

NOTES AND ANECDOTES ON THE LIVINGSTONE JEWISH COMMUNITY COVERING THE YEARS FROM 1933 TO 1945

By Ronnie Elkaim (nee Furmanovsky)

Edited by Dave Bloom

7th September 2017

Photographs – courtesy Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft of the African Jewish Congress

Table of Contents

NOTES AND ANECDOTES ON THE LIVINGSTONE JEWISH COMMUNITY COVERING THE YEARS FROM 1933 TO 1945	1
Introduction.....	2
TAUBE	3
GERTRUDE GOLDBERG	3
FLORA SHER.....	4
SHMERL KNAPERSTOCK.....	5
HENRY STROUSS.	6
ELIAS AND HENNE KOPELOWITZ	6
JENNY AND MAX SHAPIRO	7
Ivan Feigenbaum	9
HANS JACOBY	9
ADOLF FRIED.....	10
ILJON -.....	11
REIZE SCHER.....	13
JOHNNY SCHLESINGER AND WILLI SCHLESSINGER.....	14
ALICE STAMMREICH	16
ALEC SLUTZKIN	17
SOMER.....	17
THE SOSSEN FAMILY	17
THE GRILL FAMILY.....	17
NORMA WASSERSON	18
JOE FURMANOVSKY.....	18
Additional photographs of tombstones at the Jewish Cemetery in Livingstone	20

Introduction

I begin with what I remember about some of the people whose names appear on tombstones in the pictures of the Livingstone Jewish Cemetery on the [ZJC group on Facebook](#). Thanks to Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft for the pictures.

Life in Livingstone - we children went to cheder lessons every day in the afternoons and were mostly taught to read from the chumash, which we all found rather boring. Reverend Azriel Kramer was the teacher and also the stand-in Rabbi. He also went into the school to give scripture lessons about once a week. If I remember correctly we gave him a rough time at these lessons!!! We were taught the "Ashkenazi" way and I remember giggling from embarrassment when one day a new Jewish boy to the class read the Sephardi way. We thought he was very strange!

The following are my recollections of some of the people from the Livingstone Jewish Community based, but not only, on the pictures of tombstones from the cemetery.

TAUBE _Mr Taube was head of the Jewish community when I was a small child. He had a frail wife and there were no children in their home. I recall a number of “lavish” celebrations of chagim (yomtaivim!) in their home for the whole community, and they periodically dished out gifts to the children of the community especially on Chanukah. As a small child I used to visit the frail Mrs. Taube by going to their home via the sanitary lane behind our home. They lived very near to us and opposite the Wasserson and Shapiro families homes which I accessed using the same route!



GERTRUDE GOLDBERG I never knew her as she had passed away the year I was born. *But there was a “scandale” I heard about her when I was a little older. The story goes that she was married and had had an affair with one, Harold Grill (my mother’s brother, incidentally!!) and as this had to come to an end, she sadly took her own life. Her daughter, Millicent, I did meet much later when she was boarder at Eveline school in Bulawayo at the time that my sister Jane was at school there.*

FLORA SHER. I never knew her but I did know two of her children, Helene and Elsie. Helene became very active in the Girl Guide organization I became a “Brownie” and had quite a close association with Helene who was an important leader in the association. Helene and her husband Julius Scher had one child, a son Ivor, who was my age and in my class at the Livingstone Government School. He subsequently went to boarding school in Bulawayo (Milton School) and would spend his free days in our home in Bulawayo very often. (We moved from Livingstone to Bulawayo in January 1946). Ivor eventually married a lady called Veronica and they lived for a while in Que Que, (Kwe Kwe!) before moving on to South Africa. Julius Scher owned a Bicycle Store next to a store belonging to my father at one stage. (More on this later).

Elsie was known as the only eligible single young lady in the Livingstone Jewish community for a number of years and she was wined and dined by single Jewish “guys” who visited Livingstone from time to time. I don’t think she ever married.



SHMERL KNAPERSTOCK. As his name sounded to us like a “witches spell” we cruelly did not give “Mr. Shmerl” the respect and understanding he and every human being deserves. He was unfortunately a cripple and used one crutch to move around. He reminded us children of Captain Hook and we were unjustifiably scared of him. He did his best to try to be kind to us, offering us sweets, but we kept our distance. He was alone in the world from what I knew of him and died a lonely man, I would imagine.



HENRY STROUSS. _ I do not remember very much about him. I know that he and his wife were refugees from Germany and had arrived in Livingstone just before WW2 broke out. They lived in a house, once again, accessible for me via the sanitary lane. It was situated opposite the side of the shul. They took in boarders, mainly other refugees from Germany, to supplement their income. I remember that Mrs. Strouss was a pleasant elderly lady and my mother and she would visit each other sometimes, also using the same route as I did!

ELIAS AND HENNE KOPELOWITZ. _ These two people were the backbone and active leaders of the Jewish community, Elias having taken over the role that Mr. Taube had held previously. The Kopelowitzes were dedicated Zionists and community leaders. Many functions to do with the community and Israel were held in their home. I remember "performing" in concerts there that Mrs. Kop (as she was affectionately called) organized on her long verandah in their home. All the "performers" were members of the community of course. Marion Sossen and I tap-danced once or twice in these concerts!! Mr. Kopelowitz was a very successful businessman and they lived in a home on what we thought was an estate, with a tennis court (and swimming pool I think). Their grounds were sometimes used for wedding parties, as were the grounds surrounding the home of Harry and Annie Susman (nee Grill). (Harry Susman of "Sussman Bros. and Wulfsohn" fame). Mr. Kopelowitz was involved in the general Livingstone community (over and above the Jewish community) and was a member of a Bowling Club and other institutions , often being the only "accepted" Jew !

The Kopelowitz family had three children. Minda, the eldest married Johnny Schlesinger whose name appears in the ZJC picture of the tombstones. Cecelia was a friend of my elder sister and eventually ended up living in London and the David, who died at a very young age from cancer and who was a brilliant pupil at school . He was about three or four years younger than the other children in his class and was unfortunately bullied by the much bigger boys, probably because he was academically an outstanding pupil and top of his class and because he was a Jew. (I remember anti-Semitic incidents at school.) He was only a little older than I was and we were friends. He passed away after we had left Livingstone.



JENNY AND MAX SHAPIRO This couple originally from Europe and then Manchester in the U.K. were involved in stores dealing with curios and African culture items. Jenny's sister, Ethel Wasserson and her husband (Harry), also from Manchester, were in a business with them and they were all involved also in a second store selling soft goods and clothing items. Max was a hefty elderly gentleman who often could be seen sitting in a chair outside one of the shops. The younger members of his family were the active ones in the stores. Ethel and Jenny's maiden surname was Feigenbaum. They had a relative named Ivan |Feigenbaum.



Ivan Feigenbaum (at the time unmarried) was a specialist at recording special occasions on film, both in the Jewish community (e.g. weddings) and in the general Livingstone community I believe. He was also a competent jazz pianist and played in a band together with Harry Sossen and Dave Golub from time to time.

HANS JACOBY . The Jacobys were refugees from Germany. I do not remember him or his wife (who was a good looking lady) well. But I remember their daughter Annette who was a very accomplished pianist at an early age. Annette eventually moved to the U.K. after having been sent to boarding school for her high school education.



ADOLF FRIED. He and his wife were also refugees from Germany.

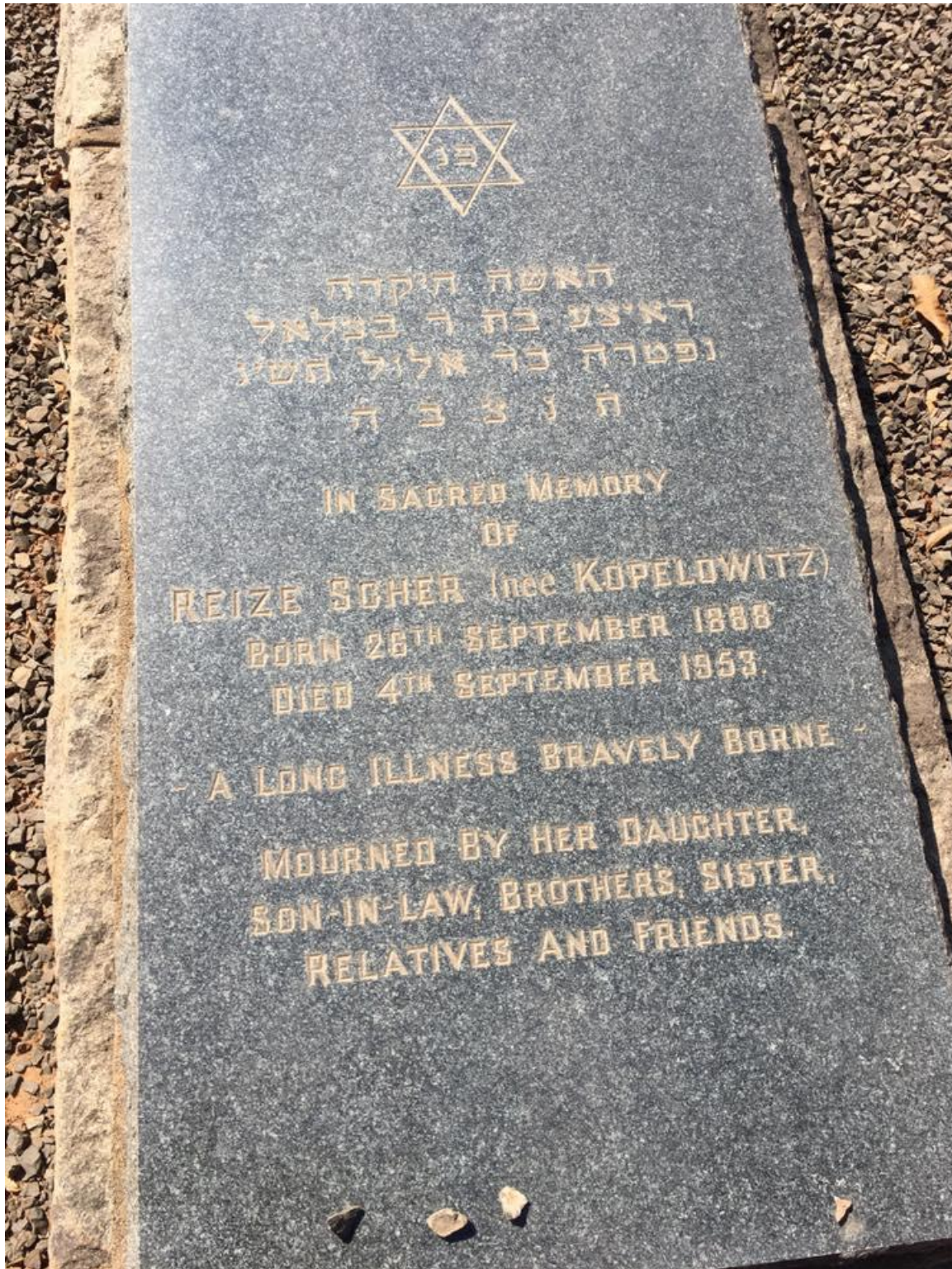


ILJON - All the people with these names were part of the same family I believe. They were all connected to the Kopelowitzes, through Henne. However, I did not really know them as they mostly came to Livingstone after we had left. I do remember the Illion family from Mufulira who used to visit the Kopelowitz family in Livingstone. Their daughter, Nata, became a friend of mine when we were young children. Their son, Michael, was the founder of the original “Mikes Kitchen” chain of steakhouses in South Africa.





REIZE SCHER. I remember this lady as a very old woman who had a daughter named Cilla. Cilla married late in life and moved with her husband, Heinz Behrens, to live in Kalomo. Reize and Cilla were also related to the Kopelowitz family.



JOHNNY SCHLESINGER AND WILLI SCHLESSINGER Mr and Mrs Willi Schlesinger and their son (aged about 18 or 19) were refugees from Germany. They opened a photographic shop where they did mainly portraits when I knew them. I remember them inviting me on one occasion to take a picture of me when I was about 5 years old. Subsequently my parents arranged for them to photograph me and my friends as a birthday gift for me. Johnny married Minda Kopelowitz. Minda and family eventually moved to Holland after Johnny passed away, I understand.





ALICE STAMMREICH was also a refugee from Germany. She and her husband and little daughter, Gitty, (Brigitta) lived as boarders in the home of Mrs. Strouss. My mother took Alice and Gitty under her wing soon after they arrived, having met them in the home of Mrs. Strouss (via the sanitary lane route!!). My mother, who was a fine seamstress, made clothes for Gitty and for her mother. Gitty, whom I met when she was an adult many years later reminded me of this and spoke lovingly and with great admiration and gratitude, of my family, especially my mother. Gitty studied at university in South Africa, met a young medical student (Koopowitz) and they married and lived in Queenstown South Africa. One of her sons was closely involved in the Discovery Medical Aid organization of South Africa. Alice Stammreich died relatively young and her widower left Livingstone to live on the Copperbelt of Northern Rhodesia.



ALEC SLUTZKIN arrived in Livingstone after we had left. I understand that he owned the North Western Hotel in Livingstone for a while.

The following contains some additional information and/ or anecdotes which may be of interest:

SOMER The Somers were also German refugees. They came out to Livingstone with a young daughter of about 16 or 17 years called Laura. It was not long before she caught the eye of Harry Grill and soon afterwards they got married. The reception was held in the garden of the home of Annie (nee Grill) and Harry Susman. Bertha Wasserson was the maid of honour. I (aged 7) was the flower girl and Merton Barrow, who was related to the Wasserson and Shapiro family, was the page boy. Laura and Harry were the parents of Marlene (Rogoff - now in Durban), Mark Grill (now in the U.K.) and Julie Measroch (now living in Atlanta, USA). Incidentally, Laura Grill (nee Somer) died only recently, less than two months ago, in Durban. Her family have pictures from her wedding.

THE SOSSEN FAMILY were very successful and well-known Livingstonians. Harry Sossen owned the well-known departmental stores called P S A. Originally, he bought a water mineral manufacturing business from Harold and Hymie Grill who left Livingstone to settle in South Africa. The water mineral business became part of the P S A organization. I think this was in the early 1930s. The P S A group of businesses remained under Harry Sossen's ownership for many, many years and until Harry left in his retirement years to settle in the U.K. where he eventually passed away. While living in Livingstone he was married to Bella nee Grill who predeceased him.

THE GRILL FAMILY This family has huge connection and ties with Livingstone, the late Marcus Grill and his wife having arrived in Livingstone at the end of the 19th century. The late Beverley Olsberg, Marion's sister was very involved in the geneology of the Grill family and through her an extremely well organized and happy celebration to mark the hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the Grill family in Livingstone toward the end of the nineteenth century was organized to celebrate this. For full details and more information on various members of the family of Marcus and Faige Grill, it is recommended that Marion Sossen be contacted.

NORMA WASSERSON Norma Wasserson was one of the children of Harry and Ethel Wasserson from Manchester who immigrated into Livingstone. Norma married in Israel to a Mr. Davidoff and she lived in Israel until she passed away a few years ago. When I was about 11 years old and just before our family left Livingstone the Jewish community was doing its best to raise funds to build a communal hall for functions etc. and this was eventually built next door to the shul. However, before it was built Norma, as a teenager, was active in the campaign to raise funds from members of the Jewish community in Livingstone and she planned to arrange a concert for this purpose. She had in mind using the few Jewish children to perform in the concert and wrote a song. She gave me the words to learn and taught me the tune. (I never was called on to sing this song as I left Livingstone before any concert took place) I have never forgotten the tune and the words even though I don't think it was ever used. And I append below the words she taught me:

"When we build our communal hall, how happy we will be.

We'll be able to have a party each night with dancing till half past three.

When we have a Zionist meeting or a Ladies Circle Tea,

It won't be any trouble, every care will be a bubble.

Build it immediately."

Song or no song, the communal hall was built after we left Livingstone at the beginning of 1946.

5

JOE FURMANOVSKY This man was my father. He had arrived in Africa in about 1926. Spent a few years in Bulawayo during which time he brought my mother (born Annie Grill) and their son (Jack) out from Lithuania to Bulawayo and where one of my siblings (Jane) was born in 1930. Soon after Jane was born the family moved to Livingstone. My father had learned to drive (I think in Lithuania, already) and became a taxi driver in Livingstone. This business turned out to sustain the family and soon he was employing assistant drivers. This "career" brought him to the Livingstone station on a daily basis to solicit customers. As Livingstone was the border town between Northern and Southern Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe) he encountered many of the Jewish refugees who needed to receive immigration approval from the authorities at the station before either remaining in Livingstone or moving northwards to find jobs in the copperbelt. It appeared that his friendship with the authorities at the station was very useful and he was often able to encourage the authorities to allow the refugees to move on. My father assured the authorities that the Jews already settled further North would certainly ensure that these refugees would not become a burden on the state and that the community would take care of them and help them find jobs. On a visit I made to the copperbelt area in July 1954 (on behalf of the Rhodesian Zionist Council's Youth Section) I met a number of Jewish people who told me that they owed their acceptance into Northern Rhodesia

to Joe Furmanovsky's assistance at Livingstone station! By this time (1954) most of the immigrants had become successful, both socially and financially and were playing a role in the country at large. One of these people was the late Hanan Elkaim who had come from Palestine down the east coast of Africa and who had hoped to work in Southern Rhodesia. As this had not worked out he boarded the train to the copperbelt with the intention of working in the copper mines. Eventually, Hanan Elkaim was responsible for creating and tarring all the inter-town roads in the copperbelt. He had learned to work on a steamroller as a very young man in Palestine long before the state of Israel was declared. He was honoured by President Kaunda for his philanthropy and contribution to the people of Zambia some years later. I married his nephew, Avner, whom I met on this visit of mine to the copperbelt!

In addition to taxi driving, my father ran a small soft goods shop for a while. This shop was next door to the bicycle shop owned by Julius Sher. Behind these shops were some empty rooms which the tenants of the shops were permitted to use as storerooms. However, because some of the refugees had arrived and stayed in Livingstone and their possessions and finances were very limited, my father arranged for some beds and mattresses to be installed in these rooms and a few of the refugees from Europe, especially the Lithuanian ones who had preceded the German ones, were accommodated in these sparsely furnished drab rooms for a while until they could make plans to improve their financial situation and move on. I remember as a small child being in my father's shop and meeting some of them one of whom was the late Abe Galaun who went on to become a multi-millionaire in the cattle raising business in the Lusaka area. Incidentally, my mother often used to send dishes of home cooked food for these people who had been forced by circumstances to accept the conditions in which they found themselves.

Additional comments are recorded in the book on *Zambian Jewry* written by Frank Shapiro some years ago (*Zion in Africa* by Frank Shapiro and Frank Macmillan)











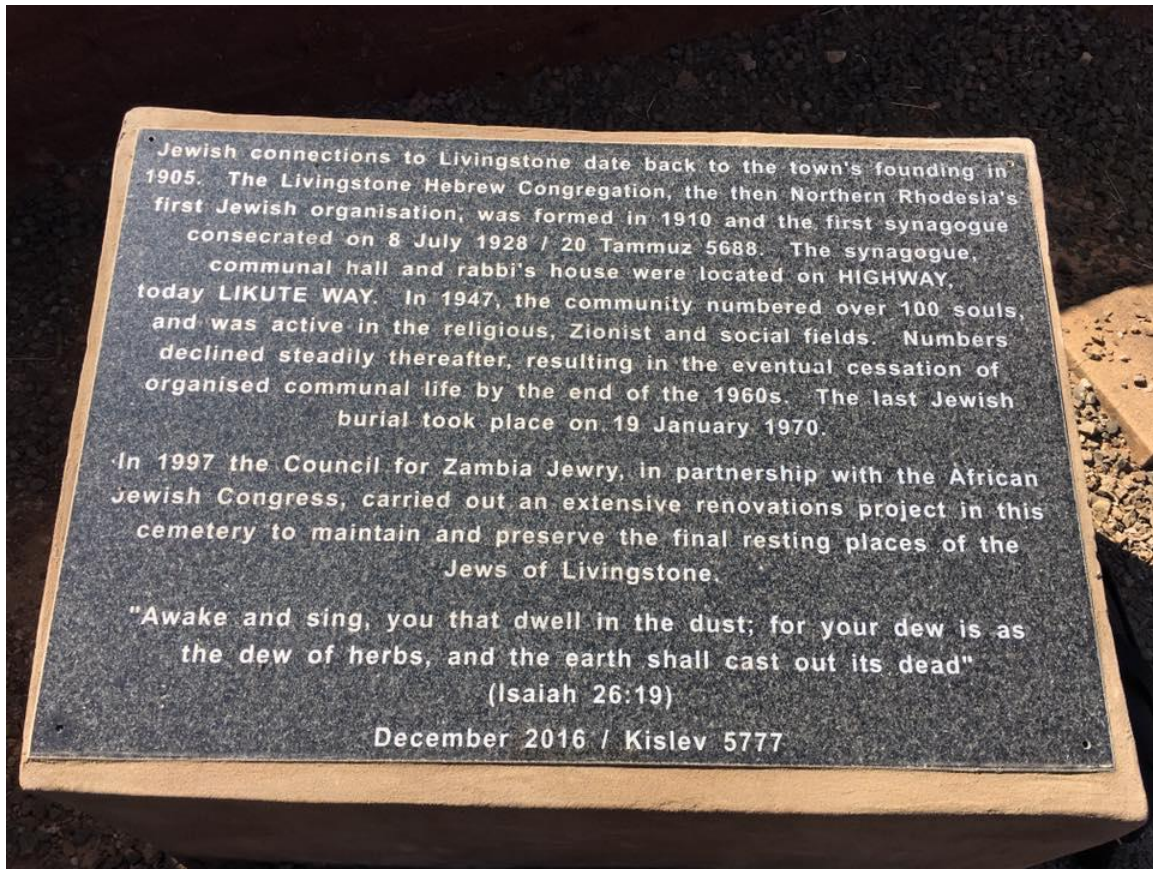












Ann Harris, President - African Jewish Congress being given a tour of the LIVINGSTONE JEWISH CEMETERY by Peter Jones

