

**A YIDDISHE GHOST
JOSEPH LEVY
THE BREWER OF BERRIMA (1799-1862)**

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"A Yiddishe Ghost?" asked the Sydney Jewish News of 7 July, 1967 and wrote under this headline that "The ghost of Joseph Levy has returned to Berrima, a N.S.W. country town, or at least that's what the local residents are saying".

"Levy", the paper said, "was one of the first Jews to come to Australia. Records show that he was a convict with the First Fleet and after his pardon became an innkeeper."

Here, the editor of the newspaper erred, because, as you will see later, this Joseph Levy arrived here 32 years after the First Fleet. There had, indeed, been a namesake in that Fleet, but he died on 15 April, 1788 and was the first Jew to be buried on Australian soil.

"Now it is said," the newspaper continued, "that Joseph Levy is returning to his inn which was converted into four home units, on Friday and Saturday nights. Residents of Arlington House, built in 1834 and previously Levy's Victoria Inn, say that Levy is the mysterious knocker who has visited them mostly on Friday nights for the past few months. The knocks occur at different times at night and are clear and distinct like the knock of a person with an urgent mission. Close investigation by the owners and tenants have failed to find an answer."

The Daily Telegraph, on 9 July, 1967, picked up the story and wrote that the tenant recounted that "his terrier went mad every time he heard the knock, racing around the house like a wild thing". "Several theories," said the Sydney Jewish News "have been put forward by amateur ghost hunters, but there is no real explanation. One Jewish resident of the area says that, while he doesn't believe in ghosts, he hopes Levy doesn't round up a Minyan of his fellow spirits on Friday nights." (The correct name for the house, incidentally, is Allington and not Arlington House.)

So much for the Berrima Ghost, but who was Joseph Levy of Berrima? His story is again one of rehabilitation and success of a Jewish convict.

Joseph Levy, the son of Mordecai, a general dealer, was a labourer of the parish of St. Saviour within the town and borough of Southwark in the County of Surrey, when aged 19, he was on 1 October, 1819 indicted at the Surrey Quarter Sessions before Mr. John Eamer, a Justice of the Peace for the town and borough of Southwark for "feloniously stealing, on 23 September, 1829, one watch of the value of £10, one watch chain of the value of £4, one watch key of the value of 1 and one seal of the value of £5, of the goods and chattels of Theophilus Hearsay, from the person." Mr. Hearsay, as a witness stated, was robbed, whilst he was walking to the Town Hall to attend a meeting. "Joseph

Levy," it was alleged, "came up to him and thrust his arm across his breast . . . and pushed him on to the footpath, at the same time looking steadfastly in his face. He then suddenly ran from him in a stooping posture and Mr. Hearsay immediately missed his watch and called out: "I have lost my watch!" Constable John Kinsay arrested Levy who tried to hide the stolen goods under the horse waggons parked in front of the Town Hall. Levy was sentenced to be transported for life to New South Wales.¹ He sailed from Falmouth on 11 April, 1820 in the convict transport "Mangles", which arrived at Port Jackson on 7 August 1820.² At sometime in the 1820s, he was made an overseer of a convict gang and as such he found his place in early Australian literature, although with a rather unfavourable reputation.

In 1845 a novel was published in Sydney under the title "Ralph Rashleigh or The Life of an Exile". This novel has been attributed, although not conclusively, to a convict who had been sentenced under the name of James Tucker, but whose real name was allegedly Rosenberg. Rashleigh related that, "whilst being drafted into a chain gang he was sent by the principal overseer to a gang, employed in clearing land, burning off trees etc. which was commanded by Joseph Levy or shortly called "Joe", described by him as a "bandy-legged, chocolate-cheeked Jew". In the story "Joe" appeared to delight in oppressing his men as much as possible. "The superintendent," Rashleigh wrote, "was very anxious to get as much work done as possible by any means. To this effect he selected from among the convicts under his charge the worst behaved and most indolent of the number of his overseers, who, as he rightly judged, by being the most afraid of the hardships of work themselves, would exercise all manners of rigour towards their prisoners and exact as much labour as possible from each, in order to keep their places. The overseers were working a gang of 50 men and had ten of them flogged every week."³

In reading this description of the cruel treatment of a convict by another convict, one is very much reminded of the behaviour of the so-called "Kapos" in the German concentration camps. To what extent, however, the author of "Ralph Rashleigh" used literary licence, and if Levy was really as inhuman as depicted in the book, will never be known.

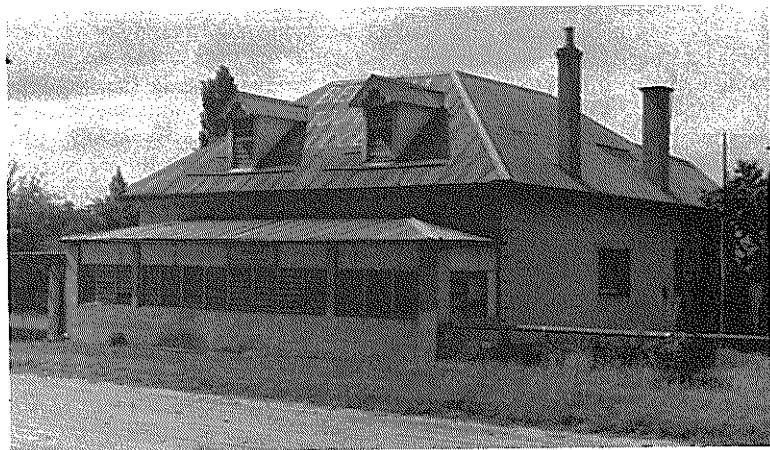
When, in 1827, Levy received his ticket-of-leave, he left the gang and hired himself out as a labourer. In the 1828 Census, he is mentioned as a "Hebrew, aged 28, a labourer of George's Field", which was the property of David Johnston, Esther Johnston's son. The ticket-of-leave was restricted to the District of Evan. Levy wrote to the Government that he had employment with Lewis Solomon in Sydney and that the district specified must be a clerical error. This was denied and Levy remained in Evan until 1832, where he finally worked for John Moses, licensee of the King's Head Inn at Penrith. (When Moses left for Sydney, Levy asked for permission to go with him. This was refused, because his dossier showed that he had forged a pass and received a sentence of three months for refusing to work.) As such he appears to have taken produce to the market in Sydney when, on

6 May 1831 he was the subject of an accident in York Street. It was rather satirically described in the "Sydney Gazette" as follows:⁶

"On Friday last, a man named Joseph Levy, was driving a cart along York Street, when, one of the wheels rising on the footpath, tilted Levy, who had taken a drop, on the ground. When he lay insensible for some moments, till recovering gradually, and pretty well sobered by this tumble, poor Moses remounted and jogged homewards, but so much indisposed as to be forced to lie up for many days in a rather dangerous plight."

On 5 August, 1834, he received his Conditional Pardon,⁶ whereupon he decided, like many other Jews had done before him, to go to the country and try his luck in business. In January 1835 he went to Berrima, a thriving small town, south of Sydney, where he opened a general store, selling the usual sundry goods, slops (ready made clothes) etc and also supplied the settlers with rations for the convicts.⁷ Less probably because he himself "liked a drop" (as the Gazette had reported on the occasion of his accident), than because of the steadily increasing demand for this precious beverage, Levy founded in 1837 the "Imperial Brewery" in Berrima.⁸ How he had acquired the knowledge of brewing is not known. Maybe he had once been employed in a brewery, or more likely, he had found a convict who knew this trade and whom he employed as brewer. In any case, he soon acquired some knowledge of the trade, because his brewery flourished for several years.

In October, 1838, in an advertisement in "The Australian", he returned thanks for the liberal support by his customers in the last year and informed them that he had "commenced brewing for this season" and that he "likewise commenced Ginger Beer brewing, where constant supply is always on roads from Bargo to Sutton Forest", which shows that the beverages were available in summer only. He also made known that he had "engaged an experienced cooper".⁹



Allington House

He experienced, of course, also the usual troubles of a country pioneer, in that an escaped convict, known as "Big Jem", stole his chestnut filly in January 1838 which, as well as a "stolen or stray Bay horse", had not been recovered by July of the year,¹⁰ although in January he had offered a reward of £2, which in July he raised, obviously without any result, to £5.

Levy acted as an auctioneer at Berrima. In January, 1839 "The Australian" reported that he was selling in auction at Berrima the unexpired lease of a farm, a bullock team, cattle, horses and farm implements, as well as 10 tons of hay.¹¹

When, in October 1839, he began again to brew beer for the summer season, his beer was now praised as the "best Colonial beer, equal to any in the colony". And he announced that he had "added to his establishment the trade of Cooperage in all branches".¹² To still better dispose of the products of his brewery, he then decided to become a publican. On 2 June, 1840 he advertised the sale of the entire stock of his Berrima store by auction, because he was commencing business as, what was then called, a "licensed victualler".¹³ Thanking the public for its liberal patronage as a storekeeper at Berrima for five years, Levy advertised in July, 1840 that he had opened the Victoria Inn at Berrima.¹⁴ The inn was well situated on the main road to the south of the Colony, and on 1 January, 1845 the "Sydney Morning Herald" reported that Levy's Victoria Inn had become the "booking office for the Sydney-Goulburn coach". After the opening of the inn, he disposed of his remaining stock-in-trade to a co-religionist who traded as Hyam Phillips & Co. This firm also took over the brewery and, when, in October 1840, Phillips commenced brewing, Levy advertised that he would assist him in the brewery.¹⁵

Being now so well established, Levy applied for an Absolute Pardon and was successful. With despatch of 19 May, 1841, he was recommended by the Governor, Sir George Gipps, for an Absolute Pardon,¹⁶ which was granted and dated 21 October, 1841.¹⁷

Levy was now a free man and at once moved to Sydney to start business there. And so that people should not think that he was in trouble again, on 30 September, 1841, he advertised in the "Sydney Morning Herald" that "the Boy, named Joseph Levy who was tried at Berrima Assizes for perjury, is not identical with Mr. Joseph Levy who resided formerly at Berrima".¹⁸ He had, however, chosen the worst time to start a new enterprise, because the severe depression which affected the country for several years in the early forties, had just begun. It was therefore not surprising, that Hyam Phillips was not able to pay Levy for the store, and that he had to take it back again, to be managed by his nephew, Lewis Levy, who later also took over the inn, being, in 1861, still listed as innkeeper at Berrima.¹⁹

In Sydney, he seems to have worked in partnership with Abraham Levy, an old convict, licensee of the "Sign of the Red Cross",²⁰ and a devoted member of the Bridge Street Synagogue. According to the 1845 York Street Synagogue report, it was Abraham Levy who, in

1830, had induced Archdeacon William Cowper to allot a burial ground to the Jews of Sydney.

If he was fortunate in business in Sydney, despite the depression, he was less fortunate in the choice of his new house in Sydney, because on 3 February, 1842, he was forced to place the following advertisement in the "Sydney Gazette":—

CAUTION

Mr J. Levey, formerly of Berrima, hotel keeper, but now in Bathurst Street, in the town of Sydney, wishes to warn all gentlemen, particularly settlers from up the country, that having had the misfortune to take the house, formerly occupied by the notorious Mother Heywood, he has also secured the services of a bull dog of the "first water", who goes by the name of "Boxer". Gentlemen are therefore advised from not visiting this house, more especially the gentleman who left his name in the waistband of his breeches only a few nights back in the jaws of "Boxer".

Mr J. Levey hopes this will be a sufficient caution!

January 31, 1842.

J. Levey.

It is interesting to note from this advertisement that Levy, who had formerly written his name as LEVY, changed it to LEVEY, maybe in the hope that people would believe that he belonged to the well-known Levey clan of Solomon, Barnet and Isaac Levey.²¹

In 1842 Levy is noted as a ratepayer in the Macquarie Ward. He had become a merchant and dealer and in December, 1844 despatched two cases of haberdashery to Port Phillip.²² But he also retained his interest at Berrima, because in 1844 he nominated, together with Hyam Phillips (whose fortunes had improved and who was now the brewer in Berrima), as "electors of Town and District of Berrima", a Mr James Harper as District Councillor for Berrima.²³ He is noted in "The Atlas" of 7 June, 1845 at his Victoria Inn as agent for that paper at Berrima, and according to the "Sydney Chronicle" of 20 November, 1847 he won government contracts for forage for Picton and Berrima for the year 1848.

He certainly hoped to gain from the 1850 goldrush, advertising his Victoria Inn on 17 January, 1852 in "Bell's Life in Sydney" with the curious advertisement:—

"THE MAIL, THE MAIL, THE ROYAL MAIL
BREAKFAST READY WITHOUT FAIL!"

This was meant for the "information of passengers travelling on the Mail to and from Goulburn".

On 13 September, 1851 "The Sydney Morning Herald" reported that Levy, as elector for Berrima, had signed a testimonial to Dr. Robert Forster at a meeting held at Berrima on 10 September, 1851. It is obvious that, when as a result of the Victorian gold finds, traffic to, and business in, Berrima had considerably improved, he had returned to his little country town. On 14 March, 1856 "The Sydney Morning Herald" noted that Levy had become the agent for the paper at Berrima.

Throughout he kept in touch with the Jewish congregation in

Sydney, and paid his dues to the Bridge Street and later to York Street Synagogue as a member of the congregation. When, in November 1843, the Committee of Bridge Street Synagogue appointed members in the country as representatives of the Synagogue, Joseph Levy and Hyam Phillips were selected for the Berrima district.

In 1845 York Street Synagogue report shows that Joseph Levy donated £9 for the purpose of defraying the expenses for ground and building of the York Street Synagogue, whilst Hyam Phillips gave £20, which was an unusually large donation. In the Committee report of 1847 Levy is mentioned as seat holder of the Synagogue, probably to assure him a seat on the holidays, when he travelled to Sydney for the services.

In a collection list "for the distressed Jews in Palestine",²⁴ the first such appeal in Sydney, published on 7 September, 1854, in "The Empire", Levy's name appears with the large donation of £3, whilst most Jews donated 10/- only.

In November, 1860 he sent a letter to the Secretary of York Street Synagogue,²⁵ detailing the circumstances of an outrage, allegedly committed at Berrima to a man of the Jewish faith by the name of Michael or Lewis Garcia — one of the rare Sephardi names encountered in the colony, asking for assistance to the injured Garcia in his endeavours to prosecute his aggressors. His letter was accompanied by a letter from the Chief Constable at Berrima, confirming the facts and recommending prosecution of the parties who had molested Garcia. The President of the Synagogue told his Committee that he had spoken to Lewis Garcia, when he was in Sydney, and that the man, for some unknown reasons, had not mentioned the assault at all.

Joseph Levy died at the age of 63 in Sydney. The York Street Synagogue Burial Register records that he died on 25 September, 1862 in Pitt Street, Sydney and that he was buried at the Devonshire Street Cemetery as one of the last burials in that cemetery. In 1901 the cemetery had to make way for the Central Railway Station, and Levy's tombstone was transferred to Rookwood Cemetery where it still stands. Permission for the transfer was given by Mrs. M. Solomon of Penkivil Street, Bondi.²⁶

It appears from Levy's death certificate that his wife's maiden name was Merriman, obviously a fictitious name. It was also recorded that he was survived by a son and a daughter. His son, Lionel Levy, whose name had not been entered in the Birth Register of the Sydney Synagogue, became a country commercial traveller. He died from heat exhaustion and was buried on 1 December, 1899 at Bombala. Mrs. M. Solomon, who gave the permission to remove the remains and tombstone of Joseph Levy, was his daughter, Rebecca.

On 23 March, 1930 the "Hebrew Standard" published an interview which Mrs. Solomon gave on her 97th birthday for the wife of the paper's editor, Mrs. Alfred Harris. She told Mrs. Harris that she was born in 1833 in George Street, Brickfield Hill, Sydney and that later the family had moved to Berrima. The old lady had vivid recollections of

the times of the York Street Synagogue and hers is one of the very rare contemporary Jewish accounts of this period. Her father, she said, was one of the first seat holders of the Synagogue. The Jewish community in those days was one big family. After the service it was customary on the festivals for the congregants to meet in the large hall attached to the Synagogue and the children were regaled with nuts and sweets. The majority of the congregation was poor and all alike strove to assure fellowship in religion. She remembered well George Street's pillory for prisoners and the fun the children of the day had tickling the feet of the chained prisoners with straw. She also remembered the "goldrush" of the fifties and the arrival of the gold escorts from the goldfields. She had been a good sportswoman, liked swimming and especially riding. She thought little of riding from Eden where she had lived, when married, to Cooma to visit her father-in-law. She had married, she said, Mr. Maurice Solomon in 1853 in the York Street Synagogue. According to the York Street register, her marriage was celebrated on 1 September, 1854. Maurice Solomon was the third son of S. Solomon of Monaro and the marriage had been witnessed by Abraham Levy, who had a store at Queanbeyan in the Monaro district.



Rebecca Solomon

And here the second "ghost" makes its appearance. Mr. S. Samuel Solomon was a convict, who curiously enough was also transported in the same ship, the "Mangles" on which Rebecca's father had arrived, but on the sixth voyage of this ship to the colony, which berthed at Port Jackson on 19 April, 1833. He was an umbrella maker and salesman of London, aged already 50, who had also been sentenced for stealing, to be transported for life. The indent of the "Mangles" noted that he could read and write and that he was the father of four male and five female children and that he was the cousin of Mrs. Josephson of Sydney.

Perhaps through Josephson's influence he was able to settle in the Monaro district. On 1 February, 1835, his wife Rebecca arrived in "Britomark" with five daughters and three sons, one of whom was Maurice, then aged six. The family had first settled at "Reid's or Dr. Reed's Flats" which later became known as "Jews' Flats" and later moved to Cooma, where they founded a large store. The youngest brother of Maurice, Charles Solomon, became the first Mayor of Cooma. After his marriage, Maurice took over the store and hotel of Solomon Solomon, who was probably an uncle, at "Jews' Flats", and later moved to Eden, where he opened a store.²⁷

Rebecca Solomon had fond memories of the Reverend Jacob Isaacs who had married her and of the Reverend A. B. Davis whose wife she had often assisted when visiting the sick and the poor. She had now many grand-children and three great-grand-children, she said, whilst two of her grand-children had given their life for the country in the Great War. Mrs. Harris noted that Mrs. Solomon was in the full use of her faculties and an avid reader of good literature. When she suddenly died, two months after this interview, on 1 May, 1930 at No. 11, Tusculum Street, Potts Point, she was survived by four sons, three daughters and numerous other descendants. The "Hebrew Standard" of 6 May, 1930 reported that one of her sons was S. H. Solomon, the City Treasurer.^{27a}

Rebecca Solomon was buried in the same tomb as her father Joseph Levy.

And now, the third "ghost" makes its appearance.

The Bridge Street Register shows, indeed, that Rebecca Levy was born on 19 February, 1833, the daughter of Joseph Levy of Berrima, but who was her mother? There is no trace in the records of the Synagogue of Joseph Levy's marriage. This is understandable, because Church records show that Joseph Levy, aged 32, was married on 23 August, 1832, to Sophia Smith, a seventeen year old girl, "born in the colony", by the Reverend John Dunmore Lang, the famous Presbyterian clergyman and politician in Sydney.²⁸ The fact that her birth was entered in the Synagogue's Birth Register, although she was born of a non-converted gentile woman, was in accordance with the Laws and Rules of the Synagogue, published in 1833, allowing daughters of persons married before April 1833 to be accepted as proselytes.

And so Rebecca, daughter of a convict and daughter-in-law of a convict, became a worthy Jewish mother, who founded a large and respected family.

NOTES

- 1 Sessions papers, 1819, at Records Office, Corporation of London.
- 2 Indent of "Mangles" (Mitchell Library).
- 3 Ralph Rashleigh (James Tucker-Rosenberg) "Ralph Rashleigh or the Life of an Exile, with annotation by Colin Roderick, Sydney, 1952, Chapter 11.
- 4 Sydney Gazette, 14.9.1827.
- 5 Ibid, 13.5.1831.
- 6 Ibid, 5. 9-9. 1835; Gov. Darling Despatches Mitch. A. 1271,p.221.
- 7 The Australian, 2, 4, 6, 9 October 1838.
- 8 Ibid, 2.10.1838.
- 9 Ibid, 2.1.1838.
- 10 Ibid, 6.7.1838.
- 11 Ibid, 5.1.1839.
- 12 Ibid, 12.10.1839.
- 13 Ibid, 2.6.1840.
- 14 Ibid, 18.7.1840.
- 15 21.11.1840. Hyam Phillips died 14.6.1877 and was buried at Raphael Cemetery. He probably arrived by convict ship "Morley" in 1833.
- 16 Gov. Gipps Despatches, 1841 (Mitch. A. 1224, p. 1197/99).
- 17 Ibid, 1842. (Mitch. A. 1231, p. 271/74).
- 18 The Australian, 27.5.1841.
- 19 The Australian Post Office Directory, 1861. Lewis Levy, great grand-uncle of Terry Newman, Committee Member of this Society, died at Berrima on 15.10.1879, aged 64. He was buried at Rookwood Cemetery. See, also, A.J.H.S. Journal, Vol. VII, Part 3, p. 254.
- 20 The Australian, 30.9.1841.
- 21 Ibid, 16, 28 September, 24.10.1842.
- 22 Ibid, 12.1.1844.
- 23 Ibid, 11.4.1844.
- 24 Report of the Committee of the York Street (Sydney) Synagogue, 1845.
- 25 Minutes of the York Street (Sydney Synagogue) 3.12.1860.
- 26 Devonshire Street Cemetery Register at Botany Cemetery Office.
- 27 Felix F. Mitchell, "Back to Cooma Celebrations", Cooma 1926,

- reprinted 1967; see A.J.H.S. Journal, Vol. VI, Part VIII, p. 537f. Solomon Solomon was married to Rachel Abrahams by Rev. Jacob Isaacs on 12.8.1840 in Sydney. He died at Eden on 12.6.1900, age 79. His wife died eleven days previously, age 84.
- 27a Samuel Henry Solomon married in Great Synagogue, 9 November, 1887, Dora Hollander, daughter of Jacob Hollander, formerly of Ballarat. S. H. Solomon holds the record of the longest serving City Treasurer of Sydney City Council – over 30 years. He died in Sydney 2.8.37, age 77.
- 28 Convicts applications for marriage C.O.D. 12 Mitch. 4/4509 No. 261, page 60.