

tempt to stimulate some action from the government. Cohen even went so far as to personally escort McGregor on several occasions to the surveyor general's office for questioning, apparently without result, for there was no official action taken.¹⁴ By December 1845, after a fruitless campaign, lasting well over a year, to have the surveyor general, Sir Thomas Mitchell take an interest, he managed to have the newspapers stir up some publicity by reporting his gold activities in the press.¹⁵ The newspaper announced that Cohen had purchased gold from a shepherd and with the help of his young son Moses, had washed the specimen and melted the gold down, a job which earned the lad one shilling.¹⁶ Perhaps it was this gold which Edward used to fashion a ring for Queen Victoria, and which Sir Thomas Mitchell, home-ward hound for England, promised to deliver to Her Most Gracious Majesty, along with the information that it was the produce of the colony. What Queen Victoria thought of this gift is not known, for Cohen's generosity was never acknowledged.¹⁷

Cohen was persistent. His advice unheeded by Mitchell, he also tried to interest members of the Legislative Assembly in McGregor's gold and also tried to gain title to the land where it had been found, at Mitchell's Creek, near Wellington.¹⁸ He failed dismally. The Legislative Assembly had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo¹⁹ and the government eventually declared, at a much later date, the land Cohen sought a 'gold reserve'.²⁰ Despite petitions by his widow as late as 1851, the Cohen family benefited not one scrap from Edward's efforts. Cohen himself died in October 1847 and was never to know that his information would be proved correct in a matter of weeks.²¹

One hundred and fifty years have passed since Mosely Cohen, full of hope and enthusiasm, launched his successful business venture. In the normal course of history, such an ordinary event would have passed unnoticed and gone unrecorded. The more enterprising efforts of his brother to publicise gold are buried away in government files. Had Edward Cohen lived, he may have been able to have gained some benefit from his initiatives and attained a more prominent part in history. Mosely M. Cohen would undoubtedly have faded into almost total obscurity had he not possessed the quietly dignified entrepreneurial style to realise that the universal language of gold 'speaks', and speaks loud and long, with or without the help of man. The call was heeded by his fellow businessman, the mineralogist William Tipple Smith, who, putting a mineralogical two and two together, later went on to discover an enormous payable goldfield at Ophir in late 1847.

But that my friends, is quite another story.²²

NOTES

1. Newspaper accounts credit the salver to M.M. Cohen. However the historian Hawkins credits the making of the piece to H. Cohen; *Australian Silver*, 1800-1900, pp. 16, 18.
2. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22.11.1832
3. *Australian* 31.5.1833
4. *Ibid* 3.3.1842
5. *A Fool's Gold?* L.R. Silver footnote 30 Chapter 1.
6. Under demolition order 1986 to make way for a 31 storey office block.
7. *Sydney Morning Herald* 13.9.1832.
8. *Ibid* 22.6.1843
9. *Ibid* 11.7.1844
10. The first exhibition in a refined state was that of Lhotsky, vide Silver op. cit. p 3.
11. *The Forefathers*, J.S. Levi, pp.29-30.
12. *Sydney Morning Herald* 4.8.1840
13. *Ibid* 22.6.1844
14. A full account of the action taken by Cohen is in Colonial Secretary Letters, Esther D. Brocksalyn, July 5 1851.

15. *Cumberland Times & Western Advertiser*, 20 Dec. 1845
16. Mitchell Library, P1/C; Moses Cohen notes that this was the 'first' showing of Australian gold, a statement based allegedly on words spoken by McGregor to the lad, a mere boy at the time. However, this is at odds with the statement made by Mrs Brocksalyn *op cit.*, who puts the date at least 12 months before. Mrs Brocksalyn, an adult eyewitness of the events, recounted in great detail, would be the more reliable witness.
17. Brocksalyn *op. cit.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. Silver *op. cit.* p 13
20. Brocksalyn *op. cit.*
21. Silver *op. cit.* p 12
22. The entire account of the discoveries of W.T. Smith is found in Silver *op. cit.*

The writer is indebted to Mr M.Z. Forbes for kindly supplying the sources of the information referred to in footnotes 11, 15 and 16.



Ophir, 1851 (lithograph, George F. Angas, National Library).

Hargraves' "Mishter Cohen" A Prelude To The Goldrushes

by M.Z. Forbes, B.A., LL.B.

Early this year there appeared a short letter in the *Sydney Morning Herald* by Lynette Silver urging the preservation of certain premises standing since the 'thirties of the last century in George Street, Sydney, near Bridge Street. The writer of the letter mentioned that the premises had once been occupied by Mosely M. Cohen, a jeweller who had there exhibited, perhaps for the first time in Sydney, specimens of gold found some years prior to the famous discoveries in 1851 by Hargraves. I then made contact with Mrs. Silver who kindly invited me to the official opening, on 8 May last, of the GOLD exhibition at the Geological & Mining Museum where, at the same time, her new book, *A Fool's Gold?*, was launched. The book tells of the finding of payable gold by William Tipple Smith, an unassuming mineralogist whose role has long been unrecognised. Further, Mrs. Silver readily accepted my suggestion that she contribute an item to this *Journal* regarding Mosely Cohen and others who may have been involved in this early gold saga. It will be seen that the brothers, Mosely Moss Cohen, and, probably more particularly, Edward Daniel Cohen, both fill a small lacuna, worthy of notice, in the history of the Jews in the earlier days of settlement in the Colony of New South Wales.

Although there had been evidence of several findings of gold since 1823 and thereafter in the region West of the Blue Mountains, and especially around the Bathurst districts, Governor Sir George Gipps believed that search for the precious metal would disadvantage the Colony during a period of serious depression. When ever reports reached the Government of findings of small quantities of gold, the official policy of the administration was to maintain secrecy and to discourage the public from searching for gold. One of the fossickers was the shepherd, Hugh McGregor, who was employed on the pastoral lands of Nanima station, near Wellington. These extensive holdings, until about 1849, were then under lease from the owner of the property, Joseph Barrow Montefiore. Of McGregor himself, only a few bare facts are recorded, and not even the catalogues of the Mitchell Library contain any entry furnishing clues and data for the historian. McGregor had found gold in the area of Mitchell's Creek and seems to have regularly forwarded samples to Sydney. He was at first a poor man. "Of course", said a writer, "if he were rich he would not have been minding sheep."¹ The secret of his discoveries leaked out. McGregor had mined a quartz vein which became worked out, and he eventually left the district.

Having regard to the paucity of information relating to McGregor including the secrecy with which he and others went about their gold searches, it is not surprising, also, that until now writers have not been concerned to identify those with whom, in Sydney, McGregor had dealings. Thus, in a recent publication, *The Cradle Of A Nation*, the author states: "From 1846, McGregor made regular trips to Sydney, selling his gold to Cohen's jewellery in George Street. There soon remained few people who had not heard of the mysterious shepherd."² Writing on this same subject, a modern historian has quoted from the *Bathurst Free Press*, as follows: "A little temporary curiosity would occasionally be excited whenever the news was spread

around, that old McGregor, the gold-finder from that district had passed per mail on his way to the metropolis, as was always believed, laden with auriferous treasure. This subsided and nothing more would be heard of the matter for a long interval, then an occasional rumour that he had rejected some temporary offer held out by a Sydney jeweller, or Wellington settler, as an inducement to disclose the secret of the locale whence his treasure was derived."³ The most recent book by Lynette Silver, likewise, makes reference to McGregor, though only very briefly and incidentally, to the jeweller, Cohen. Since the publication of her book, the author, as will be seen from her article in the *Journal*, has made a little further research with the object of identifying the jewellers who bought gold from McGregor. Some of the latter's samples, as Mrs. Silver writes, "milky white quartz with gold embedded in it, were exposed from time to time to the public gaze in the shop window of Cohen, a jeweller in Sydney's George Street North. Mosely Moses Cohen, goldsmith and jeweller, had set up his shop on the George Street site, directly opposite the Bank of Australasia, in 1836, having previously started business in nearby Denmark's Place in 1832. His exhibiting of McGregor's specimens caught the attention of the passing public and undoubtedly the attention of a mineralogist, who, coincidentally, if he did not actually share Cohen's shop, set up an identical business at about the same time as Cohen, no more than three doors away, and also described as being opposite the Bank of Australasia."⁴ The name of that mineralogist was William Tiple Smith, and the same writer adds that, "It seems highly probable that he would have taken an intense interest in the specimens exhibited by Cohen, ... recognising them for what they really were."⁵ There is, however, but scant information connecting Mosely Moss Cohen with McGregor, although there is apparently a letter to Sir Roderick Murchison from Captain Phillip Parker King, it being there mentioned that Cohen, of George Street, North, exhibited gold specimens in his shop.⁶ For what that evidence may be worth, it may be conceded that the premises of Mosely Moss Cohen, just South of Bridge Street, were located in a section of Sydney which was then known as George Street, North. There is, on the other hand, more than ample evidence that Edward Daniel Cohen, who was a brother of Mosely Moss Cohen, also carrying on business as a jeweller during the 'forties at his premises in George Street — near the Royal Hotel and the Markets — had regular dealings with the shepherd, McGregor.

In *The Forefathers*, by Rabbi John Levi, there appears an item relating to Edward Daniel Cohen, a transported convict, from which the following data is extracted:

Born Birmingham 1800. Jeweller. Convicted Liverpool Borough Session Jan. 1830 for stealing a watch. Transportation for life. Arrived N.S.W. per Burrell Dec. 1830. Note in ship's indent reads "Some expectation was held out to him by Sir Robert Peel in case of his good conduct for three or four years. The Governor subsequently wrote 'no reason for interfering'." Daniel was the brother of M.M. Cohen. Assigned to work for the Australian Agriculture Co. He was bartered for two other convicts by Moses Brown and set up in business (illegally) as a watch maker and taken over for £25 by M.M. Cohen when he arrived in Australia. Daniel Cohen was sent back to the hulks and then volunteered for service as an overseer at Port Macquarie (1833). Married Esther Isaacs born 20 March, 1841. Died Sydney 5 Oct. 1847.⁷

In *Australian Genesis*, there is a most significant item, which will be referred to later, with respect to E.D. Cohen,⁸ but no mention is made of his brother, presumably because he had no connections with the Jewish community. The authors of that work specify, during the period 1835-1840, a number of well-known Sydney

jewellers, including Edward Daniel Cohen's "City Hall of Arts" known by its two "mechanical clocks" and the large mirror at the end of the shop.⁹

When writing on "Jewish Voters in Sydney's First Election",¹⁰ which was held on 1 November 1842 when certain citizens were permitted to vote in the election for the City of Sydney, E.S. Marks drew attention to the Jewish names in the Citizen Lists published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Marks compiled therefrom two Lists. In List A he included names of those recorded in the first report of the York Street Synagogue, 1845, or, the names of fathers of Jewish children in a Census of 1846 prepared under direction of the Synagogue Board. In that List Marks included, "Daniel E. Cohen, shop, King Street",¹¹ noting that Cohen was specified in the list of seatholders and subscribers to the Synagogue. He could have added, however, that the same Cohen was also indicated in the abovementioned Census as being the parent, together with his wife, Esther, of Moses Cohen, born at Sydney on 20 March 1841.¹² But, Marks further compiled, in his List B, the names of citizens suggesting the strongest probability that they were in fact Jews. In that shorter List was included the name of Mosely Moss Cohen, "house and shop, George Street."¹³ In the *Journal* he seems to have received at least one mention, or rather, in the reprint of the 1845 Report of the York Street Synagogue where M.M. Cohen's name is listed amongst those who made contributions to the Sydney Synagogue of Articles used in the performance of Divine Service. Cohen's gift was an Eight-day Clock.¹⁴

In the abovementioned Report of 1845, E.D. Cohen is shown as being a Synagogue Seatholder Member and also as being a donor of money towards the building expenses of the Synagogue.¹⁵ Again, in the Report of the Synagogue for 1847 Edward Cohen is included in the names of those holding seats.¹⁶ Ten years previously, when he was at Port Macquarie, Daniel Cohen, as the York Street Marriage Register records, there married Esther Isaacs.¹⁷ He commenced business in 1840 at Windsor, but by 1842 he removed to 5 West King Street, Sydney.¹⁸ Two years later Cohen was established at the City Hall of Arts, 392 George Street, Sydney. He inserted advertisements in the Sydney Press, some of which were obviously designed to attract attention: "FORGET ME NOT — When you want your watches repaired, as they will be well done, and to the appointed time — REMEMBER The immense Stock of Spectacles."¹⁹ His death at the above address at his residence in George Street was notified in 1847, it being stated that Daniel Cohen was then aged 45 years, formerly of Liverpool.²⁰

The *Cumberland Times And Western Advertiser*, which was printed in Parramatta, carried a small news item in 1845, that E.D. Cohen was exhibiting a specimen of virgin gold which was stated to be "in its pure state, and on melting down, is found to be the purest gold."²¹ Relevant references appear in the last Chapter of *Australian Genesis* where the opening words appropriately read: "The first Chapter in the History of European Settlement in Australia begins with exile and ends with gold."²² It was true, indeed, that the ex Jewish convict, E.D. Cohen, was one of the first to publicise the discovery of gold in Australia, even before Hargraves came on the scene and started the goldrush of 1851. The Mitchell Library Manuscripts contain a Postcard, apparently in the handwriting of Moses Cohen, son of Daniel Cohen, to which is also attached a photograph of Moses Cohen. It may be questioned, perhaps, whether the latter had a personal recollection of the matter about which he wrote, many years later, seeing that the event in question took place when Moses Cohen would have been a child, aged no more than 4 or 5 years. After stating that gold was discovered by the shepherd, McGregor, in 1844 and 1845, Cohen went on to write that McGregor sold "to my Father, E.D. Cohen, watchmaker and jeweller,

George St. Sydney ... and gave it to me in front of the shop to carry it in. I helped to clean it with him and Father, and when he was paid for clean gold, he gave me a shilling for helping clean it, and said, you are the 1st Australian white boy to carry and help clean and spend the first shilling from the first gold got in Australia", adding that it was dug out of the ground at "Namina" near Wellington.²³ It seems to be clear enough, that this same earlier discovery of gold, together with E.D. Cohen's involvement with it, was the subject of subsequent comment by Captain John Henderson (78th Highlanders), writing in 1854 in *Excursions And Adventures in New South Wales*: "So far back as about 1843, I had been informed by a gentleman in New South Wales, that a jeweller and goldsmith in Sydney, had been for years in the habit of buying pieces of stone with gold attached to them from a shepherd belonging to the Bathurst district, who carried them down once a year when he went to the capital to make purchases for himself and his family. I certainly asked where the shepherd obtained these specimens, but was told that he kept it a profound secret."²⁴ This author, who has been referred to in a previous *Journal*, quite evidently had a dislike for Jews. A few paragraphs later he writes of the Victorian goldrush, saying that one is "compelled to elbow at every corner escaped convicts, emancipated Jews, and unkempt ruffians of every description."²⁵ Henderson, a soldier turned author, must have nurtured an unmitigated aversion to Hebrews, for, when speaking of the enormous increase in property values at Melbourne, finds it incredible that such people were making fortunes: "... , while (it almost takes away one's breath to think of it) a Jew, twelve months after his arrival in the Colony, in a penniless condition, offers for the Royal Hotel £10,000"²⁶ (to the then tenant). However, leaving aside this digression, there is nothing to show that E.D. Cohen had accumulated riches, though he rose from the emancipated ranks and, doubtless, made a contribution to Sydney's trade as a silversmith and goldsmith, watchmaker, jeweller and optician during a short period of about five years, when economic conditions in the Colony were most difficult. At a time when it was Government policy to discourage the discovery of gold, traders such as Daniel Cohen maintained close links with searchers of whom McGregor was a prime example. Cohen would have merited, in retrospect, the expectations which, on his transportation, were said to have been held out to him.²⁷ It is also creditable that he proved himself to be a loyal Jew who identified himself with his co-religionists.

Edward Hargraves won the Government's support as the first discoverer of payable gold and received a substantial reward, notwithstanding that his claims were challenged, stirred controversy, and were regarded by some as being exaggerated and even falsified. He had failed to acknowledge the claims of those who had worked with him, and he generally discounted earlier significant findings of gold. Captain Phillip Parker King, for example, seemed to think that Hargraves was "an impostor of science" who made "impertinent assumptions."²⁸

When, in 1855, there was published in London, Hargrave's book, *Australia and its Goldfields*, it is noteworthy that its writer alluded to the purchases of gold by E.D. Cohen, albeit, by using the occasion as an opportunity for ridicule of the Jews referred to in the story. In the course of his inspections of various gold sites, Hargraves, in 1851, went to Mitchell's Creek, near Wellington, where he met a Mr. Brockstain who had married the widow of E.D. Cohen. The reports, according to Hargraves, which were given to him by Brockstain, left him with feelings of disgust:

"You know", said he, "dish isht de vay it washt — McGregor got de gold long time ago, ten — twelve years ago, and sell to von Mr. Cohen. Mr. Cohen ish dead, and I marry de widder. My wife tells me every time him comes to Sydney

vid de sheeps, dat isht vonce a year, always bringht de gold and sells it you see to Mishter Cohen. Mishter Cohen sell two three pieces to Sir Thomas Mitchell, and Mr. Clarke the gemmologist buy some too."²⁹

Hargraves' attitude towards Jews, which emerges from the above remarks, may not have been too exceptional in the social climate of those times,³⁰ though it should also be said that such comments do not reflect credibly on one who constantly demanded recognition, often demeaning and disregarding others who merited consideration. "Mishter Cohen" was, of course, Daniel Cohen, and this evidence furnished by Hargraves, establishes beyond any argument that Cohen, in his dealings with McGregor, by exhibiting gold in his business premises, and by his contacts with the Surveyor General, Sir Thomas Mitchell, played a significant role — even if a relatively minor one — in promoting the search for gold prior to the onset of the rush a few years later.

Mosely Moss Cohen was reported to have retired from his Sydney business in 1843;³¹ and there is no indication from the Directories that he afterwards resumed his jewellery business. However, with reference to the general excitement immediately generated in 1851 by Hargraves' discoveries, Professor Manning Clark's *History* mentions a few of the popular reactions to the stirring events of the day, including, for example, 'Have you seen a magnificent specimen of virgin gold in the jeweller's window in George Street?'³² If, indeed, there was such an exhibition of gold in 1851, then, without now pursuing the matter further, there were at that time two well known jewellers in George Street, namely, J.J. Cohen & Sons, Temple of Fashion, 479 George St. North, and Cohen & Co. of 491 George St. North.³³ Either of these establishments may have been the scene of a gold display in 1851.

The information which has been uncovered by Lynette Silver, as well as by my own researchers, adds a little flesh and blood to the isolated references which have hitherto been available. The story of Daniel Cohen, and perhaps others too, fills a niche in the events which finally led up to the dramatic goldrushes. Cohen and McGregor, in their mutual dealings, were well known to each other. McGregor's fossickings, in that very region near Ophir, which was the scene and focus of the first Australian goldrush resulting from Hargraves' explorations, contributed to some of the subsequent discoveries. These goldrushes, of course, had an extraordinary impact on colonial society and the economy, when migrants, in their thousands, were drawn to Australia by the lure of gold. This same large scale immigration substantially augmented the Jewish population, thereby adding new vigour to the small pioneer Jewish communities. With few exceptions, the historian has been contented with broad surveys, occasionally examining movements and institutions, and sometimes a history, though it may supply useful source materials, is crammed full of data, the writer not pausing to follow up interesting and fascinating sidelights. Again, the exceptions proving to be the rule, there has been but little Australian Jewish biography, and biographical details of many lesser figures — not without significance — are seldom noticed. "The time has come", as a leading historian has observed, "to think of Australia as men and people, not as land and resources."³⁴ The human aspects of Australian Jewish history, in which individuals are seen to have made worthy contributions without them being fully conscious of the value of their efforts, merits further and closer study. The historian would do well to include within his purview of the golden 'fifties the roles of a simple shepherd, McGregor, of Daniel Cohen, a Sydney jeweller whom contemporary writers would not have noticed except, perhaps, to relegate him to the "Ten Lost Tribes", and of William Tipple Smith who provides a challenge to the myth that Hargraves was the sole discoverer of payable gold.

NOTES

1. History of Wellington, Robert Porter (1906), pp. 19-20
2. Part One, (1979), p. 7
3. 25 May, 1850: *They Came to a Valley*, D.I. McDonald, (1968), pp. 86-87
4. *A Fool's Gold?*, (1986), p. 7
5. *Ibid.*, p. 11
6. *Ibid.*, Footnote 28, p. 150
7. pp. 29-30
8. J.S. Levi and G.F.J. Bergman, (1974), p. 316
9. *Ibid.*, p. 214
10. *A.J.H.S. Journal*, Vol. 1, p. 272
11. *Ibid.*, p. 275
12. *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 79, "An Early Census", Ernest S. Marks, and at p. 83
13. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 276
14. Y. 16
15. Y. 11
16. *A.J.H.S. Journal*, Vol. 5, p. 80
17. *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, "Early Jewish Settlers in Port Macquarie", Sidney Schultz, p. 345
18. *A.J.H.S. Journal*, Vol. 1, p. 275
19. *Bell's Life in Sydney and Sporting Reviewer*, 28 Feb. 1846
20. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 & 13 Oct., 1847
21. 20 Dec. 1845
22. p. 316, and note 8, above
23. Mitchell Library, P1/C; also, *Australian Genesis*, p. 316
24. Vol. 1, pp. vii-viii
25. *Ibid.*, pp. xv-xvi
26. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii
27. see, note 7, above
28. *A Fool's Gold?*, p. 58
29. Quoted by Simpson Davison, *The Discovery and Geognosy of Gold Deposits in Australia*, (1860), p. 295
30. See, *A.J.H.S. Journal*, Vol. 9, 609-612; to which may be added the following item from *The Land of Promise, or, My Impressions of Australia*, London, (1854), at pp. 7-11, 51-52, by W. Shaw quoted in *A Documentary History of Australia*, Vol. 2, Frank Crowley, p. 221: "Clothiers are numerous; the method of thrusting out apparel for sale, and the gloomy aspect of the interior, remind us of Hebrew establishments, and we are reflecting on the confidence these traders must have in the integrity of passers-by, when, partially screened by habiliments, we observe dark men with hooked noses and unclean hands standing ready for "the receipt of custom." The keen eyes of one instinctively fathoms the contents of a parcel we are carrying: we resist the impetuosity of his attack, and pronounce him to be a Jew. Judging from the peculiar patronymics that often occur, we should conclude that "the Ten Lost Tribes" have found their way thither, and are true to their calling."
31. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June, 1843
32. *A History of Australia*, Vol. IV, p. 5
33. *A.J.H.S. Journal*, Vol. 9, p. 621
34. *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal*, Vol. 46, "The Biographical Approach to History", James J. Auchmuty, p. 111