



Before the discovery of gold in Otago, only five Jewish families ventured to live amongst the Scots at Dunedin. Wolf Harris, George Casper, Hyam E. Nathan, Joseph Fogel and Adolph Bing formed the basis of the congregation which Hyam E. Nathan assembled in his home in High Street.

By the beginning of 1862, numbers had grown to such an extent as to warrant the establishment of a formal congregation, which as time would prove was to become a very vexatious congregation.

As in most colonial communities, the congregation concerned itself firstly with the requisition of a cemetery, and secondly with the arrangements for acquiring a permanent place of worship. The original Jewish settlers had received a small section of land for a burial-ground but, with migrants pouring in, Hyam E. Nathan, Henry Nathan and Benjamin L. Farjeon had to seek a larger piece of ground from the Superintendent of the Province, who courteously granted the request, appointing the former two gentlemen as trustees. In accordance with the custom at that time, the trustees set aside a section of the cemetery for the burial of suicides and other persons considered unfit to be interred amongst the members of the community. Another custom of the period necessitated the appointment of an honorary official, "Gabbai d'Beth Almin", whose task included looking after cemetery affairs and the supervision of funeral arrangements on the death of any Jew in the province. Only the honoured could receive such an appointment, for the duties were regarded as sacred.

Once again, for the High Holydays of 1863, the George Street synagogue could not be used. Being too small, it could not accommodate all the worshippers. They crowded into the Masonic Hall. Soon

afterwards, the committee decided to build a new synagogue at the corner of Moray Place and View Street at a cost of £2450, including the land.

Amidst constant conflict between the President and the committee, the congregation, immediately after the incumbent minister, Rev. Levy, was dismissed, appointed Rev. Bernard Lichtenstein as minister and Shohet in order not to entertain any proposal of Levy's return. Although a native of Russia, Lichtenstein spoke English fluently. He had served as minister at Nottingham. A quiet man with a retiring disposition, he managed to soften the tempers of the bellicose amongst the committee, and the congregation settled down to a period of comparative peace during the seventeen years in which he held office. They had to show him, however, that they ruled. They informed him that all donations offered to him as personal gifts had to be handed over to the synagogue funds.

With the passing of the years, Lichtenstein's mildness allowed him to make concessions to the environment and to his committee. His first departure from the regular custom which he had practised in Russia and England concerned the choir. He allowed Joel Moss, the choirmaster, the son of the choirmaster of London's Duke's Place Synagogue, to introduce ladies into the choir. The twenty-three members of the mixed choir sang in good voice at Lichtenstein's next innovation—a consecration service for girls between twelve and seventeen years of age.

General apathy in the essential field of education naturally followed the abandonment of religious practices. Not until four years after the foundation of the congregation did it open religious educational classes under Joseph Myers, who also lectured occasionally in the synagogue and officiated at services. The ministers tried their utmost to strengthen the school, but the members gave it no support, and eventually no one took any interest in it at all. The synagogue committee had to take the school under its own wing.

After Rev. Bernard Lichtenstein passed away on 19 June, 1892, the school closed down altogether, but it reopened again on the appointment of Rev. Julius Louis Harrison nine months later.

The remains of the late Rev. Bernard Lichtenstein, rabbi of the Jewish congregation, and Past Grand Warden and Grand Chaplain of the District Grand Lodge of Freemasons, Otago and Southland, E.C., were interred on Tuesday afternoon, 23 June, in the Jewish portion of the Southern Cemetery.

Sometime in the past the Dunedin City Council purchased the Jewish block from the Jewish Community and the purchase price was refunded to the Council on the understanding that Council would maintain the cemetery in perpetuity. This section is rather small but is badly neglected and a sad indictment on many Councils who seem not to have honoured their commitment to the Jewish Community of Dunedin.

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