain the reputation of the business. Abraham Kott, who was for a short time before

his death Treasurer of the Perth Congregation, was the proprietor of a flourishing drapery with branches in Coolgardie, Kalgoorlie and Menzies, which he started after his arrival on the fields in 1894.

In every branch of commercial activity on the gold-fields, from the highest to the lowest, there were Jews. No comprehensive list could be given, but those whose names have been cited are a fair cross-section. By their activities they benefited themselves, naturally enough, but in doing so they played an important part in the life of the town. They helped to build it as surely as did the miners who dug for gold.

Only a few months passed between the discovery of gold in Coolgardie in September, 1892, and the first find at Kalgoorlie in June, 1893. The two towns are only 25 miles apart, and the new discovery caused something of a rush away from Coolgardie. The field at Coolgardie was, however, so rich that there was no real fear in those early days that it would be neglected. None the less, there was always a certain jealousy between the two towns. This does not appear to have been quite so fully developed in the Jewish sphere as it was among the general public and in the press. One symptom (or perhaps cause) of this jealousy was the assumption by the Coolgardie community of the title "Goldfields Hebrew Congregation" at a time when Kalgoorlie also had an organised community. Final results were rather curiously divided between the two congregations. Coolgardie built its Synagogue first, but it ceased to exist as a community in 1899. Kalgoorlie did not erect its building until 1902, but the community has had a long life, and, though small, is by no means extinct to-day.

Conditions in early Kalgoorlie were much the same as those in early Coolgardie. In both towns residents contended with harsh living conditions, with dust, with lack of water and amenities, and with imperfect housing. It was against such a background that the Jews of Kalgoorlie began to organise themselves. The type of Jew who formed the community of Kalgoorlie was in all essentials exactly the same as that with which we have met in our study of Coolgardie—the wealthy mining or business man, the shopkeeper, the artisan and the struggling miner.

Details of the Jewish effort in mining properly so called, that is, prospecting or working underground, have not come down to us. Even in the early days of Western Australian mining ventures Jews were giving financial support, and prominent men, such as Lionel Samson, were actively associated with them. Samson, as early as 1864, was a director of the Western Australian Mining Company, and Frederick Levi, a well known South Australian, was a director of the Fortune Mining Company.<sup>222</sup> These companies were not engaged in work on the eastern fields which we are now considering, and which were not then discovered to be auriferous, but Samson and Levi are the forerunners of Simon, Kaufman and V. L. Solomon. The first glimpse of any attempt at communal organisation in Kalgoorlie is a meeting at the end of August, 1896. The tangible result of that meeting was, as usual, a request to the Minister for a grant of land. The letter, dated 9th September, 1896, reads :—

We, the Hebrew Congregation of Kalgoorlie, pray you to grant us a block of land for the purpose of building a synagogue for the benefit of our rapidly-increasing numbers. We intend building a house of worship as soon as our funds will permit. There are already over 50 of our co-religionists in Kalgoorlie alone without the outlying districts. We therefore hope you will grant us our petition at your earliest convenience and beg to remain etc.<sup>223</sup>

The letter is signed by Moss S. Solomon, Honorary Secretary. Appended to it is a group of signatures of men who presumably were the committee or the prime movers in the organisation. The signatories are (with the exception of one which is illegible) Samuel Lobascher, Charles Kapp, Samuel Henry Marks, M. Solomon, H. Baron, Solomon New, A. Schulman, Isaac Barker, Braham Cohen, Louis A. Morris and Fred. Morris. Few of these men were prominent in the general community, though their signature is an earnest of their zeal for Judaism. The Secretary, Moss Solomon, was a tailor, and Kapp a merchant who had migrated from Germany. Schulman was the local representative of the Jewish firm of Silbert & Sharp, fruit merchants of Perth.<sup>224</sup> Fred. and Louis Morris, who were jewellers, came to Kalgoorlie in 1895, and were well known in the town for their public spirit, the racehorses they owned and their general sportsman-

ship. Fred. Morris later attained fame as the leader of an exploration party to Hall's Creek, where he died in 1900.<sup>225</sup>

In addition to the petition, the committee used the influence of C. J. Moran, M.L.A., one of the goldfields representatives, in putting their case to the Minister. Moran, in a letter of 5th October, asked for the Minister's favourable consideration of the request. The influence was not successful. On 17th October, the Minister replied to Moran, rejecting the request on the ground that no lots were available in the townsite of Kalgoorlie. The matter was allowed to drop for almost a year. In August, 1897, a further request was made, this time through the Mayor of Kalgoorlie (the Hon. H. G. Parsons, M.L.C.). The Mayor's interest in the matter had been made public a month earlier at the first circumcision in Kalgoorlie, where he took the chair and responded to the toast of his health.<sup>226</sup> In his speech, the Mayor expressed the opinion that there would not be the least difficulty in securing a site. This optimism was borne out by a letter from the Under Secretary for Lands to the new Secretary of the Kalgoorlie Hebrew Congregation (Solomon Saunders), dated 9th September, 1897 :—

With reference to your request through the Mayor of Kalgoorlie for a grant of land in that town for ecclesiastical purposes, I am directed by the Hon. the Minister for Lands to inform you that he will be prepared to consider an application for one lot in that Townsite, providing it is not a corner lot or one in too good a business position, and if you make a selection it will have consideration.

It must be distinctly understood, however, that land granted for ecclesiastical purposes is only given on 999 years' lease, with powers of re-entry by the Government should it be used otherwise than for the purpose for which it was set apart.

Saunders replied to this offer on 21st September :—

At a meeting of the Kalgoorlie Hebrew Congregation a resolution was passed conveying our sincere thanks to you for the promise (to) grant us a block of land for ecclesiastical purposes. A committee has been appointed to select a block as soon as possible and particulars will be forwarded to you for your approval.

In addition to the signature of Saunders as Honorary Secretary, the letter contains the names of five men who presumably constituted the committee referred to in the letter. E. N. Marks, who was a well-known business man

in the town, and whose name we have met in Coolgardie, was stated to be President, and H. Solomon treasurer. The committeemen were M. Solomon (one of the signatories to the letter of September, 1896), S. Malasky and Louis Morris. Solomon Saunders, who succeeded Moss Solomon as Secretary, was a prominent auctioneer and a kinsman of the Rev. Moses Saunders of Perth.<sup>227</sup> It was to a speech by him that the Mayor replied when he forecast the grant of land in July, 1897.<sup>228</sup> The offices of his firm, Linton & Saunders, were often used for small meetings, and he was a generous benefactor to all causes, both Jewish and non-Jewish, in the town. His name was usually found as a subscriber to all the funds that were raised—and they were many—to help the dependants of men killed in mining accidents.<sup>229</sup>

It is rather surprising that of the six men named in this letter, only two, M. Solomon and Louis Morris, signed the original letter a year earlier. This can, however, be explained by remembering the uncertain business conditions of the goldfields. There had been a great mining boom in 1895 and 1896. By now, both towns were feeling to the full the reaction that always follows these booms. There had been a considerable general migration from the fields during 1897, and it is quite natural to assume, since Jewish prosperity depends on general prosperity, that the departures would include some Jews.

Solomon Malasky, the only other name in the letter of whom anything is known, was the proprietor of a fish saloon in Hannan Street, the main thoroughfare. His popularity in the town can be gauged from the fact that on leaving Kalgoorlie to open a business in Perth in December, 1897, he received a purse of sovereigns and a pipe from a representative committee of townspeople.<sup>230</sup> The intrinsic historical importance of this presentation is, of course, small. Its value is a source of inference, a statement which is true of many of the relatively minor incidents recorded in this paper. From this presentation we can draw four inferences: that there was little or no anti-Jewish feeling in Kalgoorlie; the foreigner was accepted there without question; Jews even in relatively humble positions in the social scale were working for the benefit of the whole community, and that their efforts met

with recognition from their fellow-citizens—all matters of considerable importance in the history of a small Jewish community.

The first of these inferences—the absence of anti-Semitism—has been referred to before in dealing with the early history of Fremantle. Its absence was as noticeable in the press of the goldfields as it was in the early press of the port. In a paper which invariably included some jokes to fill up small spaces, only one had a Jewish tinge—and that not offensive. In the literature which has grown up around the early days of the goldfields, only one Jewish joke has come under the writer's notice, and that, while it could have been more kindly expressed, was not ill-natured. In the news items over two years in the *Western Argus* there is only one report of a crime which specifically stated that the accused to be a Jew—a report of a particularly brutal murder in Russia. Though the police court reports from Coolgardie, Kalgoorlie and the surrounding towns contain rather more Jewish names than we would expect (but that is never an infallible guide to Jewishness), the papers never mentioned, let alone emphasised, Jewish crime. One is justified in concluding that anti-Semitism on the fields was small and unimportant. In considering this matter, we must not forget that the financial power of some Jews, chiefly Lesser Levinson, Alfred Simon, Charles Kaufman and V. L. Solomon, could have been made the subject of much press comment had the necessary ill-feeling been present. No such comment appeared. The Jews of Kalgoorlie could build up the Jewish community in peace.

After the receipt of the Government's letter of 9th September, the next step in the building of the community was the selection of a block of land. The selection was speedily made and communicated to the Minister in a letter from Saunders dated 16th October. The block chosen was one covering a quarter of an acre in Porter Street, near the corner of Hannan Street (Lot 457). The choice, however, was not approved by the Minister, as the block was considered too valuable. The Minister offered Lot 213, which was accepted in April, 1898, after the close of our period. This lot was, however, not used for Synagogue purposes owing to the difficulty of raising funds.

Matters remained in abeyance until 1901, when a fresh organisation was formed, the old grant surrendered, a fresh one obtained of a piece of land in Brookman Street, and the present Synagogue built.<sup>231</sup> A sidelight on the migratory tendencies of the goldfields population, to which reference has already been made, is that none of the committee which began work in 1901 had been connected with the body whose history we have been tracing.<sup>232</sup>

The absence of a proper Synagogue did not deter the Jews of Kalgoorlie from assembling for worship on Holy Days. The first record of a service in the town deals with the service for New Year, 1896. The newspaper does not state in which building the service was held, but on the Day of Atonement the Old Stock Exchange in Semaphore Chambers was used. This first act of public Jewish worship took place at the time the first application for land was being made, and this fact was announced to the general public in the report dealing with the services. In the report the congregation is described as "recently organised"—which fits in with the tone of the letter of 9th September, 1896.<sup>233</sup>

It has been shown that there was no attempt made to pursue the question of the land grant between October, 1896, and August, 1897. Once again the approach of the High Festivals seems to have prodded the committee into action. In addition to re-opening correspondence with the Minister, arrangements were made for the Rev. Moses Saunders to come from Perth to conduct the Day of Atonement services for 1897. There was considerable publicity in the press. The report of the New Year service says that it was held in a room lent by Messrs Saunders & Chambers. The Morning Service was read by a Mr. Raphael, and the Additional Service by a Mr. Broad. After recording that there was a large attendance, the paper goes on to say :—

We are given to understand that the recently formed Hebrew Congregation of this place has prospects of being a thoroughly vigorous organisation. A block of land has been promised by the Government as a site for the Synagogue, and the building is to be begun as soon as the Government's offer is carried into effect. Numerous assurances of financial help have been given by members of the congregation resident in and about Kalgoorlie for the building. In conformance with another promise by the Government a

site has been selected for a local Jewish cemetery. This ground is to be consecrated by the Rev. Rabbi Saunders during his approaching visit.<sup>234</sup>

This was the second time that the congregation had been called "recent," and perhaps the use of the word implies that the new committee regarded itself as a separate body from the old. There can be no doubt that the promise of land had given a great fillip to Jewish work in Kalgoorlie, though the optimistic reference to financial help did not accurately state the position. The report above quoted was merely the precursor of two longer ones dealing with the services for Kol Nidre and the Day of Atonement.

As forecast, these services were conducted by the Rev. Moses Saunders of Perth. They were held in the Municipal Buildings in Brookman Street, not far from the site which five years later was to be the Kalgoorlie Synagogue. The report of the Kol Nidre service deals wholly with Saunders' sermon on the text, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord, is One."<sup>235</sup> The later report, which is shorter, is worth quoting:—

The Services of the Kalgoorlie Hebrew Congregation on the Day of Atonement continued on Wednesday in the Municipal Buildings in Brookman Street. The ceremony of worship which was begun at 8 o'clock in the morning was continued without intermission until about 6.30 p.m. There was a very large attendance. . . . The text of the sermon was: "For I have given you good doctrine; forsake ye not my law. It is a tree of life to those who lay hold of it, and the supporters thereof are happy." In the course of his remarks the Rabbi impressed upon the Kalgoorlie Hebrew Congregation how desirable it was now that the Government had granted them a piece of land that steps should be taken to get a synagogue erected as quickly as possible. Thus they would have their own place of worship while the services of a teacher could be procured so that the children could learn Hebrew and the rudiments of Judaism.<sup>236</sup>

Some features of this report call for comment. It was not strictly true that the Government had granted a block of land. They had, at that date, merely promised to consider an application. The appeal of the preacher for some attention to be paid to Jewish education was by no means too early. As in Coolgardie, there had been no attempt at education, other than parental, and the year closed with the town still lacking a Hebrew school.<sup>237</sup> Some of the reasons for this have already been discussed

in connection with a similar state of affairs in Coolgardie.

But the most interesting feature of the report is the fact which it discloses that the services were held in the Municipal Building. Even assuming, as was almost certainly the case, that some rental was paid to the Council,



VAIBEN LOUIS SOLOMON.

(From "Adelaide and Its Environs," in the Mitchell Library, Sydney.)

it is probable that the influence of the Mayor was exerted in favour of the Jews when the application for use of the hall was made. The Mayor, the Hon. Harold G. Parsons, M.L.C., seems to have been particularly friendly towards the Jewish community.

During his year of office as Mayor, he had used his influence in obtaining a grant of land; he had publicly expressed his view that such a grant would ensue, and, when the Government had agreed to grant a block to be selected by the congregation, the Mayor had offered to surrender a site he owned (Lot 457), which the committee considered suitable.<sup>238</sup> He had shown his interest in the little band of Jews by taking the chair and speaking at their first joyous occasion, the initiation of the infant son of Isidore and Christina Davis.<sup>239</sup>

Reference to this circumcision cannot fail to bring to mind the work of the pioneer women of the goldfields. These women are to-day held in the highest honour throughout Western Australia, and they deserve to be. Of the details of their work, even their names, often little is known. But they were there, and some of them were Jewesses. In the absence of definite facts, the only tribute that can be here paid to them is in the words of the author of a recent book on a pioneer of New South Wales :—

Contemporary official accounts refer to them hardly at all; they are there by implication only, and when we have read all we can in the printed records of the adventures of those days, adventures in which they shared, they still remain elusive shadows behind the solid forms of their husbands.<sup>240</sup>

Of the prominent Jewish men of Kalgoorlie, the leaders were once more Kaufman and Simon. The two towns were much one in the business sphere, despite their distance apart, and it is quite natural that the mining magnate should have large interests in both. It was said of Kaufman that he was "the most astute, but bold, financier and mining expert in the colony." The wide ramifications of his control over such large organisations as the Ivanhoe Mine, the Lake View Company and others would seem to support this statement. Since his arrival in the colony in 1894 he had done a great deal for its development, even if some of the transactions into which he entered caused public feeling to run against him. Efficient management of Lake View, says a biographer in a contemporary newspaper, reconciled the public to the financial coup of which they disapproved, and which gained him control of that mine.<sup>241</sup> Kalgoorlie owes much,

as does the whole of the goldfields, to the work of both its Jewish leaders in the mining sphere.

To the general public outside the colony, the most prominent Jew identified with Kalgoorlie was Vaiben Louis Solomon. Solomon, who was the son of Judah Moss Solomon of Adelaide, a great communal worker in that city, was not a permanent resident in Kalgoorlie, but had large interests—land, mining and commercial—in the town.<sup>242</sup> Outside it he was better known for his work for South Australia, where he was born in 1853. He was later a well known journalist in the Northern Territory, and entered South Australian politics, eventually becoming Premier for a short time in 1899. He served as a member of the Federal Convention of 1897 as a representative of South Australia, and later entered the Federal House.<sup>243</sup> He died in 1908 after having played a considerable part in the affairs of Kalgoorlie, South Australia and the Commonwealth. This is not the place to attempt any assessment of the value of his political work. For us the only point is that he was a man who was identified with Kalgoorlie, who added lustre to the Jewish name in the little community, and who must therefore have a high place in any Jewish history of the goldfields.<sup>244</sup>

Despite the financial prominence of some of the goldfield Jews, there was surprisingly little in the way of political activity on their part. None of the parliamentary representatives was Jewish, and up to the end of 1897 only one had stood as a candidate. In that year Lesser Levinson stood for election to represent the North-Eastern (i.e., goldfields) Province in the Legislative Council. He finished, however, at the bottom of the poll.<sup>245</sup> Perhaps the paucity of Jewish candidates was caused by the fact that the two men who would be most likely to offer themselves were ineligible because they were not British subjects. Levinson, as we have seen, was an Englishman.

In local politics up to the end of 1897 Jews had taken a considerable interest, though only Simon, as a member of the Coolgardie Road Board, and Levinson as a Coolgardie Councillor, took any active, official part.<sup>246</sup> For reasons which were not given in the press, Simon resigned in August, 1897. In 1896 Frederick Morris had stood

for one of the wards of Kalgoorlie in the municipal elections, but had failed.<sup>247</sup> None the less, it may safely be inferred that the influence of these powerful Jews with whom we have been dealing was felt in the sphere of local politics. It was sufficient for Kaufman to be chosen as a member of the Railway Committee in Coolgardie when the railway agitation was at its height in March, 1896.<sup>248</sup>

It is not a far cry from local politics to the local hotels, and, as in Coolgardie, Kalgoorlie had among its Jewish population some who achieved prominence and popularity as hotelkeepers. The best known of these in Kalgoorlie was Henry Rosenthal, who came to the gold-fields in the middle of 1894 and established the Exchange Hotel. After eighteen months, during which he is said to have made a fortune, this hotel was sold and Rosenthal moved to Perth.<sup>249</sup> Before his departure he received an address from his employees. In discussing another Jew who received public recognition before leaving the town, enough has been said to explain the importance of this relatively trivial incident. Perhaps one may add that this address shows that if Rosenthal did make a fortune in eighteen months he did not make it out of his employees. After some few months in Perth, he returned to Kalgoorlie and opened the Palace Hotel, where he remained for the rest of the period covered by this paper.<sup>250</sup>

A visitor to Kalgoorlie at the end of 1897 who was intent upon an examination of the town from a Jewish point of view would find much to excite his interest. He would find a town with growing pains, intensely jealous of its real or fancied rivals, wealthy, vigorous, and perhaps a little harsh. It would bear traces of its rapid growth from a hamlet of hessian huts; there would be spacious buildings almost side by side with the tumbledown business-house of the unsuccessful shopkeeper. Against that background there would be a little Jewish community of 40 souls, among them only six women.<sup>251</sup> There would be no Synagogue, but the leaders would tell the visitor that negotiations for a block of land were practically complete, and that as soon as the money was ready they would have their Synagogue. The visitor would find that among that mixed crowd of Jews from all the Jewries of the world there were rich and poor, men who controlled great

mining companies, men who owned flourishing trading concerns, men who worked underground, and men who eked out a living in a little shop. He would find among them three who were fully capable of conducting the services in whatever room the Committee could hire for the holidays. He would hear with regret that there were no Sabbath services and no formal arrangements for Jewish education. The few children in the town would have to receive that from their parents. He would be pleased to know that at least two male children had been born that year, and had been properly initiated into the Jewish faith. There had been no deaths, though among the general community deaths from fever and accident were all too frequent; neither had there been any marriages celebrated in the town. He would probably leave with the feeling that this community, though small, was staunch, active and destined to be as successful as the uncertain economic conditions of a goldfields town would permit. He would leave knowing that the Jews of Kalgoorlie were respected, were working for the good of the town, and were true to the traditions of their history.

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**NOTES.**

194. Recollections of Mr. Saul Epstein, of Perth, formerly of Coolgardie.
195. Jules Raeside : *Golden Days* (Perth, 1929), p. 131.
196. *Ibid*, p. 135.
197. From the recollections of Mr. Louis Cohen, of Perth.
198. Raeside, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
199. File No. 1879/95 in the Lands Department, Perth. The story of the Coolgardie land grant is taken wholly from this file.
200. From the recollections of Mr. Saul Epstein.
201. An error. New Year fell in September, not August, 1895.
202. Arthur Reid : *Those Were the Days* (Perth, 1933), p. 23.
203. P.L.B., p. 55.
204. Certificate of Title, Vol. 95, Folio 133, in the Lands Department, Perth.
205. No record of any such promise appears on the Lands Department file.
206. *Western Australian Goldfields Courier*, Coolgardie, 5th September, 1896.
207. From the recollections of Mr. J. Perl, of Melbourne, formerly of Coolgardie, as communicated to Mr. A. Newton Super of Melbourne.
208. From an unpublished "History of the Jews in Australia," by Mr. A. Newton Super.

209. *Western Australian Statistical Register*, 1900.
210. Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 224. The author has mis-spelt the name of the groom.
211. *Western Australian Statistical Register*, 1897.
212. File No. 1879/95 in Lands Department, Perth.
213. Super : *History of the Jews in Australia*.
214. Kimberley : *Western Australia*, Part II., pp. 124-5 (Perth, 1897).
215. P.L.B., p. 99.
216. Kimberley, *loc. cit.*
217. Super, *op. cit.*
218. P.L.B., p. 100.
219. From a newspaper cutting (undated) in the possession of Mr. M. L. Caro of Perth, formerly of Coolgardie.
220. Super, *op. cit.*
221. Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
222. *Western Australian Almanack*, 1864; quoted by Super, *op. cit.*
223. From File No. 7371/96 in the Lands Department, Perth, from which the whole story of the Kalgoorlie land grant is taken, unless otherwise indicated.
224. From the recollections of Mr. Saul Epstein.
225. From the recollections of Mrs. C. H. Leedman, of Perth, daughter of Louis Morris.
226. *Western Argus*, Kalgoorlie, 8th July, 1897.
227. From the recollections of Mr. Saul Epstein.
228. *Western Argus*, 8th July, 1897.
229. This, and some similar generalisations elsewhere, are culled from a reading of the files of the *Western Argus* for 1896 and 1897.
230. *Western Argus*, 23rd December, 1897.
231. *The Westralian Judaeon*, September, 1939.
232. Minute book of the Kalgoorlie Hebrew Congregation, page 1. This book, which covers the period 1901-1921, is in the possession of Mr. L. N. Zeffert of Perth.
233. *Western Argus*, 24th September, 1896.
234. *Western Argus*, 30th September, 1897.
235. *Western Argus*, 7th October, 1897.
236. *Western Argus*, 14th October, 1897.
237. *Western Australian Statistical Register*, 1897.
238. Letter from the Honorary Secretary, Kalgoorlie Hebrew Congregation, to the Under-Secretary for Lands, 16th October, 1897, on Lands Department File 7371/96.
239. *Western Argus*, 8th July, 1897. The ceremony was performed by I. H. Myslis of Coolgardie.
240. Bassett : *The Governor's Lady, Mrs. King* (Oxford, 1940), p. 1.
241. *Western Argus*, 15th July, 1897.
242. *Western Argus*, 5th March and 13th April, 1896.
243. *The Universal Jewish Encyclopaedia* (New York, 1943), Vol. 9, p. 642. *The Jewish Encyclopaedia* (New York, 1905), Vol. 11, p. 458, gives his date of birth as about 1849.

244. A recent book on the history of Federation, Alfred Deakin's *The Federal Story* (Melbourne, 1945), contains some references to the work of V. L. Solomon, but erroneously refers to him as "Elias Solomon," evidently confusing him with the Elias Solomon who later became the first Federal member for Fremantle (see Part I. of this paper).
245. *Western Argus*, 8th July, 1897.
246. *Western Argus*, 26th August, 1897.
247. *Western Argus*, 19th November, 1896.
248. Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
249. *Western Argus*, 12th November, 1896.
250. *Western Argus*, 12th August, 1897.
251. *Western Australian Statistical Register*, 1897.

## The History of the Western Suburbs Synagogue.

### An Excerpt.

By PHILLIP BARG.

(Read before the Society, 16th December, 1946.)

Of the early attempts to establish a congregation at Newtown—the first suburban congregation in New South Wales—no written records are preserved, and reliance must be placed on the memory of living persons.

The work of the sincere and worthy men and women who laboured so long and earnestly in the establishing of the congregation on a lasting basis cannot be sufficiently set forth in any record. All that can be attempted here is to note, in passing, one of the more important events.

The year 1883 saw the sowing of the first seeds, when a minyan commenced to meet regularly at the home of Abraham and Naomi Solomon in King Street, within one hundred yards of the present Synagogue, and later at their residence at 15 Brown Street, Newtown. The nearest place of worship was distant about three miles. Because of this, the members of the minyan decided to work for the creation of a local centre for worship.

Mrs. Naomi Solomon† is happily still living, and her memory is still clear as to the happenings of those far off days.

Subsequently the minyan was for many years located at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Selig at King Street, Newtown. In the meantime the number of co-religionists

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†Mrs. Solomon has died since the writing of this paper.