

founded a jewellery company, M Basch & Co. In 1897 Emmanuel, fondly referred to as "Uncle Monty", joined his brothers. In *The Chronicle* of July 23 1935 on his death, the newspaper wrote:

"... being essentially a public spirited man, he soon began to take a prominent part in communal affairs. He became President of the Bulawayo Hebrew Congregation in 1903 and held office for 12 years in succession, during which he supervised and guided every aspect of Jewish communal life in Bulawayo.

"In 1906 he joined the Town Council and the following year he was elected Mayor. Of modest nature, he undertook the office with diffidence, but soon proved himself so capable that he remained in office for four years in succession ... As Mayor and President of the Hebrew Congregation he laid the foundation stone of the Jewish Synagogue.

"... He was a very good chairman and his moderate spirit and sense of humour enabled him to steer the civic debates safely through rough waters."

It is interesting to note from an old photograph taken in 1908 (see front cover) that Mr Basch is seen with a multitude of women, of all creeds, who had gathered to raise funds for the new *shul*. He proved that when in need, many people would come to the assistance of others regardless of their backgrounds. "He ... is known to have given much in private in addition to his public contributions," the newspaper wrote, adding: "It was not possible that there could be anyone who could bear him any ill-feeling of any kind."

He also became chairman of the Hospital Board and when the Government took over the Bulawayo Memorial Hospital he became chairman of its Advisory Committee, an office he retained until his death. During the Great War he was one of the principal organisers of the Central War Fund.

Another notable event in his life as Mayor and Master of the Masonic Lodge, was the visit on November 21 1910 of the third son of Queen Victoria, the Duke of Connaught, and "Most Worshipful Grandmaster of the Grand Lodge of England".

It was during this visit that the foundation stone for the Anglican Church was laid and Mr Basch, as Mayor, was invited to become the first Jew to join the Bulawayo Club, and where he made an address. Aunty Lee explained that he was a man of high self-respect who took his various community roles seriously and so, with due etiquette, he quietly accepted this duty, but never again made use of his Club membership.

Mr Basch was obviously not only dear to Aunty Lee but to many others as well. His late marriage to Bertha, in 1913, seemed utterly understandable after I learned that they had much in common; a community spirit, organisational abilities and modest natures. Bertha was equally remarkable. After her death in 1928 an article said:

"... The late Mrs Basch had always been in the forefront of work for charitable and other good causes. She had a real talent as an organiser and the gift of infusing others with her own abundant energy."

She undertook several secular and Jewish duties, such as the Loyal Women's Guild, the Matabeleland Women's Institute, and the Ladies Red Cross Working Party, which eventually won her the MBE for her work during the War. She carried out her duties with "both dignity and charm". A friend said of Bertha that "she gave 99 percent of her life to the community," and this sentiment is evident in the numerous letters of congratulations for her MBE from prominent people around the world.



These have been filed faithfully in a large red-leather bound folder labelled in gold, "Newspaper Cuttings," by older sister Rachel, which Leonora now has. Mrs Basch was particularly interested in horticulture and her garden was the show garden of the city. She and Emmanuel were a happy couple and their home was always the centre of hospitality. The death of his wife, eight years before his own, was a "grievous blow" to Mr Basch and it was said he was never the same man again.

Bertha's sister Rachel, known as Ray, was disabled from birth and she was cared for by the family. Although she was only mentioned briefly that morning, it was she who left the greatest impression on me. It is only through Ray's collection of newspaper cuttings, photographs and mementos, the safe-keeping of the letters of the letters of congratulations to Bertha for the MBE from such people as Mabel Birchenough, Eveline Atterbury and Aimie Lawley, that I have caught a glimpse of the past.



An early curtain which hung before the Ark. It was stolen a number of years later and never found.

Through her loving care and Aunty Lee's memories I have had insight into a family of pioneers. Now through this oral history I am a link in that chain and will be able to pass this on to my children. I thank you Aunty Lee for this morning and for the past. ☆

Fair Trade

Nearly 100 Israeli exporters and institutions exhibited at the Israeli Pavilion during the 1960 Central African Trade Fair in Bulawayo, which was officially opened by Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother. The range of articles included fridges, air conditioners, foodstuffs and Israel's new Sabra car. Turnout that year and the next few following was outstanding.

Bongolo Smith

Barnett Smith came to Africa mid-1880s, hawking ostrich feathers and selling mules to the British Army in South West Africa. Early 1900s took a small cattle breeding herd overland from SA, swimming them across the Zambezi River, to Bechuanaland and Belgium Congo, to supply fresh meat to people inland. There became first man to start cattle ranching. Earned nickname "Bongolo" (mule) from his days as mule trader and not on account of his stubborn personality. He was successful in ranching despite being illiterate. He was approached by two Belgium banks to become part of the principle food supply company in Belgium Congo. He served as the company's MD before moving to Bulawayo, where he brought his cattle expertise and practised ranching around Mat'land, becoming one of largest cattle ranchers in the region. Daughter Dora, one of seven children, married Henry Lazarus. She was an ambulance driver and then a nurse in Bulawayo. Later she became UJW chairlady, president National Council of Women. She led the battle against appalling conditions in black townships and would scrounge meat and vegetables to start a Makokoba soup kitchen in 1950s.



Bulawayo Hebrew Congregation Committee, 1932. (Standing from left): L A Rubenstein (asst hon sec), Jack Ellenbogen, M Abrahamson, M King, C I Jacobs, M Baron, J Ginsberg (hon auditor). (Sitting): O Kaufman, E Basch, (trustee), P D Landau (vice pres), D A Blumberg (pres), S S Grossberg (hon treasurer), H B Ellenbogen, C M Harris (hon sec).

Penniless trader finds his roots

THE turn of the century was an auspicious one for Bulawayo Jewry although many would not have thought so at the time. It was then that Max Baron arrived in Bulawayo from Lithuania.

Unable to speak English and penniless, he nevertheless established a business through solid hard work and made a modest fortune. He had a great propensity for buying up everything he could lay hands on

and soon accumulated an amazing range of goods at his veritable "Old Curiosity Shop". His great geniality, kindness and ready smile earned everyone's admiration. He was also a devout man, the *shul* being the absorbing interest in his life. He reared a large family, the members of which went on to established reputations for themselves.

Four of his sons fought in World War Two: Philip was a lieutenant-colonel; Joseph, a

captain was awarded the Military Cross; Hymie was a wing-commander and a member of the original Rhodesia Flying Corps; David saw service in North Africa and Italy. Another, Ben, became a leading lawyer.

At the time of Mr Baron's death in 1948, *The Star* in Johannesburg wrote: "Africa is crying out for more people but there is a disposition to pick and choose ... South Africans feel that their numbers are too few and need to be greatly augmented. Immigration is the obvious way to do this. But then the objections begin. Some don't want Jews (Mr Baron was a Jew). Others don't want immigrants from Eastern Europe. (Mr Baron came from Eastern Europe.) It is declared that intending settlers must have money. (Mr Baron arrived penniless), or that they must pass a language test. (Mr Baron could speak no English)."

Yet he died one of Bulawayo's most respected men. *The Chronicle* wrote that during his 48 years in the city he became something of a legend. There were probably many more stories concerning him than anyone else in the country but he always accepted these with unflinching good humour. ☆



The Baron family. (Back from left): Phil, Joe, Rose (Gordon), Ben, Ezy. (Front): Dora, Thelma (Wolffe), Hymie, Dave and Max.

When East Europe meets Africa

THE Chitrin-Treger families, originally from Dwinsk in Russia, are possibly the largest group of Rhodesian / Zimbabwean born Jews from pioneer stock. In 1901 Raphael Chitrin with his brother-in-law Zolmon Treger came by boat to this country. In 1905/6 they were followed by their wives and about 10 children. Raphael, who married Sarah Beyer, had seven children. Jack and Minnie Chitrin were later born in Bulawayo.

Raphael and Zolmon set up a wholesale business which was later taken over by Harry Chitrin and his cousin, Algie Treger, followed by Jack. Today it is run by the original settler's namesake, Raphael Chitrin, his grandson, who has built the company into one of the biggest of its kind in the country.

So much did Raphael Chitrin the elder love Rhodesia that in 1933 when he became ill in Cape Town, he made his deathbed wish — to die in Bulawayo. His family tried to honour his needs by taking the sick man on the north-bound train from Cape Town. When they reached De Aar it became clear that Raphael was becoming worse by the hour. So a special train was chartered at great expense to speed up the journey. Sadly he never made it and died near

Francistown. However, his body was returned to Bulawayo and was buried here. Raphael had been a stalwart of the Bulawayo Jewish community having lived here for 32 years. He left behind three sons, six daughters and 20 grandchildren. All lived in Bulawayo and surrounding districts.

Harry Chitrin lived at Lonely mine. He was joined by Archie and Jack Chitrin. Harry was the bookmaker of the family and enjoyed a flutter. He was one of the originators of Tattersalls, enjoyed racehorses, knew his bloodlines and even had his own jockey colours — red, gold and blue.

Another of the Chitrins, daughter Tilly, married Benny Lobel, of Lobel Bakery fame, extending the family even further. This Lobel also was one of the first people to import Brahman cattle into the country. The Treger branch, in the form of Maurice a simple plumber, went from success to success with the founding of a steel manufacturing business, which has become Treger Industries, a huge conglomerate in Zimbabwe today.

Bella Chitrin was an active member of WZC and Hon life member of the Bulawayo WZC. She was deeply concerned

over the plight of women and children and helped organise functions to raise funds to alleviate their plight. ❖

Morris Abrahamson

Born in Russia 1892 and came to Rhodesia in 1912. Save for a period during World War One when he was out the country with the Southern Rhodesian Volunteer Reserve, he lived here ever since. Active in communal and Zionist affairs, he was president of the shul, elected Hon life member, and was Chevra Kadisha first Hon treasurer and its president for 14 years; Hon life member and trustee of Parkview Weizmann Sports Club and trustee of Jewish Women's Communal League. In the 1930s and World War Two, he assisted immigrants.

Isaac Wolffe

1894 pioneer, he settled and founded a little farming village called Blinkwater, near Umvuma. He traded in cattle, built an hotel and shops. He was a founder of Bulawayo Chevvei Zion Society. He married Annie Green in 1908 and donated the first chupah to the shul. All his children, Hyman, Jacob, Eveline, Morris and Miriam, were educated at Milton and Eveline. He died in 1927.



The Chitrin-Treger family: 2nd lady from left Sarah Chitrin, next to her Tilly Lobel. Standing with black trousers Harry Chitrin. In car Algie Treger, on roof of car Willy and Benny Lobel, 2nd person on bonnet of car Jack Chitrin, standing next to him Maurice Treger. Woman in centre Bella Miller with Leonard Rabinowitz on her lap, moving right Hymie Lobel, Tawbe Treger, (child unknown) Becky Treger, Raphael Chitrin, Ray Rabinowitz. Centre seated from left Stella Thal, Edith Goldberg, Minnie Lewis wearing hat.

100 years of sacred heritage kept alive

'The great and noble institutions built up through years of indefatigable effort by a generation of pioneers whose memory is still fresh in our minds and hearts must be maintained at all costs. Our synagogue, our Memorial Hall, our school and our other centres of spiritual and cultural activity, were handed down to us in sacred heritage and must be kept alive and active'

☆ *O. Kaufman, president Bulawayo Hebrew Congregation 1940*

by Charlotte Bernstein

FROM canvas tent to brick and stained-glass windows, from that which could be wind blown to the sturdiness of foundations — that is the faith shown by Bulawayo Jews in their town over the last hundred years.

The inaugural meeting to establish the Bulawayo Hebrew Congregation was held in a tent belonging to Rosenblatt & Moss, next to the BTA, a far cry from the permanent edifices on both sides of Jason Moyo Street corner 3rd Avenue and which embody the spirit and soul of the Jewish community.

The 21 pioneers who met on August 12 1894, not many weeks after Bulawayo was proclaimed a town by Dr Leander Starr Jameson, were concerned with the need to provide Jewish burial facilities and services for the High Holydays. And it was only on High Holydays in those first few years that services were held.

Those pioneers were: Messrs J Boam, J Cinnamon, S Goldring, D Goldman, E Granger, S Heyman, R D Hanson, J Jacobson, S Jacobs, I Levi, M S Levin, J Moss, S Nathan, I Rosenblatt, S

Rabinowitz, J Saber, E Saber, E Tertis, V Wolf, J Wolffe and H M Zeffert.

Rev M I Cohen in his memoirs records that the first services were held in the unfinished dining-room of the Charter Hotel.

"The windows were draped with calico, a curtain was hung over the door, and whisky cases, covered with planks, provided the sitting accommodation." Towards the end of 1898, Friday evening and Saturday morning services were held regularly.

The small congregation we are today is justly proud of its long-standing record of holding twice daily services largely due to the determination of "Peeps" Golden — even though it requires a roster and a few telephone calls as a reminder — when larger communities are unable to muster a daily *minyan*. Mention is made frequently over the years, in committee meeting minutes, of the difficulty in finding 10 men for a *minyan*, including the censure of Rabbi Yesorsky for attending secular meetings instead of coming to *shul*.



The Charter Hotel, Bulawayo, 1896, used briefly to hold services.

Until the formation of other Jewish institutions, the Hebrew Congregation was the centre of communal life, acting as a Benevolent Society and Chevra Kadisha. It established an Education Committee and responded to anti-semitism. Fortunately, these incidents were very few in those early days.

A census of Bulawayo (sic) done by the Town Police and reported in the Bulawayo Chronicle of March 8 1895 reveals that "in the matter of creeds..." there were 92 Jews among the 1,537 white settlers. The Jewish population of our city as at December 31 1993 was 353 individuals, being 307 adults and 46 infants, children and scholars.

The Bulawayo Chronicle of June 28 1895 reports on the first AGM of the Hebrew Congregation:

'The meeting... was held in the board room at the Market Building on Sunday, when there were present: Messrs C Joseph, S Goldman, S Goldring, M Joseph, Margolius, I Woolf, Rosenberg, Tobias, V Woolf, Lippmann, Kaminsky, Leven, E Tertis, S Jacobs, E Basch, Saber, Tempofsky, Levy, Flock, Trimlick, J Boam, and others. Mr J Saber was voted to the chair. The balance sheet which showed donations amounting to £15 12s, and subscriptions of £41 10s 6d, and last year balance of £24 6s, total £81 8s 6d, and an expenditure of £62 13s 9d, leaving a balance of £18 14s 9d, was read and passed. The following report was read and adopted:

Rabbi's shortcomings

In 1899 Rev M I Cohen was due to come to Bulawayo to take up his post here, but it was the Boer War in South Africa. The Jewish congregation received an anxious telegram from him which read, "Am asked to join Jewish ambulance for front stop wire if you object." But the committee replied that "as there are two *briss's* to be proceeded with, it is impossible to grant your request." Rev Cohen arrived on time.



Laying the foundation stone of the Synagogue in Abercorn Street, Bulawayo, 1897, by Captain Arthur Lawley, Administrator of Matabeleland.

"...you will observe that the work done by your congregation has not been so productive as anticipated. The balance sheet attached shows the financial position, not a very strong one, still a small balance in hand. The fencing round the burial ground has been completed. A Sephor Torah has been purchased from the Rev Dr Harris, together with a Shophar, prayer-books, and a few talisim, for the sum of £30, £15... We unfortunately have buried three of our co-religionists, one a pauper, the cost of which has been defrayed by the Chartered Company. The cost of the

fund to build a synagogue had been set up in 1895 and more than £500 had been subscribed to it, with Mr Rhodes and Dr Jameson each contributing £100. The congregation even advertised in South Africa for plans of a suitable building to be submitted, a prize of 25 guineas being awarded to the best design. A fund-raising Bazaar Committee had also been approved.

Isidore Henry Hirschler, a Jew and first Mayor of Bulawayo, records that "three Churches, the English, Roman Catholic and Wesleyan, are firmly established in our

Buluwayo Hebrew Congregation.

Joseph Boam, Esq.,

Dear Sir, — In view of your departure for England, we... present you with an address recording our high appreciation of the painstaking and conscientious manner in which you have carried out the duties of Hon treasurer and secretary during the natal year of the congregation, which you so prominently assisted in forming. We wish to assure you that the valuable support you have given this congregation from its earliest stages will always remain green in our memories, and will be a bright example and a guide to us in furthering you and our desire to make this town — although far away from the world's civilisation — a pride to Judaism...
(signed by the committee)

Mr Boam in well chosen words thanked them one and all for their kindness, and in accepting the magnificent address, said 'it was the highest honour they could confer upon him, and one that he would ever value...'

Mr E Frank became Hon sec and treasurer next, and after him Mr A Davis. It was at this meeting on December 14 that first rumbling of discontent surfaced. Frank Cinamon, keeper of the congregational vineyard, objected unsuccessfully to the method of nomination and proposing, saying the two offices should be separate. He got his way nearly a year later when Mr Hirschberg became secretary and Mr Aserman treasurer.

From February to August 1896 there were no meetings owing to the Rebellion. After this, writes Rev Cohen, there was considerable immigration of Jews without means so in March the Hebrew Aid and Benevolent Society was formed. At the

Presidents of the Bulawayo Hebrew Congregation

1894 - 1899	J Saber	1945-1946	S Rabinovitz
1900	M Immerman	1947	P L Sale
1901	I Pieters	1948	D A Blumberg
1902 - 1913	E Basch	1949-1950	M Abrahamson
1914 - 1916	R Aserman	1951-1952	A Rabinovitz
1917 - 1918	L Landau	1953-1954	M Abrahamson
1919 - 1920	E Basch	1955	M Swiel
1921 - 1922	L Landau	1956-1957	W Fredman
1923 - 1924	H B Ellenbogen	1958	Ald C M Harris
1925 - 1926	L Landau	1959-1960	P Taub
1927 - 1928	O Kaufman	1961-1962	W Fredman
1929 - 1930	H B Ellenbogen	1963-1970	Clr S Jossel
1931 - 1932	O Kaufman	1971-1972	M Gordon
1933 - 1934	D A Blumberg	1973-1975	S Jossel
1935 - 1936	O Kaufman	1975-1977	A D Feigenbaum
1937 - 1938	E Landau	1977-1979	J Brenner
1939 - 1943	O Kaufman	1979-1982	H W Orkin
1944	P L Sale	1983-1994	A D Feigenbaum

funeral and our charges for the late Mr D Adler were sent to his brother, but we have not received any reply...
Joseph Boam,
Hon Sec."

Joseph Saber was elected president for the ensuing year while Mr Boam became Hon sec and treasurer. A scheme to erect a temporary building as a synagogue was submitted. As David Adler had died on January 10, after an accident while exercising his horse Exchange on the race course in December, it was perhaps unlikely that his brother did pay up. There are no records, however, to verify the outcome.

Very few of the family names of those who attended this meeting or even the inaugural one appear on the current congregation list.

That the work of the congregation continued to be "not as productive as anticipated" is reflected a few years later in the Minutes of His Worship the Mayor for the mayoral year ending August 2 1898. A

midst, their ministers exercising a valuable influence, whilst a fourth, the Presbyterian, is in cause of formation." No mention is made of the Hebrew Congregation, which was not to have a minister for nearly two more years.

Lost pulpit

In about 1904 our then *shul* received a brass pulpit as a gift from the Great Synagogue in Cape Town. Does anyone have any idea what has happened to it?

Double sided

Did you know ... on the reverse side of our foundation stone at the *shul* dated May 17 1910 laid by Emmanuel Basch is an inscription saying it was laid by Capt Arthur Lawley in 1897. The *shul* ran out of money the first time so the stone was kept and re-used later.

No sooner had the AGM taken place returning the original office bearers than a special meeting was called the next month to accept the resignation of the Hon sec and treasurer. The *Buluwayo Chronicle* of July 26 1895 gave detailed coverage:

"A special general meeting ... was held on Sunday, the 21st inst., at the Board Room of the Sanitary Board which was numerously attended, the occasion being to accept the resignation of the post of Hon secretary and treasurer, hitherto held by Mr Joseph Boam, who is proceeding to England ... Mr J Saber, in thanking Mr Boam for his past services, which had been so signally successfully, handed a beautifully illuminated address presented by the members, which read as follows:—



Joseph Beemer, a wholesale merchant, married Antoinette Therese Renner of Vienna, Bulawayo 1903. These were the parents of Sonia Jacobs.

next meeting after the Rebellion "discussions were very hot." There were a lot of complaints from members and they wanted to know what had been done with the bazaar goods and money. "The poor president's position was by no means a bed of roses."

The grievances led to a split in the community and it may also have been caused by the different conceptions of the regularity of services and religious rites held by Jews of British and eastern European origin. Personality clashes and dissatisfaction with the committee's slow progress in providing a synagogue and Hebrew education played a part. Abner Cohen, who no doubt aspired to the presidency of the congregation, led a break-away group which claimed 50 members, many of them youngsters, and who were rudely called "The Little Parliament".

In April 1897, Mr Cohen did indeed become president of the new congregation.

The Bulawayo Jewish Congregation (as opposed to "Hebrew") held crowded services every Friday night and Saturday morning in a rented room in Williams' Building. With their monies they ordered an iron building from Port Elizabeth which would serve as a school. Rev Cohen wrote, "They unfortunately resorted freely to granted matter to run down the congregation. The latter were forced to take action." The two groups met and tried to find a compromise. There was much haggling and finally the two congregations formally re-united as the Bulawayo United



1908 Bazaar in aid of synagogue funds

Hebrew Congregation in February 1898 when Mr Saber resigned as president.

The word "United" was soon dropped and the provisional committee consisted of four representatives of the old congregation and three from the new. Assets were combined.

During the split a set of by-laws were received from Johannesburg and the first Rule Book of the (Hebrew) Congregation was ready. An attempt at reconciliation took place at the *Chanukah* service in December 1897 by which time the congregation stood at 120.

The newspaper found it worth reporting:

"...for the purpose of celebrating the Feast of Hanuchah and especially for the entertainment of Jewish children of the town, of whom there were quite thirty present. A feature of the proceedings was the harmonious way in which the Jews of the town mingled together. Mr Freilich gave an excellent magic lantern exhibition, which was greatly appreciated, particularly by the children..."

Mr Saber, in November 1895, had been gazetted as Jewish Marriage Officer for Bulawayo and in December that year, instructed in his duties by Rev A Bender of Cape Town, conducted the first Jewish marriage. Welsh-born Aaron Jacobs

Progressive Synagogue consecrated

THE establishment of a *Progressive Congregation* was suggested by Rabbi Misses Cyrus Weiler and promoted by his father-in-law Abe Gelman. So in 1952, after a large meeting in Salisbury to discuss the formation of Reform Judaism in Rhodesia, Joe Heilbron, one of the founders, was elected president of the Bulawayo Progressive Jewish Congregation. A new synagogue was consecrated in August 1958, on the corner of Rhodes Street/10th Avenue when part of

the Fairway Hotel was converted into a synagogue, barely a year after the arrival of Rabbi Curtis E Cassell, their first and only incumbent minister. It was opened by the Hon A E Abrahamson, MP Minister of Labour Housing and Social Welfare.

By 1963 the congregation was worried by the fact that it was still using rented accommodation. The president said that although several draft plans had been drawn up nothing final had been reached for a permanent House of Worship. presidential reports dating back to 1959 each appealed for their own House. Nothing was done for many years and it was feared this would lead to stagnation.

This *shul*, which was on the first floor where International Hardware stands today, was used until the Sinai Synagogue and the Louis Tregler Hall was officially opened on July 11 1971.

The opening co-incided with the 26th conference of the Southern African Union for Progressive Judaism, held in Bulawayo. The

event was attended by many people from centres outside as well as within Rhodesia, including representatives from other Jewish organisations.

Clr Ralph Harris, president of the Progressive Congregation, recited a Psalm, whereafter Sir Roy Welensky unlocked the doors, saying he admired the faith displayed by the members in the building of a new synagogue at that time (during the Rhodesian crisis). The choir sang *Pit'chu Li Sha'are Zedek* and the 121st Psalm, the music for both being composed by Hans Bloch, the congregation's organist. The *Sifrei Torah* were then carried in procession into the synagogue.

Rabbi Cassell served the congregation until his departure in 1977 after which the Board of Deputies discussed merging the *shul* with the Bulawayo Hebrew Congregation. A few personal problems and difficulties had to be overcome, such as the handing over of the Marriage Register and the removal of items to the Abercorn Street *shul*.

Finally on October 12 1977 both groups managed to combine smoothly. ✪



Rabbi C E Cassell, Mrs Cassell, Joseph Heilbron.



Bulwayo Shul Choir 1955. (Top from left): Rolf Jacobsohn, Sonny Fisher, —, Eli Zacks. (Middle): Cassie Weinberg, Daphne Ralstein, Judy Rabinovitch. (Front): Willie Lewin (choir master), Diana Hurwitz, Sadie Kaplan, Dora Middeldorf, Lily Rabinovitch, Rena Reiff, Cantor Golub.

married Rose Frank, whose brother was Jacobs' partner in Bulwayo Steam Timber Mills. The occasion was lavishly reported in the newspaper:

"...The bride looked exceedingly nice in a long dress of white satin with an enormous train, and her figure suited the wedding dress admirably. As is usual on these occasions the bride attracted all the attention and indeed deserved it. To anyone not accustomed to Jewish ceremony a Jewish wedding is a most picturesque affair. The bride and bridegroom stand under a handsome awning which is supported by four stalwart members of the community and the service is recited in the full toned language, three thousand years old which leads one back to the days when the world was young. One could not help being impressed by the fact that the service, centuries old, was being used in a town not two years old.

"...The happy pair received the congratulations of their numerous friends in the dining-room, and here their health was drunk in right down good fashion, while a prettily adorned table was covered with good things of the confectioner's art. The presents were next inspected and showed such an assortment of expensive and handsome presents that it was difficult to believe they could have been procured in Bulwayo..."

On December 14 Mr Jacobs became a committee member and it was further proposed that "all necessary enquiries be made by the committee for the engaging of

Willie Fredman

Played a prominent role in communal and Zionist activities. He died in 1978 at the age of 82. He came from London in 1911. His sporting ability soon manifested itself on the soccer field and on the tennis court. When he married Lily, the *Bulwayo Chronicle* headlined the event: "Bulwayo sportsman weds."

a suitable Gentleman to act as Minister, *Mohle (sic), Schochet* and Hebrew teacher." In celebration of the Bulwayo Hebrew Congregation's 50th anniversary, and in recognition of the active part he played in the life of the community since its inception, Mr Jacobs was elected Hon life vice president.

The newly married Mrs Jacobs worked hard on the bazaar committee to raise funds for the building of the *shul* and her husband was shortly to become the first chairman of the Bulwayo Hebrew Aid and Benevolent Society. Their son, Cecil, was to follow in their footsteps, playing a prominent role in community affairs.

After the great stand sale in Bulwayo on August 11 1894, the Chartered Company granted the Jewish community free sites for a synagogue and a large plot on the road to Sauerstownship to be used as a burial ground.

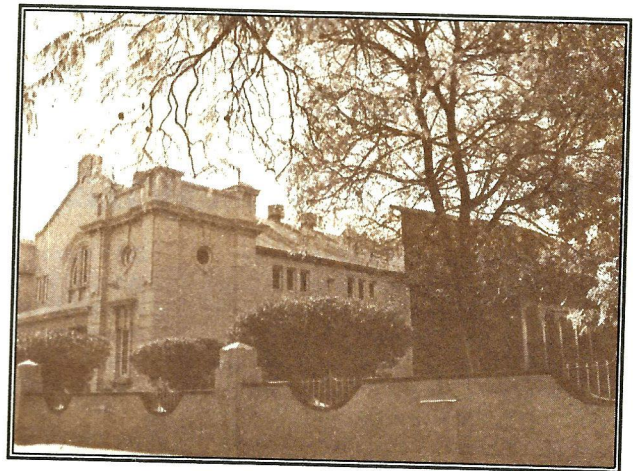
Although stands 201 and 202 Abercorn Street West were listed in the *Directory of Bulwayo and Handbook to Matabeleland* (1895-1896) as the location for the Jewish Synagogue, there was no permanent building there yet and services were held at various locations ranging from the Charter Hotel where the first *Rosh Hashanah* services were held, to Meikles Store (conducted by Mr Margolius); the imported iron building of the break-away Jewish Congregation, to the Stock Exchange Hall (conducted by Messrs R Aserman, J Epstein and D Lowenstark).

The grandeur of the latter and its resemblance to other *shuls*, impressed the committee and they wanted to build their own along similar lines.

On a Sunday afternoon on June 21 1897, during the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, "there was a brilliant gathering" (including the Free Masons of Bulawayo) on the site of the new Hebrew Synagogue to witness the laying of the foundation stone by Capt Arthur Lawley, Deputy Administrator of Matabeleland. "Arriving at the spot the proceedings commenced by singing a verse of the national anthem, and then the stone was placed into position, corn, wine and oil poured over it with appropriate benedictions. Coins of the realm and the local newspapers were placed in the cavity of the stone, which was tried in due and ancient Masonic form." Mr Lowenstark read the Hebrew service of dedication.

The building fund, which had started in 1895 with between £1,500 and £2,000 set aside, was short of the lowest tender of £3,800 for the design by architect A A Abrahams and to be built by Henderson & Swift. The project was postponed. The committee had specified the plans should include room for extension, a ladies' gallery, and that the "minister's reading desk will have to be circular with two entrances two steps up".

Services were first held in the temporary brick shul on the site of the present Guild Hall in February 1898 and the Purim services in March served as the consecration ceremony. The imported iron hut became a school room and meeting place. This brick building was used until



The shul today seen from Third Ave, mikvah to the right.

the present shul across the road was built. Rev Cohen proudly wrote in 1929: "Since the beginning of 1898 we have never held a single meeting outside our own buildings."

Previously Joseph Schumackler wrote regarding the opening of a kosher butchery, but the matter was held back until the arrival of a minister. However, the end of 1898 saw the appointment of Mr F C Friedlander as shochet, mohel and reader, but this date can be disputed. With the approach of Pesach, Mr Boas was appointed matzo baker on condition the shochet superintend the bakery.

In Zimbabwe today there is no mohel who meets the requirements of the

Johannesburg *Beth Din* and for the most recent *bris melah* held in Bulawayo in February this year, the parents of Asher Lunde had to fly in a *mohel* from Johannesburg. On a lighter note, the Lady Rodwell Maternity Hospital wrote to the *shul* in 1942 objecting to *bris melahs* being held at the hospital as too many people congregated and interfered with the routine of the place. They would permit *bris's* if the number was limited to six.

Another marriage, that of Mr and Mrs I W Egan, took place in 1902 conducted by Rev Cohen who had been appointed two years earlier as the first minister. This marriage was the second Jewish wedding in Bulawayo and the first to reach the golden anniversary milestone in 1952.

Fund raising started in earnest in 1908 for the building of a permanent *shul*. A bazaar was held in the Grand Hotel in March and an entrance fee was charged.

It was opened by Mr H Marshall Hole who referred to the rapid growth of the Hebrew congregation, which had "now grown into a most important and influential section of the community," adding, "the tasteful display of the stalls around them that day was evidence of the earnest efforts which had been expended by those who had organised the bazaar". Mr Hole said the Jewish community had always been generous in supporting public institutions in Bulawayo, and "he might instance the hospital, which on many occasions had to thank their members for assistance".

The local newspaper report read:

The stalls "presented a most attractive appearance... from the artistic style of dress adopted by the attendants. At the fancy stall, the assistants were attired in a bright *Zingara* costume, and amongst their exhibits was a model of a hospital. The attendants at the Palestine stall wore the *Zionist* costume, and they offered for sale really interesting curios. The shooting gallery was in charge of a lady appropriately dressed as the Daughter of the Regiment. The attraction here was a sub-target lent by Col. Ramsey. Dresses of the early Victorian style were worn by those in charge of the needlework stall, and the refreshment stalls were staffed by ladies in Japanese costume. There was also a well-arranged flower stall from which a number of girls, some quite little mites, worked energetically in disposing of button-holes, etc. There was also a telegraph department controlled by ladies whose dresses smacked of the military fashion. There were side-shows, concerts, etc, directed by a well-known impresario and the SRV band played selections during the sale...".

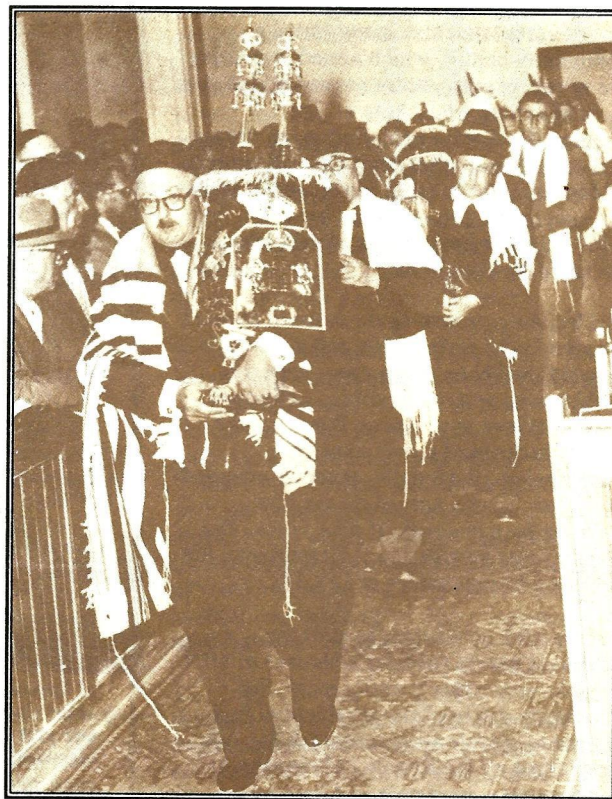
Funds were also donated by Jack Palca from the sale of *Lonely Mine*. Lending thousands of pounds at 5

percent interest (normal rate 8-9 percent), he returned the interest as a donation when it was paid back at the end of the year. Many people at the time questioned the need for a *shul* of such dimensions. By April 1910 £2,200 had been collected including donations from Gentile well-wishers and South African Jewish business houses.

Emmanuel Basch, Bulawayo mayor and congregation president, laid the foundation stone for the new *shul* on May 17 1910 and the building was finally consecrated in April 1911. The reverse side of the stone laid by Capt Lawley was used.

MacGillivray and Grant were the architects and Sellick & Co the builders. Mr Basch was president for 12 consecutive years and is described as having conducted his work "with dignity and impartiality". He was seconded in all his duties by his wife Bertha who received an OBE for her Red Cross work.

Years later this synagogue itself was not big enough and overflow services had to be arranged. With a membership of 294, during the years 1939-40, for the first time



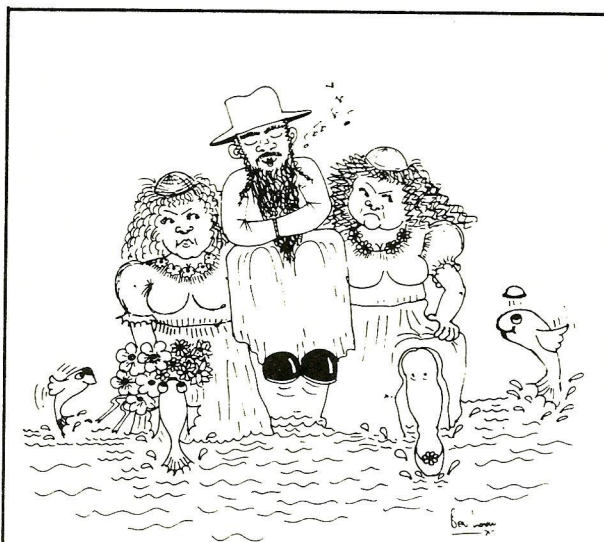
Siyum Hatorah December 13 1959. (From left in procession): J Seligman-Elsass (donor) with the new *Sefer*, Cantor G Golub, Rev W Yesorsky, R Levin.

an overflow was held during the High Festivals, in the Jewish Memorial Hall with Max Baron conducting assisted by Dr Jacobson and Messrs S Sonnabend, M Trauman, I Jacobsen and C Rendzberg. Several cantors, including Rev Kibel, conducted the overflow while a member of the executive oversaw the event.

Sam Rabinovitz first brought up the idea of extending the old *shul* or building a new one in 1944. By 1945 Leonora Granger had already drawn up plans. Perhaps the difficulties experienced by the various sub-committees on seating for the High Festivals occasioned the idea, although their strenuous task was not necessarily made any easier by the extension.

There were numerous objections: some did not want to sit behind pillars; another did not want to sit next to her mother-in-law; yet others wanted seating for their children or visitors. Early on it was agreed that widows would not be moved from their seats but they would be asked to donate a year's subscription. It was settled that seating was to be done by seniority, but every attempt was still made to accommodate members' wishes.

In 1952 the congregation decided to buy the property next to the *shul* in Abercorn Street. This, it was felt, would safeguard future plans for development. The community had grown steadily and the number of new arrivals was noticeable.



Watery Wedding

Doreen Bik recalls that when she was to be married in 1939, it was raining cats-and-dogs. The wedding was in Gwanda but to get out there guests had to traverse a number of normally small streams. Rev Cohen, who was to officiate, left at his customarily leisurely pace only to arrive at the last stream which was now a gushing torrent. Not willing to wet his official garments, the regal reverend had to be hand passed over the waters making it in time to the wedding. Where was Moses when they needed him?

The congregation also inaugurated a community centre, which aimed at making the synagogue the centre around which most activities would rotate. The Community Centre held discussion groups and adult classes that dealt with all aspects of Judaism. Yet another development was the opening of a new kosher butchery that same year, the only one in Matabeland managed by Harry Sack.

The building project again aroused divided opinion in the early 1960s and although a mandate had been given years earlier to build a new *shul*, 61 members petitioned the committee to postpone this for three years, because of poor finances. Nevertheless, the lengthy meeting attended by 180 members, agreed on the new building by a majority of nine votes. The contract was awarded to R Kiwelowitz, his being the lowest tender at £28,673.

Details such as whether to start the extension before (builder's choice) or after *Pesach* (committee's preference), the position and size of the presidential box, the use of marble and mosaic for the Ark, repanelling of the *Bimah*, colour scheme and carpeting, numerals and letters on chairs, cushioned seats and backs instead of oak pews, chandeliers and wall brackets, all provoked much discussion, particularly since several donors were to cover some of the costs. The Bulawayo Women's Synagogue Guild sponsored the centre stained-glass window as a memorial from all Bulawayo Jewish women and children to the six-million Holocaust victims.

The re-dedication of the *shul*, which could now house the whole congregation — nearly 1,200 adults with room for juniors — took place on November 18 1962. Rev Yesorsky in his "impressive" sermon appealed to congregation not to be satisfied with the reconsecration of the building but

Bulawayo's Rabbis

1900-1939 Rev M I Cohen
(see separate story)

1940-1947 Dr I H Levine

He came from Sea Point, was appointed minister at a Special General Meeting on January 24 1940. The committee believed it had made a good selection "as his experience and educational attainments will be of the greatest value in fostering and promoting the spiritual progress of the community." Dr Levine was inducted at a service held on May 26 at which Rev Konviser and Dr Levine's father, the Rev Levine of Pietersburg, officiated. Dr Levine introduced a children's service into the regular Saturday morning service, held alternate Saturdays. Prayers were in English and he would give a special address to the children each fortnight.

1947-1964 Rabbi Wolfe Yesorsky

During his 17 years, he was headmaster of Louis Landau Hebrew School and due to his teaching, his pupils had top results in Hebrew at Cambridge School Certificate levels. Born in Gateshead, England in 1910, educated at Manchester Talmudical College, Jews' College, London where he obtained his minister's diploma and thereafter at the University of London where he graduated BA (Hon) in Semitics. He got his Rabbinic Diploma in Israel a few months before his death. He had a wide knowledge of the Bible and Rabbinic literature and read modern works of Jewish scholars. He began his duties as welfare minister under the United Synagogues in London. In 1939, he went to Griqualand West Congregation, Kimberley where he was minister and headmaster until 1941 when he joined the Union Defence force as chaplain with the 1st and 2nd SA Division, Middle East and North Africa Campaigns. In 1945 was minister at Oxford *shul* in Johannesburg, before coming to Bulawayo in 1947. He was an executive member of the Board of Deputies, Cazo, Chovevei Zion, Histadrut Ivrit, Yiddish Cultural Society and Hon Chaplain of the Guild and the Jewish ex-Servicemen's League, an early supporter of the Jewish day school and past member of the Board of Governors. He is remembered for his sermons which were vigorous and direct spiced with humour. Died Nov 5 1964.

1958-1977 Rabbi Curtis E Cassell (Progressive)

Minister for the Progressive Congregation, he was, and still is, admired for his depth of religious knowledge, his kindly manner and his wisdom on all subjects by both congregations. During our time when we had no Orthodox minister, Rabbi Cassell stood in for both communities. He is an historian in his own right and has taken up the history of Rhodesian Jewry where Rev Cohen left off, and is a published author. Rabbi Cassell lives in London.

1958-1977 Rev Jacob Szlapak

Born in Poland where he taught Hebrew from 1922 until the outbreak of World War Two, Rev Szlapak came to Africa in 1948. He was minister to the Livingstone Hebrew Congregation for 10 years. In 1958 he moved to Bulawayo where he worked for the Congregation as assistant minister and Hebrew teacher. In 1977 he went on *aliyah*. He was revered for his piety and scholarly works, admired for his sense of humour and adored for his friendliness. Died in 1979.

1966 Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Rabbi Rosen was here briefly for three months from August to October.

1967-1975 Rabbi I Zwebner

Came from Emmarentia Hebrew Congregation, SA. Born in Jerusalem, 1914, he qualified as a teacher at the Mizrahi Training College, went to Glasgow University from 1938-1942 and got an Ed.B Diploma in Education and Psychology and later a MA. He was minister to Maida Vale Congregation in London and studied at Jews' College. In 1953 he moved to SA and was there for 14 years before joining us. He is a devoted Zionist, a strenuous and unflagging protagonist of the cause of Israel. The committee, in its minutes, record that felt it would be a "step up" for him to be appointed as rabbi of Bulawayo, which it considered an honour, instead of being a suburban rabbi in Johannesburg.

1960-1980 Rev Samuel Kibel

He was at a number of congregations in SA and on his retirement in 1960 settled in Bulawayo with his wife. For more than 20 years, he graced the front middle pew. He placed his many talents at the disposal of the congregation and served as *chazan* and choirmaster when needed, and officiated at funerals. Modesty and humility endeared him. He was a Talmudist of no mean calibre and held in high esteem. The Kibels left Bulawayo in 1980 with their two children for Cape Town. Died in 1985.

1976-1979 Rabbi Avraham Wigler

Born in Jerusalem, he worked in SA as a teacher and minister of Muizenberg congregation. He is a *shochet*, *mohel* and *shofer*. During his stay here he headed the Hebrew-Religious Department and his wife Hadassa taught Hebrew at Carmel. The Wiglers live in Israel today.

1979-1982 Rabbi Moshe Zion Cohen

Began his duties in August. Born in Jerusalem 1936 he studied at various *Yeshivot* and is a graduate of Central Training Institute for High School Teachers of Jewish Studies attached to Yad Harav Maimon. He obtained BA in Judaic studies at Jerusalem University. He is a teacher, *shochet* and *mohel*. He is best remembered by our children with whom he endeared himself.

1985-1989 Rabbi Abraham Avnit

From Poland, he came to us from Australia where he had served in Sydney. He is a *shochet* and *mohel*, and his wife Navah a Hebrew teacher. They both lived in Israel for a time but now live in Canada. He will be remembered by the children of Carmel School for arriving at a *Purim* party dressed as a cowboy riding a white horse.

1991-present Rabbi Benjamin Isaacson

Came to Harare in 1988 before moving to Bulawayo. His inauguration in Harare was impressive with a number of Government officials attending. At it, Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris of SA, described him as a strong and forceful leader who is the epitome of what a spiritual leader should be. Rabbi Isaacson is devoted to the interests of humankind — particularly the poor, the incapacitated and the oppressed. He is known for his own part in the struggle against apartheid in SA. One of his close associates is Archbishop Desmond Tutu of Cape Town who sent him a special message on the occasion of his induction. ✨

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From the Bulawayo Directory, 1895



Bulawayo Synagogue reconsecrated December 1962. (From left): Chaim Winderbaum, M.Plan (Hon sec BHC), Sam Rabinovitz, L Levin (vice pres), Willie Fredman (pres), Rabbi Yesorsky, Cantor A Hainowitz.

to reconsecrate themselves to the ideals for which the *shul* stood, stating that a greater danger than that of empty synagogues was that of empty Jews.

At the same event the Youth and Education Centre was opened next door. The foundation stone was unveiled by the president Mr W Fredman.

In presenting her report a few days earlier, Lily Katz of the Synagogue Ladies' Guild reminded the men that she had a very able committee "who are only too willing to do what is required of them, but gentlemen, please do not regard us only as willing servants but as FULL PARTNERS who have the cause of our religion and *shul* at heart".

Sacred Task

Hans Bloch tells the story of how a precious *Sefer Torah* reached him — one which had been rescued from a defunct congregation in Germany. While living in Johannesburg he received a letter from his former rabbi in Hamburg. This rabbi had saved a *Sefer Torah* and had it sent to Hans. When in 1950 the Blochs moved to Bulawayo the *Sefer* came with them. Rabbi Yesorsky agreed to house it in the *shul*. Eric, Hans's eldest son, read his *Bar Mitzvah Parshah* from it, and his sons also practised from this scroll. Sadly, a fault was later found in it and it was no longer allowed in the synagogue. Hans now has it at home in a special Ark built for it. With it also came an extraordinary *Yad* (pointer). It was made of chromium plated brass complete with a carved, pointed hand — brass because precious metals were forbidden in Germany at that time. Hans recalls: "My synagogue in Hamburg is destroyed; my former Rabbi is no longer alive ... The *Sefer Torah* rescued from Nazi Germany is still with me, and hopefully, will be a family heirloom."

Over the years, the old and then the new *shul* held a number of special events. For example in 1937 there was a special Prayer and Thanksgiving service for the coronation of their Majesties King George and Queen Elizabeth. The following year a Sub-Committee for Refugees and Immigration was appointed to deal with the billeting of refugees who came from Germany, Austria and other parts of eastern Europe, helping them as they arrived in Bulawayo and co-operating with the Immigration Department by providing guarantee funds.

Succot always proved to be a happy period and a feature in 1943-45 were the special consecration services for girls. In 1958, local Jewish ex-servicemen held a large *Chanukah* service. Rev Yesorsky, who himself was in the army, conducted the service. Arthur Sarif MBE read the roll of honour, while Mr M Greenspan MBE and others opened the Ark.

Other services were held from 1938 onwards in connection with the war, including our annual Day of Mourning for the victims of Nazism. In 1959, a Memorial Stone was erected in the cemetery and was unveiled by the president of the *Chevre Kadisha*, Mr B Abrams. Uniformed *Habonim* and *Betar* provided a guard of honour. Later there was an historic ceremony for the first *Siyum Hatorah* in our history. Mr J Seligman-Elsass gave

over the new *Sefer Torah* in honour of his parents and family annihilated by the Nazis.

With the congregation bursting at the seams, the *shul* hosted many important guests such as Chief Rabbi Casper of South Africa in 1964, and "collective" *Bat Mitzvot* became the order of the day. In 1972 nine girls on one occasion gave an impressive ceremony after they were coached by Rabbi I Zwebner and a 60-strong choir provided the music.

To ease the administrative burden of the burgeoning congregation, a Hebrew Youth Congregation was formed in 1968. Wizo House was filled by youth from the uniformed movements and others. This Youth Congregation was not to interfere with the existing youth movements, but would foster religious observance and a love of Jewish tradition. As an indication of the community's size in those days, this section was made up of 200 youngsters aged between 14 and 18.

The congregation, due in large part to its size and respectability in the city, also began to be more vocal on world and local events which countered Jewish tradition. When in 1969 nine Jews were hung in Iraq after the Six Day War, Bulawayo Jewry held memorial services and protest meetings. Rabbi Zwebner spoke out saying he was appalled at the hatred displayed towards Israel. He was only one of our beloved rabbis who took to the pulpit to speak out on matters of concern, a tradition being continued today.



The Synagogue Ladies' Guild maintained its work taking over the welfare of the *shul* and its members, by caring for Jewish children at boarding schools and providing kosher food to patients in hospital, among some of their duties. By 1971, the congregation was so respected within the city itself that it was honoured with a special Civic Service to celebrate the 28th anniversary of the declaration of Bulawayo as a city. The synagogue was filled with people from all strata of civil service, including senators, MPs, judges, magistrates and officers of the forces. The



Bat Mitzvot 1971 (from left): Jennifer Bernstein, Barbara Hyman, Nadine Owens, Rebecca Schay, Rabbi Zwebner, Sandra Goldin, Desiree Katz, Nadine Boyer, Gail Kenigsberg.