

Frank Gross (1862-1932)

Elias Gross (1863-1956)

Joshua Gross (1868-1941)

Samuel Stone (1859-1913)
(known as George Stone)



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In Australia, Beulah, wife of Richard Gross (b 1938) the grandson of Frank Gross, is researching her husband's family.

This is what she has found out about the families of Richard's grandfather Frank Gross, also Frank's brothers Elias and Joshua Gross, and Elias's brother-in-law Samuel (George) Stone who were all in Kimberley in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### **1820s:**

**Richard's great-great-grandfather, Joseph Salamon Gross**, was born in L'viv in historic Galicia which lies within modern Western Ukraine, in the 1820s. Richard's wife Beulah says: 'The earliest record that I have found is the marriage certificate of his parents Herz Grosser and Chana Schuz(in) or Schitzin in 1811. They had three sons. After Chana died, his second wife was Sare Czarne Goodreich with whom he had five more children all born in L'viv the youngest being Josef.

**In 1854 Josef – now called Joseph Gross, Richard's great-grandfather** b L'viv in 1854 leaves Ukraine for Leeds, UK to join his oldest brother, Leib, who had been there for four years. In their naturalisation papers, dated 1866, they both stated that they were **silversmiths**. **In 1858,**



**Joseph** (he anglicised his name) married Sarah Sloman. The fourth of their 11 children, all born in Leeds, was **Isaac (aka Frank;)** who was Beulah's husband **Richard's grandfather**.

### **Elias Gross (1863-1956) Family** (Richard's Great uncle

The fifth of Joseph and Sarah Gross' eleven children, and a (year) younger brother of Frank, was Elias Gross (1863-1956). **At the age of 18, Elias left Plymouth for South Africa. He sailed to Cape Town on the SS *Spartan* on 28 July 1882.**

He immediately went to Kimberley where there was big excitement and opportunities around the diamond mines. His grandson Errol Rosenberg wrote: My maternal grandfather, Elias Gross, born in Leeds Yorkshire, England, attended school there during the time that Lord Beaconsfield was prime minister (1874-

1880). Lord Beaconsfield (Benjamin Disraeli) was of born Jewish though his father had his children baptised. This led to a wave of anti-Semitism in England.

Elias and his brother, Joe, (Joshua) were subjected to insulting behaviour and bullying by their gentile peers. They had no choice but to fight their way to and from school. In spite of being slighter in build, they overcame this disadvantage by a strategy of speed and aggression which surprised and frightened off their opponents.

In 1882, Elias, attracted by stories of the discovery of diamonds in South Africa, travelled by ship to Cape Town, caught the train to Wellington, which was the end of the line and took a horse-drawn coach to Kimberley.

Elias went into partnership with a gentile friend in an ox-wagon and became a smous (hawker). They travelled from Kimberley as far as Benoni in the Transvaal and supplied farmers with their necessities along the way. At that time, Orange Grove, near Johannesburg, was a favoured outspan where they could feed and water their animals.

On Saturday nights in Benoni, the locals were entertained by boxing, among other things. A purse of five pounds was offered to anyone who could stand up to one of the local blacksmiths for five minutes. This was not a great challenge to Elias who was an experienced fighter, and five pounds was a princely sum. That night he was five pounds richer.

Elias related how the fact that he kept kosher saved his life. He and his gentile (smous) partner were returning to Kimberley when they ran out of food. The partner decided to shoot a hare for the pot. The smell of the grilling meat and his hunger was almost too much for Elias but his faith prevailed and he did not eat it. That night the partner died of food poisoning.



Elias eventually accumulated sufficient funds to buy a business in Kimberley – Sussman Jacobs. In 1895 on 12 June, Elias married **Leah Stone** (1872-1959) in Kimberley. Leah had sailed from Southampton to Cape Town on 10 March 1894 on the *Norham Castle*. According to their Australian grand-daughter, the arrangement was that Leah would follow Elias to Cape Town from the UK. He was born in Leeds and she in Manchester, only 45 miles/72 km apart, so they were clearly in contact but how and when is not known. (Maybe Elias or her brother Samuel known as George sent the funds to bring her out.)

Elias and Leah were married for 61 years and had seven children all born in Kimberley, though no records of their birth have been found: Gladys; Reginald David (aka Reggie); Henry (aka Sonny); Sarah (aka Sally); Isobel (aka Bella), Dolly and Basil Sydney.

Only three had children of their own. Elias and Leah raised their family in a strictly religious environment, yet only Gladys who sadly died aged 28 followed this tradition and kept a Jewish home.

Leah and Elias Gross clearly prospered in Kimberley as their grand-daughter in Australia recalls that they travelled by ship to the UK several times to shop for clothing, crockery, linens etc returning to South Africa with full suitcases and cabin trunks.



Leah and Elias on their 50th anniversary. Left to right: Nora (Reggie's wife), Henry, Heather (Basil's wife) Leah, Elias, Isobel, Sarah and Basil

Bernice Kaplan, their great-grand-daughter emailed in March 2021: 'The Grosses were remarkable. Leah, my great grandmother was very much a lady - graceful, well spoken (not a hint of a European accent) and I believe quite terrifying at times. And Grandpa had a wicked sense of humour. Their children were all well educated and some did significant things.

### **Frank Gross Family (Richard's grandfather):**

**1895: Frank Gross (1862-1932)** born Leeds UK, **opens a concession store in Kimberley.**

Giving his occupation as 'miner', Frank Gross left for the Cape Colony on the *Arundel Castle* on 8 June 1895, probably disembarking in Port Elizabeth. He immediately went to Kimberley, 444 miles /715 km northwest of Port Elizabeth, most likely travelling on a Cobb & Co stagecoach as there was no other form of transport available then. (On Wikipedia Beulah found that Freeman Cobb went to South Africa in 1871 to establish the stagecoach service with Charles Cole between Port Elizabeth and the new Kimberley diamond fields.)

He already had his brother Elias in Kimberley who had recently married Leah Stone, whose brother was a diamond dealer and prominent member of the Griqualand West Hebrew Congregation.

Instead of becoming a miner, **Frank opened a concession store**, to service the mining communities. It was known as a 'native shop'. His stock consisted of whatever the 'natives'

required for living in Kimberley and their native areas. This included hand-operated Singer sewing machines, thread, cheap fabric, tobacco, pots and pans, **blankets** and so on. Large trunks were also much in demand because the 'natives' filled them with merchandise and sent them home to their families who lived far away. They came from as far afield as Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe); East Africa (now comprising Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda); Tanganyika (now Tanzania); Basutoland (now Lesotho); Bechuanaland (now Botswana) and elsewhere to earn money working in the diamond mines. Richard remembers his father saying that his grandfather Frank was with Cecil Rhodes during the Siege of Kimberley (14 October 1899-15 February 1900).



Frank traded extensively in Basutoland (now Lesotho). He made friends with the Basotho Paramount Chief in the early 1900s.

**In 1905** he was invited to attend the coronation of King Moshesh's grandson, Letsie II, Lerotholi, paramount chief of the Basotho nation.

Frank (on the right) is the shortest man here

Frank custom-designed blankets and then, using textile connections in Leeds, had them made to order at the now defunct Waverley Woollen Mills there and shipped to his store in Kimberley. He became the chief supplier of these blankets, in his 'Native Shops' in Kimberley and later in Bloemfontein.

He learned to speak the native languages, Sesotho (pronounced 'seh-soo-too) and perhaps even Zulu, and sold the blankets to the powerful

tribal chiefs. Apparently, some of the designs may still be used. Today, these blankets are highly prized and very expensive.

**1899:** Four years after arriving in South Africa, Frank travelled to Port Elizabeth to marry Lena (aka Lily) Jacobs; (1871-1938) (right) on 9 June 1899. Lena was born in Leeds as was Frank. The families probably knew each other, and it was arranged for her to come out to marry Frank. Lily had been a good student, even though she was registered as living in the Levi Hospital and Orphan Asylum in Whitechapel, London. Many of these children weren't necessarily orphans but were there because their families were too poor to keep them. Lena is listed as a scholar. She clearly did very well, gaining certificates of merit and valuable prizes. She went on in 1894 to become a teacher at the Victoria Road Schools, Middlesbrough (Junior Mixed). In December 1894, aged 23, she obtained a Teacher's Certificate from the Education Department after a probation period at the Spitalfields Bell Lane Jews' Free School.



After the wedding the couple returned to Kimberley. They lived behind the store. Frank and Lily had four children all born in Kimberley: **Victor Disraeli** (1900-1991); **Cecil Samuel** (1903-1983); **Bertram David** (aka Bertie, 1904-1987) and **Vera Sarah** (1906-1993). Bertram was Richard's father.

### **1906: Frank Gross and family move to Bloemfontein**

Sometime after 1906, Frank opened another concession store in Bloemfontein, Orange Free State and moved the family there. His fellow Jews called him 'King of the Basothos' because he imported the woollen blankets\* that had become popular with the Basothos replacing the traditional animal skin Kaross.

According to Bertie, his father Frank would return home to Bloemfontein from Kimberley every weekend by train and automatically give each child a hiding for actual or supposed mischief or bad behaviour during the week.

### **To the Rand**

Frank then opened a third concession store serving the black miners on the gold mines in **Benoni** on the East Rand, Transvaal (276 miles/445 km from Bloemfontein.) We see that his brother Elias, was already familiar with that neighbourhood. **Bertie Gross**, the only one of Frank and Lily's children to work in the stores, was sent to manage it – and came home to Bloemfontein at the weekends too.

He told the family the story that in the shops, tobacco was rolled into coils and sold by length, usually a foot (12inches/30 cm). He also said that the Africans always preferred tobacco cut from the roll the shop cat slept on!

Years later Bertie told his children about the 1922 miners' strikes and how Government troops were sent to quell the strikes. However, the strikers were lying in wait at Benoni station and massacred the troops as they alighted.

Frank must have made a good living from his concession stores because he was able to send his two older sons Victor and Cecil to London to study dentistry and medicine respectively and the youngest child, their daughter, Vera, went to boarding school in London as well. Bertie remained, working in the stores, but educated himself until he was admitted to the Law Society of the Transvaal in 1934 and commenced practice in Law.

**1927:** When he retired, **Frank and Lily Gross** returned to live in London. They travelled on the *Windsor Castle* arriving in Southampton on 1 August 1927, perhaps to be near to their sons, Victor and Cecil, who had qualified and settled there. Their first address in London then was 95 Guildford Street, Russell Square, London WC1 which appears to have been a boarding house.

Frank died at 105 Broadhurst Gardens, West Hampstead, London on 4 December 1930. His doctor son, Cecil, was in attendance

Lily then obtained a British passport (No. 325841) from the Foreign Office, valid from 18 February 1931 to 18 February 1936, Costing only sixpence.

The passport gives her name: Mrs Lily Gross, nee Jacobs; bears her picture; (see above) and was valid for the British Empire and all countries in Europe including the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Turkey. It also states that she was a British subject by birth; was the widow of a British subject; was born in Leeds 14 October 1871; was five feet (152.4 cm) tall and had brown eyes and black hair.



She travelled from February 1931 to May 1937 in what seems to have been round trips from Cape Town to the Hoek van Holland; Calais; Port Natal; Genoa; Bombay; Colombo; Sri Lanka and Durban. On 18 January 1938, in South Africa, she renewed her passport to 18 February 1940 at a cost of eight shillings (less than A\$1).

Lily died very suddenly on 31 January 1938 in Sunningdale, Johannesburg aged 66. She is buried in the Brixton Cemetery, Grave No 4535.

## **JOSHUA GROSS (1868-1941)**

Joseph and Sarah's ninth child was born in 1868 in the family home, 7 Trafalgar Street, Leeds. He was the third of their sons to go to Kimberley. Sometime during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Joshua emigrated to South Africa to join his brothers, Elias and Frank but the exact date has not been found.

He married **Juliet Wasserzug (1877-1943)** in Kimberley on 21 June 1905. On the marriage certificate he is described as 36 years old, a bachelor and a storekeeper. She is described as 28 years old, a spinster and her profession is given as 'Lady'. This was probably because she was educated and earned her living as a governess.

Beulah has not found why or when Juliet emigrated to Kimberley but it must have been after the 1881 UK Census and before she and Joshua married. Perhaps the marriage was arranged as they were both older than usual for marriages at that time. Their only child, **Rita Rebecca** (aka Dickie, 1911-2006) was born in Kimberley.

In the 1901 UK Census Juliet is described as a Governess, living at home with her widowed mother, Rebecca, who was living on her own means, and with two brothers, a young male boarder and a young female servant. As the address, 41 Pandora Road, Hampstead, was a substantial house in a good neighbourhood it appears that the family was living comfortably.

Richard's father, Bertie, often spoke about Uncle Joss, but Richard cannot recall anything more.

On 10 February 1941 Joshua died of coronary thrombosis at Cavendish Court, Cavendish Road, Yeoville, Johannesburg; and Juliet died also of coronary thrombosis, at home, 52 Minon Street, Yeoville, Johannesburg, on 20 June 1943. Both are buried in Brixton Cemetery, Johannesburg.

## Samuel (aka George) Stone – Elias Gross' wife Leah's brother (1859-1913)

Leah's brother Samuel, known as **George Stone**, also came to Kimberley and became a respected diamond dealer. In 1900 he was presented with a silver salver (below) by the Griqualand West Hebrew Congregation because of his 'untiring efforts on their behalf during the Siege of Kimberley'.



George's granddaughter, Bernice Kaplan, in London, has this salver and told Beulah that the Chevra Kadisha told her that it was awarded because he had obtained kosher meat and other food during the siege.



A plaque (above) was erected on the wall of the Kimberley Memorial Road Synagogue when Samuel Stone died, in 1913 again commemorating his indefatigable work on behalf of the community. It is still there.

### **Richard Gross b 1938**

Bertie and his wife Ray's youngest son, Richard, qualified as a doctor in 1961 at the University of the Witwatersrand Medical School, Johannesburg.

After completing the medical six months at Bara he became a houseman at the Far East Rand Hospital in Springs, to do the required surgical six months. Richard was the only doctor in the area to work in the hospital where he had been born!

After qualifying, Richard practiced as a GP in Brakpan. In 1974 the family left for Australia where they settled in Saratoga, a suburb of Gosford, New South Wales about 50 miles/80 km north of Sydney. Richard practiced there as a family doctor for 29 years. Richard has been a Rotarian for over 60 years and still going strong. Their children grew up and excelled at school and University in Australia. In December 2014, Richard and his wife Beulah moved to Pine Needles, a retirement village in Erina, a suburb of Gosford, where they are very happy pursuing their hobbies – for Beulah, writing, leading U3A classes, studying and researching family history and for Richard, model railways.



## **\*The Story of the Basothu blankets**

It is very cold in the mountainous region of Lesotho. The people, like many indigenous tribes of southern Africa, used to wear hides and skins, to wrap up in. In the second half of the 19th century these became increasingly hard to find, exacerbated in the 1890s by the scourge of the cattle disease the "[Rinderpest](#)" outbreak of 1897.

This illness had entered Ethiopia and travelled down Africa wiping out more than five million cattle and unknown numbers of wild animals south of the Zambezi alone. By 1872 already many of the old skin covers had been replaced by crudely made cotton or woollen blankets. The blankets origins can reportedly be traced back to the European traders and missionaries. The transformation to the colourful factory-woven textile is attributed to King Moshoeshoe I.

The popularity and assimilation of the blankets by the Basotho people can be traced back to one single incident when a blanket was presented to the Moshoeshoe I, in 1860 by a man by the name of Mr Howel. The King was by all accounts very much taken with the blanket "a handsome railway



wrapper made of light blue pilot cloth, heavy and hairy” and wore the blanket in preference to his then neglected traditional leopard skin karosses. Thus, giving a sign to his people.

The King is reported to have secured the production of "special blankets" in 1876 after meeting with Scottish textile manufacturer Donald Fraser.



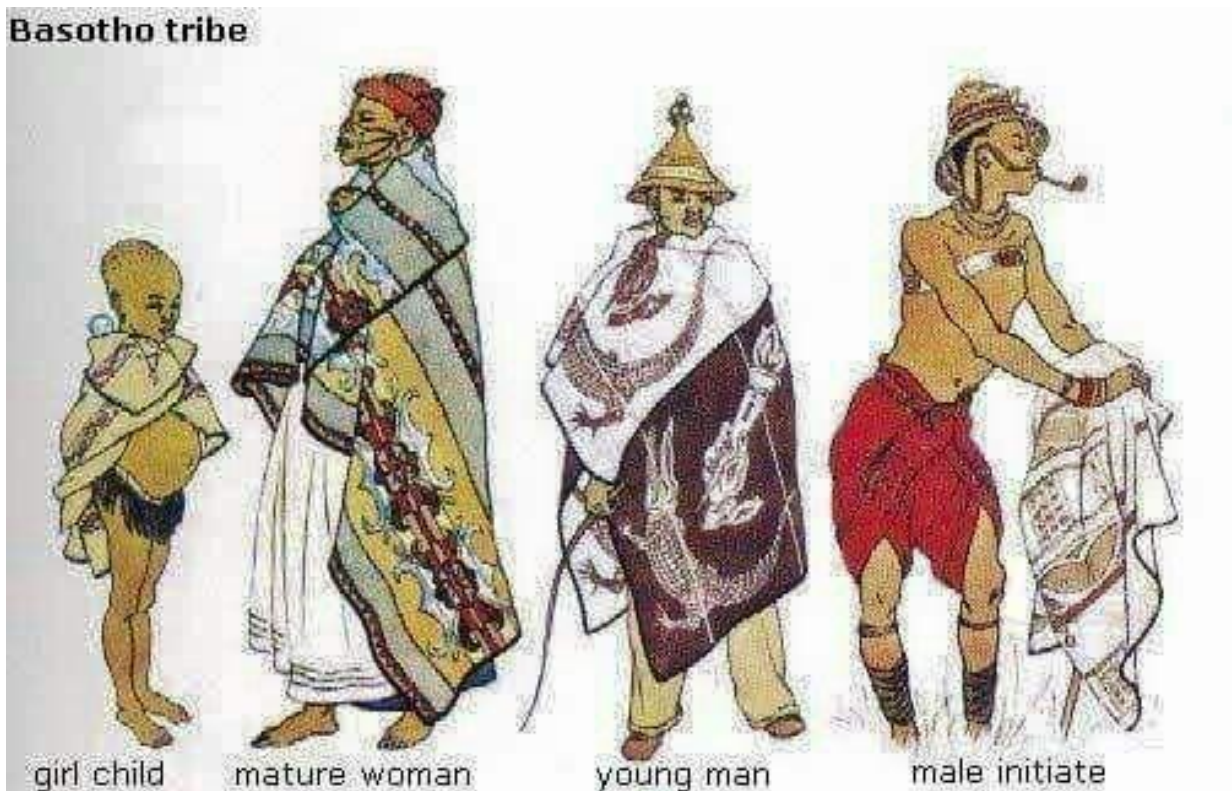
These new blankets were not only sturdier but were made of wool so warmer and firmer. They could also be fashioned in a way that more resembled the Kaross and they therefore quickly replaced the poor-quality cloth that the people of Lesotho were previously wearing.

Frank Gross became associated with Letsie II, Lerotholie, the Paramount Chief of the Basotho, in in the early 1900s. He became the chief supplier of these blankets – especially after he opened his ‘Native Shops’ in Kimberley and Bloemfontein. He imported the woollen blankets and designed some of them, from from the Waverely Factory in the UK specially for the Basothos. (Today they are made in a factory outside, Johannesburg Arranda Textile Mills, that opened in 1953.)

(See the picture of Frank and Letsie II above on page 4.)



## Ceremonial uses for Basotho blankets



Although blanket styles have been subject to outside influences, they are still to this day closely linked with the milestones of Basotho family life:

1. Boys preparing for the circumcision ritual don a special fertility blanket known as a moholobela. After the ceremony he's considered to have reached manhood, and wears another kind of blanket, called the lekhokolo.
2. On the occasion of his wedding, a man wears a motlotlehi, and he presents his wife with a serope when their first child is born.
3. Before her wedding day, a woman spends a great deal of time trying on and selecting blankets for her trousseau. Women's blankets are quite different to men's – they are designed to be pinned over their bosom whereas the men pin them to the right shoulder.
4. There are also special occasions in the Basotho's national life where blankets symbolize the particular event. For instance, on Independence Day or National Tree Planting Day, a man of substance may wear not one but three blankets, namely the Torch blanket, a Victoria and a Sandringham.

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## The Gross family in Kimberley from 1882

Elias, Frank and Joshua Gross as well as Samuel (George) Stone family stories, compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, March 2022, from stories and pictures (including some from other relations) sent by Beulah Gross in Australia, and some original research.