

FROM SCHOOL TO "SHUL"
THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE GOLD COAST (QUEENSLAND)
HEBREW CONGREGATION
(1954-1962)

by
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In September 1981, 20 years passed since the first synagogue was consecrated and opened for worship in Surfers Paradise, Queensland. This important milestone in the history of Queensland's only non-metropolitan congregation — well worthy of special observance by the local membership — is a suitable vantage point from which to review the formative stages of this fast growing and now well established Community.

The year 1961, when the original synagogue building was opened (it has since been replaced by a much larger structure), was not the starting point of organised Jewish life. For this, one has to go back quite a few years to 1954, in fact, when steps were taken to provide Hebrew education at Queensland's South Coast for children of resident families. To gain the proper perspective of the then existing situation, one has to discard completely the picture which the Gold Coast offers today. In the intervening years, more than one land boom and subsequent residential developments have transformed this coastal stretch from Southport to Coolangatta into one of the glamour resorts and retirement areas of Australia — with a large and ever increasing population drawn not only from Queensland, but from many parts of Australia and overseas.

The writer of this paper, who was First Minister of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation from 1946-1962, well remembers his first visit to Surfers Paradise. It was in 1947 when, acting upon a request from the Sydney Rabbinate, he visited a gentleman from Melbourne who lived in Surfers Paradise for the purpose of discussing a certain family matter. After passing through Southport on the way from Brisbane, he reached three miles further on an intersection where the Surfers Paradise Hotel occupied the left hand corner position, exactly as today. Behind the Hotel there was an open view towards the beach and the surf, no houses at all, only sand dunes, while on the opposite side of the highway a few streets with houses were visible. He entered a side road leading to the beach somewhat further on, and after passing a few houses reached his destination right at the water's edge. This was close to 35 years ago and vastly different from the almost urban character of that area today. Even then, some Jewish families had already settled along the South Coast, particularly in Southport, which was a township of some size, with communal and shopping facilities far in excess of any other place on the Coast as far as the border with New South Wales.

What a tremendous transformation since then! It all started in the early 50s with a real estate boom which involved residential expansion on a gigantic scale and drew large numbers of tourists from the southern States and Queensland to the Coast, quite a few of whom became permanent

settlers. The Brisbane Community, only 50 miles away, was involved in these developments from the outset. Some of its members started to acquire flats and homes, others went into business at the Coast, while many came from interstate, mainly during the winter months, as tourists, as well as for business purposes. By 1954, sizeable numbers of families were to be found at the Coast, either as residents or as weekend holiday tourists. The Brisbane Community started to receive requests for the provision of Kosher food, synagogue services and educational facilities.

Communal concern at this stage was, in the first place, directed towards those families who had settled there permanently. While it was too early to think of erecting a building or even of forming a Congregation, two aspects soon assumed primary importance in view of the growing numbers: Education for children and services on the High Festivals. The earliest start for teaching children was made in Southport where some Jewish families had resided for some years and where now a Jewish guest house proprietor, H.W. Goldman, a long standing member of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, had come to live with his wife and family. The Annual Report of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation for 1954-5 carries this brief reference under the heading, United Board of Hebrew Education: "During the last few months the Board has established a Hebrew class at Southport to foster Hebrew education for children who are permanent residents of the South Coast. Our thanks go to Mr. H.W. Goldman of Southport who with his great knowledge of Hebrew and his experience as a Hebrew teacher is conducting a weekly class at the residence of Dr. R. Levy. It is with a feeling of satisfaction that the seven children who are at present attending this class at last are given the opportunity of Hebrew education".

Although the number of children was small in 1954, it was a start and, in fact, the nucleus for permanent educational facilities later on. Along the coastal stretch, other families with children settled, some having boys of pre-Barmitzvah age. A more central location was soon considered essential. When Mr. and Mrs. H.M. Samuel from Melbourne and their three children became permanent residents of Surfers Paradise — Mr. Samuel opened a pharmacy in Cavill Avenue — they offered their home in Ferny Avenue for teaching purposes. Classes were transferred to their residence, with Mr. H.W. Goldman still continuing as a teacher until the Goldman family moved away from the Coast in 1958. Already before that time, to assist Mr. Goldman, the Brisbane Congregation had undertaken to provide additional instruction, including the preparation of boys for their Barmitzvah. For some time, boys from the Coast had come in every Sunday morning to participate in the Brisbane Hebrew Classes and to have a weekly Barmitzvah lesson. Eventually, it was found more practical for the Brisbane Rabbi to travel to the Coast one afternoon per week, teach the children in various age groups and give Barmitzvah tuition to several candidates after these classes. When this special 100 mile round trip proved too difficult for the Rabbi, Mr. N. Tempelhof, President of the United Board of Hebrew Education, and his wife voluntarily undertook the responsibility of class teaching twice or three times a month while the Rabbi continued with a regular monthly visit. To centralise facilities even further,

the classes had meanwhile been transferred to the Surfers Paradise State School which, at the Rabbi's request, allowed the use of its buildings after school hours. In this way a well working and much appreciated arrangement had developed. It formed a strong basis for additional Jewish activities and was, both morally and financially, supported by the resident families.

II

The year 1958 was, in many respects, a year of decisive progress for Jewish life on the South Coast. Encouraged by the co-operation of the Brisbane Community and the effective working of the teaching scheme, the resident families, steadily growing in numbers and benefitting from an upsurge of tourism which brought many Jewish visitors from the south to Queensland, now turned their attention to the establishment of regular services. The Annual Report of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation for 1957-8, at page five, makes this reference: "For the first time Friday night and Saturday morning services have been held in Surfers Paradise during the summer holidays when a Minyan was arranged by Brisbane members whose initiative was well rewarded by good and regular attendances". With the approach of the High Festival season, moves were initiated by the 15 families now resident in Surfers Paradise to organise services for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Again, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel offered their home for this purpose and turned to the Brisbane Congregation for their active co-operation. Rabbi and Board were only too happy to give their full support and in several preliminary discussions at Mr. Samuel's home all essential arrangements, including provision of a Torah Scroll, were finalised. Mr. S. Gans, a regular and knowledgeable worshipper at the Margaret Street Synagogue in Brisbane, kindly offered his services as Baal T'fillah. It was, indeed, an historic occasion when about 70 people assembled at the Samuel residence on the First Day of the New Year 5719 to participate in the Rosh Hashanah service according to orthodox tradition. All present were deeply moved by the very fine rendition of the prayers and the festive spirit that prevailed among the large assembly of worshippers — taxing the home to its utmost capacity. Both New Year and Day of Atonement services were praised in glowing terms by residents and interstate visitors who formed about half the audience, and even the local Press carried favourable references to this unique event in the history of the South Coast.

Under the immediate impact of these highly successful services, a meeting was called at the end of the Second Day of Rosh Hashanah in the lounge of "Ocean Court", of which Mr. J. Hansky of Melbourne, was the resident proprietor, to which all resident Jewish families had been invited. On the agenda was the establishment of a Congregation for Surfers Paradise and surrounding districts and the formation of a Committee of Management. According to the minute book of the Surfers Paradise Hebrew Congregation, of which this is the first entry, 12 people were present and adopted both these proposals. Mr. H.M. Samuel was elected

President, Messrs. J. Hansky and L. Korman Vice-Presidents, Mr. John Goldstein became Hon. Secretary and Mr. N. Kipner, Hon. Treasurer. Messrs. Julius Goldstein, J. Adler, K. Peters and M. Travers, and Mrs. Pahoff snr. were elected as Committee members. A Ladies Guild was also formed with Mrs. J. Adler as President, Mesdames Hansky and Korman as Vice-Presidents, Mrs. H.M. Samuel as Secretary and Mesdames Grodeck, Goldstein, Levy, Lacey, Peters, Travers, Devries and Brauner as Committee members. Membership fees were fixed at £2.2/-. It was further decided to look around for suitable land in the vicinity of Sunset Boulevard for a synagogue site and to invite visitors from Brisbane and interstate to all services, also to seek the support of the Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies.

The establishment of the Congregation on 16 September, 1958, and formation of its first Executive were hailed in the Brisbane Community with great enthusiasm. A few weeks later, in October, a delegation consisting of Mr. A.G. Myers, President of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, Mr. D.J. Solomon, its Treasurer, Mr. H.A. Goldman, one of its Trustees, Mr. N. Tempelhof, President of the Board of Hebrew Education, with the Rabbi and his wife, attended a Committee Meeting at the residence of Mr. Samuel to enter into more detailed discussions of the next steps to be taken in order to consolidate what so far had been achieved. It was at this meeting that the local representatives strongly declared themselves in favour of orthodoxy as the basis on which the new Congregation should be conducted and a corresponding motion was entered in the minutes (and later embodied in the Constitution). The Brisbane visitors offered fullest co-operation; also with regard to the services, if and when required, by the Brisbane Chevra Kadisha. Mr. Myers advised of the intended formation of a United Board of Queensland Hebrew Congregations and extended a cordial invitation to the local Committee to join the Brisbane and South Brisbane Congregations on this Board as an equal partner. Several cheques were presented by the visitors to swell the local funds. In the matter of land acquisition for a synagogue building, mention was made of an offer of land to the Brisbane Hebrew congregation by a well known Brisbane real estate developer, Alfred Grant. Educational arrangements had been re-organised during an earlier visit by the Rabbi and Mr. Tempelhof and the meeting was pleased to note that tuition would continue on this newly confirmed regular weekly basis. As a result of these intensified educational efforts, local children for the first time participated, in December 1958, in an excellently arranged Chanukah Celebration held at the local Scout Hall which was attended by more than 100 people, including many visitors from Brisbane. The foundation year of the Surfers Paradise Hebrew Congregation ended, indeed, on a happy and promising note.

III

The new Committee approached its future responsibilities in a realistic

spirit. Mindful of the fact that neither educational facilities at the local State school nor Festival services in a private home were really satisfactory, they saw the acquisition of a site for a building as the primary need of the moment. At the same time, it was felt that 15-20 local families could not undertake such a big effort on their own, and a move was made to approach not only casual visitors and tourists, but Congregations throughout Australia for their practical support. A circular letter was sent out in November 1958, signed by the President, H.M. Samuel, and bearing John Goldstein's address as Secretary. It read in part as follows: "It is indeed with great pleasure that we inform you of the formation of a Congregation and the commencement of Jewish Community Life here in Surfers Paradise . . . Many of our Jewish brothers continuously visit us here in Surfers in their thousands, and nowhere is there a Centre where they may gather for social or religious activities . . . The last High Holy Day Services were held in the home of Mr. Harry M. Samuel, our recently elected (first) President . . . with more than 75 participants. The spontaneity was unanimous and heartfelt, and all agreed that NOW was the time for a Congregation to be formed . . . Many Jewish people are settling here permanently, and many are here for periods of up to six months per year. Surfers is growing into a thriving area and is a wonderful place to live and a wonderful place for Judaism to take root and flourish . . . We need your support in our formative stages — and frankly, we need your help both morally and financially. Those of us who reside here permanently have pledged ourselves to the complete fulfilment of this wonderful ambition — to see a thriving Jewish Community here with a house of Worship and Jewish Communal Life! WILL YOU HELP US FULFIL THAT AMBITION?"

The response to this moving appeal, however, was rather disappointing, as none of the metropolitan interstate Congregations offered any financial support. The only positive reply came from the Hobart Hebrew Congregation, and well deserves to be recorded in this historic context (dated 14 November, 1958): "Our congregation is only a very small one, still we feel that we want to show you our goodwill and have pleasure in enclosing a cheque for five pounds five shillings towards erection of a synagogue and communal centre. We could not make a substantial contribution, and please take this as a token of solidarity".

So, it was going to be an uphill struggle for a while, and the President, in a statement to the *Australian Jewish Times*, expressed his regret that "Jews, many of whom holidayed on the Gold Coast and wanted communal facilities in the locality, were not prepared to help. Although land was available, it would be difficult to raise sufficient funds for the building unless outside aid was assured. The Surfers Paradise Community numbered only about 50 souls, many of whom were new in the district". Reference is made to the availability of land — which was also mentioned earlier. During the first half of 1958, the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation had been approached by Alfred Grant, a leading real estate developer. Mr. Grant's firm was then planning a new concept of land development which would turn a large tract of former dairy country into a system of waterways

fronted by picturesque homesites. It was named Miami Keys Estate and was conceived as a parallel development to the Florida Keys Estate in the United States. The land was situated immediately behind the Surfers Paradise-Broadbeach stretch of coastline, about 2½km from the centre of Surfers. A satellite township of 750 waterfront homesites housing 3,500 people, was confidently envisaged. The demand for these sites had come not so much from Queenslanders, but from Victorians anxious to escape the rigours of their winter climate. Knowing of the large numbers of tourists of the Jewish faith, Mr. Grant had this well in mind when he sent two personal representatives to Melbourne to advertise this new scheme in the Jewish Community. In anticipation of a large influx of permanent settlers, he decided to offer free land for Houses of Worship to six major denominations, including the Jewish Congregation, as yet unborn. In view of the legal situation, however, the actual offer was made to the Brisbane Community. The donor emphasised that the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation was under no obligation to himself or the Estate. He merely expressed the hope that the Congregation would make use of the land for the benefit of its members. In making the offer, he added that he had formed a great admiration for Jewish Communities he saw while serving in the Middle East during the war years.

The Annual Report of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation — presented in August 1958 — referred to this matter in the following passage. "A very generous gesture has been made by Alfred Grant Pty. Ltd. in offering our Congregation a piece of land in the Broadbeach area as a site for a Jewish Centre. Your Board is most grateful for this offer which has been suitably acknowledged and will be utilised, it is hoped, in the not too distant future to the benefit of Jewish residents and interstate visitors in that area." It was clearly the intention of the Brisbane Board to offer the use of this land to the loosely organised Surfers Paradise Congregation, and this was conveyed to their Executive at the meeting in October 1958 (referred to above), prompting the appropriate reference in the Congregation's November circular as to the availability of land for a Synagogue Centre.

IV

The most important development of the next few months was the formation, early in 1959, of a United Board of Queensland Hebrew Congregations, comprising the two Brisbane Congregations and the new Congregation at Surfers Paradise which had been formally invited to join in November 1958. Its purpose was defined in the 1959 Annual Report of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation as "establishing the closest possible links between the three Queensland Congregations and co-ordinating their activities in fields of common interest, such as Shechita and Kashrut, Chevra Kadisha, education and similar matters". The President of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation was elected United Board President and its Treasurer became the United Board's Hon. Secretary. All three Congregations had three representatives each on this United Board, and it was to be hoped, as the Annual Report states, that this move of uniting the

three Queensland Congregations on the common platform of orthodox Judaism would be of particular help to the new Congregation in Surfers Paradise and strengthen its activities in the future. Regular quarterly meetings got immediately underway, marked by an encouraging degree of positive co-operation between the three constituent bodies.

During the winter months of 1959, regular Sabbath services (also weekday Yohrzeit services) were held in private homes, with excellent attendances from visitors and residents. Towards the end of winter, in August 1959, a special Sabbath service was organised in the Surfers Paradise Hotel, acquired at that time by a prominent Melbourne businessman, Stanley Korman. Due to Mr. Korman's excellent co-operation and ready support, the Board room of the Hotel was transformed into a Prayer Hall for one particular Friday night and Sabbath morning service. By special invitation, the President of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, A.G. Myers, accompanied the writer to the Gold Coast for these services which were highly successful. Some 40 people attended on Friday night and double that number on Sabbath morning, with many visitors from Melbourne and Sydney being in attendance. After the service, a Kiddush was held at "Ocean Court", across the road, where both its owner, J. Hansky as Vice-President and H.M. Samuel as President, supported by A.G. Myers, expressed firm hopes that the numerous southern visitors, would give fullest support to the Surfers Paradise Congregation in its more definite plans for erecting a Jewish Centre and also attend services on Sabbaths and during the forthcoming High Festivals. The effect of this special Sabbath service was most encouraging, and the second High Festival services were again well arranged and excellently attended.

In other significant developments during the year 1959, the newly arrived Brisbane Hebrew teacher from Israel, Y. Amitzur, visited the Coast regularly once a week for educational instruction, with classes at the Surfers Paradise State School attracting up to 20 children. The Jewish National Fund established its first Committee at the Coast in early 1959. J. Hansky, acting as Blue Box Commissioner, organised the first clearance of Boxes ever to take place in Surfers Paradise prior to Pesach that year. Earlier, during 1958, WIZO Nahariya had been formed at the Coast by Julia Rapke, the WIZO Federal President, during a holiday visit and found widespread support from both local residents and visitors. The same strong support was given when a highly successful U.I.A. Appeal meeting raised 1,000 pounds for Israel. Two prominent visitors were entertained by the local Committee during that year. Mr. Moshe Yuval, Minister for Israel, with Mrs. Yuval paid an official visit to the Coast — in conjunction with an ECAFE International Conference — and a supper party in their honour at the Chevron Hotel attracted a very large representative attendance. The world renowned tenor, Jan Peerce, accompanied by his wife, also visited the Coast. After dropping in briefly at a Betar Camp held a few miles away, the visitors were given a reception at "Ocean Court" arranged by the local Committee when again many people from interstate and Brisbane attended.

V

The main concern of the committee was, of course, the collection of funds for a Synagogue building, and some progress was made in that respect, mainly from offerings at services and a few functions. It was felt at this stage that the land in Broadbeach was not ideal from the point of view of distance — a walk of close to three kilometres each way — and would be too far away for the erection of a permanent Synagogue, however attractive it was in other respects. It was therefore more than a pleasant surprise for all concerned when a second offer of a piece of land for a Jewish Centre was made during 1959 by the well known Melbourne industrialist, Mr. (later Sir) Bruce Small who had come to Surfers Paradise as an investor and developer with plans for a 460 acre, £5,000,000 project, called "Paradise City". From the outset, he had set aside three acres in the very heart of this project for a Religious Centre with provision for Houses of Worship of the major denominations, including the Jewish Faith. This area was very much closer to the heart of Surfers Paradise, about one kilometre away, and therefore of particular attraction to the local Community. Mr. Small made his offer directly to the Surfers Paradise Committee, and his gift was most gratefully accepted by the local Congregation. In the original town plans for "Paradise City", Synagogue and Churches were to be grouped around a tree shaded square that would contain an ornamental pool. They would be among the first buildings to be erected in this area, henceforth known as "Isle of Capri", which would provide 2,200 homesites, a large civic centre with all amenities, a sports park and 25 acres of parks and gardens, surrounded on all sides by water, with a bridge crossing directly from the main shopping area to the Island.

As a result of this happy sequence of events, the Congregation, at the beginning of 1960, only 15 months after its formation, now had two pieces of land available for the erection of a communal structure — certainly a most auspicious beginning for so small a Community. The next important event occurred in June 1960 when Mr. Small made good his promise of giving the Religious Centre a high priority. He approached four denominations — Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian and Jewish — to dedicate ground donated by him, and set aside earlier for these four groups, in a joint — though separate — ceremony to be held in the Centre area on the same Sunday afternoon. The Surfers Paradise Committee invited the writer in his capacity as Rabbi of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation to participate, and together with representatives of the other three denominations he agreed to this arrangement.

On 12 June, 1960, the Jewish portion of the Religious Centre Area on the "Isle of Capri" was accordingly dedicated. Each of the participating Ministers officiated within his own area in turn — around the ornamental pool — while Mr. Small was present at all four ceremonies and later invited the very large gathering to refreshments in a marquee erected nearby. Our thanks were summed up in these words (quoted in part): "It affords me, as officiating Jewish Minister, the greatest of pleasure to express, on behalf of the Jewish Community of Queensland, heartfelt thanks to Mr. Bruce Small

for his most generous grant of a substantial piece of land on which to erect a Jewish House of Worship as part of the Religious Centre in the "Isle of Capri" development scheme. The Surfers Paradise Hebrew Congregation, which is the immediate beneficiary of this magnanimous gesture, will thereby be enabled to contemplate in the near future the commencement of a building programme which, when completed, can only result in a strengthening of its membership, also in its ability to cater for the many thousands of tourists visiting here in ever increasing numbers. The Queensland Jewish Community as a whole is proud to be associated with Mr. Bruce Small in this unique scheme which we see as a challenge to all religious and spiritual forces in this country and which we, as one of the groups concerned, though small in numbers, are only too eager to accept and hope to meet with dignity and success."

VI

During the winter months of 1960, the Congregation's efforts were now concentrated with fresh enthusiasm on a strong fund raising drive for the new building. Another High Festival period was approaching, the third since the Congregation's establishment, and again suitable arrangements were made for services, this time to be held in the specially transformed new Methodist Hall in Clifford Street. The Jewish resident population of the Gold Coast had now reached the 100 mark and many visitors joined the residents during the Festival period. Services were most ably conducted by S. Chester as Chazan, with some local help. Generous support for the building scheme, with the "Isle of Capri" area well in mind, resulted in a total amount of £1,600 to be available for the new Synagogue Memorial Hall which was planned, mainly for educational and social purposes, as a forerunner for a permanent Synagogue. For the first time, Simchat Torah was celebrated that year with traditional gaiety. Lew Samuel (father of the President) and J. Hansky were the first Chatan Torah and Chatan Bereshit respectively and entertained the Congregation afterwards at a delightful repast. The children present proudly waved their JNF flags supplied from Brisbane for the first time.

An important General Meeting held on 9 October, 1960, was in fact the Second Annual Meeting of the Congregation. It noted all ongoing developments with great satisfaction and appointed a Building Committee consisting of the re-elected President, H.M. Samuel, and Vice-President, J. Hansky and Mr. Rubinstein, Assistant Treasurer. Others elected were S. Saunders as Treasurer, John Goldstein, re-elected Hon. Secretary and R. Price, Asst. Hon. Secretary. To the Committee were elected Messrs. Goldstein snr., Isaacs, Samuel snr., Adler and Brauner. Mr. S. Roth (Melbourne), a frequent visitor to the Coast, who had taken a most prominent part in the organisation of regular services, the conduct of High Festival services and in marshalling financial support amongst the Melbourne Community was appointed as Hon. Life Governor. The Chazan, S. Chester, was given permanent membership. The Annual fee was set at £5.5/- for men and £3.3/- for ladies. Mr. Roth was specially

honoured at a party in the new Treasurer's home "Bellevue" in Clifford Street at which the local families were represented in full strength to express appreciation for his fund raising efforts in the Melbourne Community.

In reporting the progress of Queensland's newest Congregation during 1959-60, the Annual Report of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation for this period recorded under the heading "United Board of Queensland Hebrew Congregations", the "gift of a substantial piece of land within walking distance of the main shopping area which was dedicated by our Rabbi for the purposes of a Religious Centre. The foremost need is for classrooms to accommodate the children whose education during the whole year has been successfully continued on a weekly basis by our Teacher, Mr. Y. Amitzur. Meetings of the United Board have been held from time to time and a number of matters affecting all three Congregations such as Shechita and Kashrut, Chevra Kadisha, education, common observances and others are successfully being attended to as the need arises". During this period, H.M. Samuel as President of the Surfers Paradise Congregation was, in fact, by rotation President of the United Board for the first time.

VII

The stage had now been reached when serious consideration was to be given to the erection of a suitable Communal structure. The Congregation had the option of two sites and as far as the necessary funds were concerned, £1,600 available in cash and pledges, with further fund raising schemes being planned for the coming year, particularly in Melbourne. Several interesting developments marked this period after the 1960 High Festivals and well into the middle of 1961. At a Committee Meeting in March 1961, the change of name from "Surfers Paradise Hebrew Congregation" to "Gold Coast Hebrew Congregation" was decided upon, in keeping with the actual membership distribution which now extended over the whole length of that stretch of Coast — from Southport to Coolangatta — known more and more as the "Gold Coast" of Queensland. A new Hon. Secretary, Julian Rose, was appointed at the meeting. The Treasurer, S. Saunders, offered his home in Clifford Street for the holding of Sabbath services for the time being and regular services were held there for a number of months. Efforts were set in motion to obtain a Sefer Torah for the Congregation, either by purchase or on loan. The first Communal Seder was held at Mr. Hansky's "Ocean Court" with very encouraging support from local members. For the first time, Shavuot services were conducted by Y. Amitzur, the Hebrew teacher from Brisbane, who meanwhile continued his regular weekly lessons at the local State School for another year under the Rabbi's supervision. Mr. Hansky, in May 1961, returned from a visit to Melbourne where he had been able to obtain the loan of a Torah Scroll from the Carlton Synagogue.

However, it must have become apparent at this stage that a building on the "Isle of Capri" would not find the necessary financial support because the distance from the centre of Surfers Paradise was still too far. The

Committee, as previously mentioned, had already come to the conclusion that the land in Miami Keys, originally donated by Mr. Grant, was definitely much too far from where most visitors would stay during the winter months. As their support was crucial, this scheme had been finally abandoned. The Brisbane Congregation, recipient of the land, had been empowered by a Special General Meeting of its members of 4 April, 1961, to sell this land and the amount obtained had just covered the rates meanwhile paid to the local Council. But now, in May/June 1961, the other area in Mr. Small's development which had already been dedicated, was also found to be unsuitable from the point of view of the main financial supporters who considered the walking distance for the average visitor, without shelter and in all weathers, was a little too far. With the concurrence of Mr. Small, this land was later disposed of to the Mormon Church and the proceeds added to the Congregation's Building Fund.

At a meeting on 7 June, 1961, the Committee decided, not without some objection, to look for a new property closer to the shopping centre, preferably one where an already existing building could be adapted for religious and educational purposes. Only 15 days later a house in Hamilton Avenue (the present location) was under consideration, on a piece of land which had a frontage of 34 feet and a depth of 162 feet. The cottage was roomy enough to house the Synagogue Hall and classrooms in addition to kitchen and other standard facilities. The price was under £5,400, which included an amount for certain essential alterations. At that time, £600 was in hand and pledges amounted to £1,225, so that a loan of £4,000 would more than bridge the gap to the full purchase price. If ever further extensions were wanted, there was enough room on this block of land, both in front and at the side, to provide for extensions or even a larger building. The main feature of this place was its close proximity to the very centre of Surfers Paradise — not more than 300 yards away from the shopping and main hotel area. The motion to purchase the property was carried, with one dissentient voice. On 12 July, 1961, a Special Meeting of the Congregation with 21 people being present, out of a membership of 50 families, confirmed the purchase and the raising of a loan of £4,000. It also appointed Messrs. H.M. Samuel, J. Hansky and I.H. Brauner as Trustees. All members and supporters were notified of the purchase by special circular during July 1961.

At the Third Annual Meeting on 16 August, 1961, H.M. Samuel was once again re-elected as President and J. Hansky as Vice-President, as was J. Rose as Hon. Secretary, I. H. Brauner became the new Treasurer, with J. Adler as Assistant Secretary and Treasurer. The new Board comprised Messrs. M. Kirsner, N. Pahoff, S. Pahoff, L. Samuel, F. Rubenstein, John Goldstein, Barney Goldstein and Jack Jacobs. Mention was made of the first wedding having been held in Surfers Paradise. The Chuppah, on loan from Brisbane, had been erected in the grounds of Mrs. Lacey's home. The bride was the daughter of local residents, Mr. And Mrs. C. Solomon. In the Rabbi's absence, Rev. L. Levine, Assistant Minister of the Brisbane Congregation, had officiated. The President announced the completion of alterations to the building and the date of opening of the new Synagogue: 3

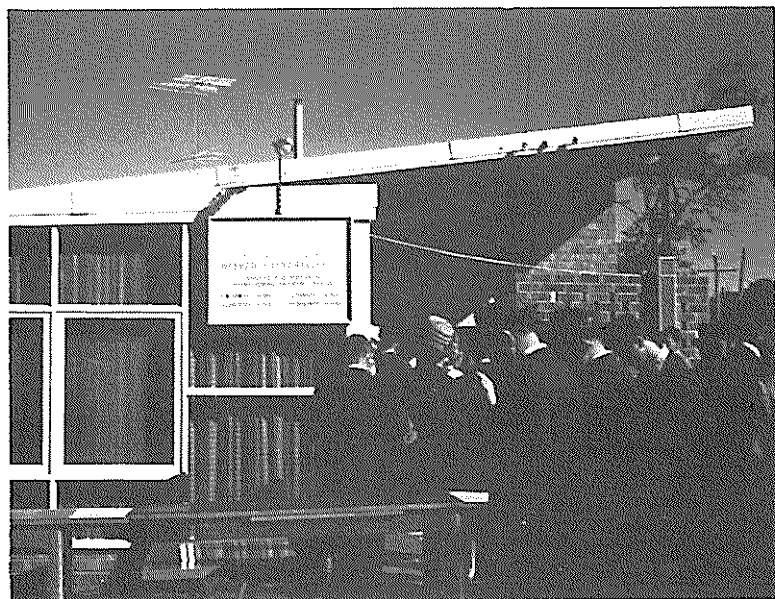
September, 1961 — which would be combined with the dedication of a Sefer Torah presented by Mrs. J. Smith of Brisbane and her family.

VIII

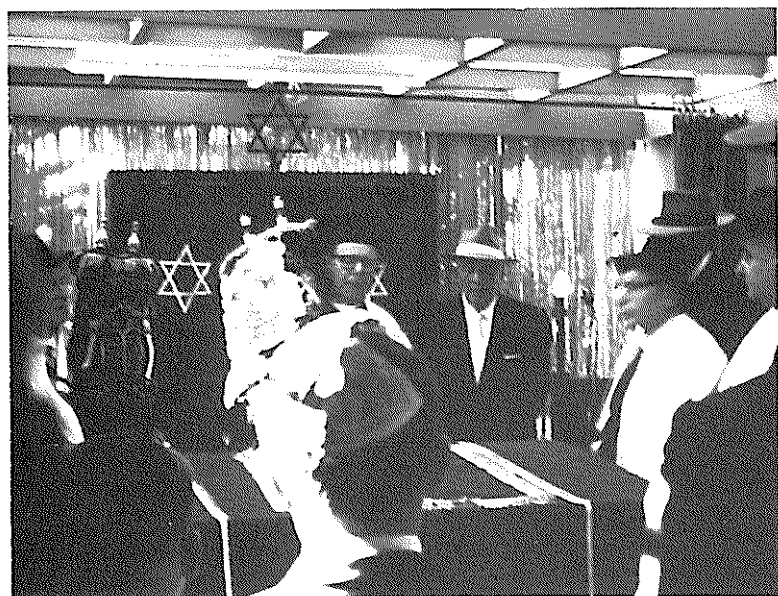
It was a gala occasion when just three years after its establishment the Gold Coast Hebrew Congregation was able to dedicate and open its Synagogue right in the heart of Surfers Paradise. The Jewish Press carried the following report (quoted in part) which covers the essential features of this historic occasion: "In brilliant Surfers Paradise sunshine, about 200 people gathered to attend the consecration of the Gold Coast Hebrew Congregation's new Synagogue, social hall and classrooms. Rabbi Dr. Fabian, assisted by Mr. Amitzur, performed the ceremony. Accompanied by a large group of members of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, they had travelled from Brisbane that morning to attend the ceremony.

"Mrs. J. Smith, of Brisbane, accompanied by her three sons, presented the Sefer Torah which was accepted on behalf of the Congregation by the President, Mr. H.M. Samuel. Among the distinguished visitors who spoke after the ceremony was Alderman Harley, Mayor of Gold Coast City, who said he welcomed the opening of the Synagogue on the Gold Coast and saw in it an indication of the growth of the area. Mr. David Solomon, President of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation, expressed the joy of his Congregation that a new Synagogue had come into existence. He said that the Brisbane Congregation had always regarded the Gold Coast Congregation as a "daughter" Congregation, but now it had to be regarded as a "sister" Congregation. Mr. A. Newhouse, President of the Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies, welcomed the opening of a new "House of God". He said he hoped the Congregation would go from strength to strength and be a stronghold of Jewish culture and learning. Mr. Earle Hoffman, President of the Canberra Hebrew Congregation, also expressed his best wishes. Mr. G. Frey, President of Queensland J.N.F., presented the Congregation with a parcel of Siddurim. The Ladies Auxiliary which is under the capable Chairmanship of Mrs. Esther Adler served the large crowd of local and interstate visitors with tea on the spacious lawns which front the new Gold Coast Synagogue."

There are several aspects which emphasise the significance of this grand milestone in Queensland and Australian Jewish history. This was the first synagogue established outside the metropolitan area of an Australian capital city for many years. Its opening as such is in stark contrast to the many closures of Synagogues that had taken place in country towns over the last few decades (in Queensland, Toowoomba has been the well known example). The short time that had elapsed between the date of establishment of the Congregation (September 1958) and the opening of the Synagogue (September 1961) was an absolute record in Synagogue history in Australia. Many of those who were present were also deeply moved by the building and consecration of a new Synagogue in Australia, reflecting as they did on the abominable desecration and destruction of so many Synagogues in the European Holocaust. In expressing some of these



Outside the Surfers Paradise Synagogue, 3 September, 1961.



Dedication Service, 3 September, 1961.



The Chief Rabbi and Mrs. Brodie outside the Gold Coast Synagogue, February 1962, with Rabbi and Mrs. A. Fabian, and Mr. D. J. Soloman, President, Brisbane Hebrew Congregation and Mrs. Soloman.



The newly built Synagogue in Surfers Paradise (1967).

sentiments in the Dedication Sermon, the Rabbi also drew attention to the slogan which heads this paper. He emphasised that without the persistent efforts in the field of Jewish education, extending over seven years under considerable practical and financial difficulties, the need for a permanent structure would have been much less obvious. It was indeed the Hebrew School which not only preceded the "Shul", but brought about its rapid establishment.

For historic reasons, it is to be regretted that no tablet was affixed to the building at that time, recording the official opening date and ceremony. This was later corrected and an appropriate plaque unveiled in 1964. Unfortunately, this plaque has disappeared from the building and despite widespread searches has not yet been located. The Congregation is aware of this loss and adequate steps, it is understood, are being taken for a suitable replacement.

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For a small Congregation it had been quite a problem to acquire Torah Scrolls. Indeed, it had been more than fortunate that, at the very opening of the new Synagogue, one Scroll, together with ornaments and covers, also curtains for the Ark and Bimah covers, had been presented by Mrs. J. Smith, of Brisbane, "Whom we look upon as being the fairy godmother to our Congregation", as the 1961/2 Annual Report later put it. However, it almost sounds miraculous that in the course of the next 12 months, two further Scrolls were obtained for the Congregation, one by the generosity of Melbourne visitors who fairly quickly raised sufficient funds for this most welcome gesture, and the other by fortuitous circumstances deserving a brief description.

On the occasion of a funeral which the writer, in his capacity as Brisbane Rabbi, conducted during 1960, he met with a family, Cox, from Tugun at the Gold Coast. Mrs. Cox was Jewish and she mentioned that a big parcel wrapped in canvas had been under their house stored away for years since, in fact, it had come into their possession from some uncles who had long passed on. Having arranged a suitable time for inspection, the writer experienced a really thrilling moment when he opened the old parcel and found the most perfect Torah Scroll — only the parchment — carefully wrapped and in an excellent state of preservation.

Mrs. Cox's maiden name was Ettie Hordice Rosenberg, daughter of Reuben Meir Rosenberg and Annie Leah, nee Karnofsky. The Karnofskys lived in Kangaroo Valley (NSW) and in other country areas for years and had brought this Scroll with them from Eastern Europe before World War I. She had some recollection of services being held in their isolated homestead and the Scroll being used on those occasions. Mrs. Cox passed away in July 1961 and a few months later, on October 29, 1961, her husband (who was not Jewish) handed over the Scroll to the writer on behalf of the Brisbane Hebrew Congregation. He conveyed the express wish of his late wife that the Scroll be used by a Jewish Congregation on Queensland's Gold Coast. He also offered to donate in her memory any

Ed. —

The south east corner of Queensland, known as the Gold Coast, extends over a 40 km stretch of ocean beaches within a short distance of the capital city, Brisbane. The excellent climate, the warm surf and a great variety of man-made and natural attractions, has made this area Australia's leading tourist destination. The permanent population of Gold Coast City has been increasing rapidly and has reached 120,000, although some think of it only as a brief stopping place for pleasure seekers. Recognised as an international tourist resort, it is estimated that the number of visitors is close to three million in a year. The region owes its development to tourists of the 1940s and 1950s. When the boom first came in the late 1950s, it came to Surfers Paradise. Today the whole length of coast from Coolangatta — at the border between Queensland and New South Wales — to Southport is one long highly developed pleasure strip. Accommodation blocks are necessarily spreading upwards, producing a profusion of high rise towers. Record building approvals worth \$284 million were passed on the Gold Coast last financial year. Such dramatic development has not been regarded by all as an unmitigated blessing. Thus, an outspoken critic refers to the area as "a tropical paradise without plants . . . the only thing that seems to grow is concrete". Yet, this region offers such a wide choice of lifestyles in providing for town, country and seaside living with bright lights, famous beaches and waterways. A magnificent hinterland of lush rural country reaches to areas of remarkable beauty and scenic grandeur.

At Surfers Paradise, in particular, there is now an abundance of beachfront blocks, hotels, restaurants, night clubs and motels, creating a vigorous atmosphere described as "fabulous", one of "sophistication and luxury". Less than 60 years ago, when James Cavill came to the area, there were but two or three houses and a Post Office. About 40 to 50 years ago, the Gold Coast was only a low cost family resort. In 1770 Captain James Cook made his voyage up the eastern coastline of Australia, passing what is now Tweed Heads and the border area of two States, naming Moreton Bay near the present City of Brisbane. He named also Mt. Warning which he called "a peaked mountain", a landmark for the shoals and breakers at Point Danger. To this district and northwards came the cedar getters who were later followed by cotton growers and the cattle men, opening up a rich district that had once served as Aboriginal feasting grounds. A century and a half ago, convicts used to break their chains from the Moreton Bay Prison and escape towards the coast.

In 1959, Stanley Korman — most co-operative in his support of the early Surfers Paradise Hebrew Congregation — erected a nine storey project, Kinkabool, in Hanlon Street, Surfers Paradise. It then dominated the relatively flat coastal scene but today it is dwarfed by the apartment blocks of the Gold Coast skyline. It is to these places that investors are being drawn by the spectacular development, promising, it is said, a pot of gold. So many are continually being attracted, whether as residents or visitors. There are possibly many explanations for the extraordinary popularity of this region. "It is not so much a place," a writer remarks, "as an idea that



*The Changing Skyline at Surfers Paradise.
(From 'Inside Story', June, 1981.)*

has taken tangible shape and now draws people to it with the power of a hypnotist". As regards the Jewish community, however, it is most satisfying that, small though the local Congregation is, its spiritual needs have not been neglected. Perhaps to our Gold Coast co-religionists, with their sanctuary and religious centre at Surfers Paradise, one may apply the rabbinic dictum, 'Tis not to all the privilege is given, to have one banquet here and one in heaven'. (Berachoth, 5b.)

M.Z.F.