

# Gustave Bowman Haberfeld

1904 – 1986

*'One of Kimberley's finest sons'*



Kimberley Jewish citizens identified themselves from the very beginning not only with their own community, but also with every facet of civic life - local and national. Many joined the City Council, some represented Kimberley in the Cape Legislature and the Union Parliament.

Six members of the Jewish Community became Mayors of Kimberley. **Such a man was Gustave Bowman Haberfeld.** The others were:

1. William Sagar 1906 – 1908 [Sagar, William and Family](#)
  2. Ernest Oppenheimer 1915 – 1917 [Newsletter #16 March 2018](#)
  3. Barnerd (Barney) Cohen 1931 – 1932 [Cohen, Barnerd \(Barney\)](#)
  4. **Gustave Haberfeld** 1953 – 1955 and again from 1965 – 1967
  5. Lionel Jawno 1959 – 1961 [Jawno, Lionel](#)
  6. Cecil Sussman 1964 – 1965 [Sussman Cecil and Natalie](#)
- You can read about** each of them on the links above

## Three former, Jewish mayoresses

In the picture below we see three former Jewish mayoresses at the civic reception for the Israeli ambassador, Mr Michael Michael and his wife. Mr Michael was Charge D'Affaires for Israel in



South Africa. Left Mrs Lionel (Lily) Jawno, **Mrs G B (Anne) Haberfeld**, Mrs Cecil (Natalie) Sussman and Mrs Michael.

## Gus's parents

**Gustave Bowman Haberfeld** was born on 21 September 1904 in Kimberley. He told Lynette Douglas in an interview in 1985 for the UCT Kaplan Centre for Jewish studies: ' My father was born in Warsaw in Poland, my mother in London. My father went to London, and they met there when they both worked in the same clothing factory.

'My father came out to South Africa first in 1892. He did not forget my mother and in 1901 he was able to bring her out. It was in the middle of the Boer War. They had to get a special Boer War permit to come to Kimberley – one way only. It said: 'Mr and Mrs Haberfeld' have authority to proceed by rail to Kimberley on 29 August 1900. It is signed by the Major superintending issue of permits in Cape Town, 28th July 1900.

'(At that stage they were not actually married yet.) They got married once they got to Kimberley and settled at no 24 Bloemfontein Road Kimberley, where I was born in in 1904, followed by my brother Cyril, in 1906, my sister Henrietta (known as Girlie) in 1911. We moved out of that house in 1919 into another house in Kimberley, we lived with my parents in three houses in Kimberley.



Although my father was a tailor by trade, when he got to Kimberley there was a diamond rush on, and he worked in a hotel near the mines. Later, he went back to his old trade again as a tailor and worked as a tailor until he died. My mother who had also trained in clothes making, was a specialist buttonhole maker. In Kimberley she used to make buttonholes at home for the other tailors in the town. Buttonholes were made by hand in those days.'

## School days and Hebrew teaching

Gus was a brilliant student at **Kimberley Boys High School (KHS)** and matriculated in 1921 with 6 distinctions, High Dutch being one of them. His retention of languages was remarkable as was his fluency in Latin and Hebrew.

From the time of his barmitzvah, Gus says: 'Rev. J. Shechter of Palestine, as it then was, the Cheder teacher wanted my mother to let me help with the teaching of the little children at the cheder. She agreed to allow this once I had had my barmitzvah and that was at the beginning of 1918, (I had had measles when it should have been my Barmitzvah the September before, so I had to have a second go and learn a new parasha.)

'Every day, after school and lunch, I used to go to the cheder at 3 o'clock and teach the little beginners. I also continued my own learning until matric. I never got home till six o'clock in the evening'. Gus was employed by the community for his work to help in the cheder teaching. When he finished school, he was also sent by the community to KHS to take the Jewish boys for prayers and scripture during assembly time, when the other boys were at Christian prayers.'

After his success in Matric, Gus would have liked to go on to study further. He says: 'If I could have gone to university, I would have gone. There was an opportunity even before I passed matric, when the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, as it was then, Dr Hertz came to Kimberley on a pastoral visit in November 1921. He was also on a quest for Jewish young men to come over to London to study as rabbis, and he approached my parents to let me come to Jews College in London. But, of course, because of our circumstances, my parents just could not let me go.'

## Louis Isaacson and Son

Of his career, Gus says in the interview for the Kaplan centre at UCT: 'I gave up cheder teaching when I was offered a position in a firm in which my brother Cyril, younger than myself had been working as a traveller for about a year. He advised me to come and see the owner of the business Louis Isaacson. He knew that his daughter was leaving the business and there would be a vacancy. As it happened, this Louis Isaacson, owner of the business, was also the Chairman of the Synagogue Board then, and he was at that stage also the President of the shul and he knew me and that I was employed by the shul. He said to me I'll take you on, I said I have to give the shul a month's notice so he said, "You go to the Boys High School in the morning, you start work for me at half past nine, you go to the cheder again at three o'clock that would be in your month's notice."'

So, aged 19 in 1923, Gus joined Louis Isaacson in his wholesale linens business. He was in the invoicing department. Later he studied with an accountant and when the non-Jewish bookkeeper left in 1926, Gus was appointed the bookkeeper. Gus explained: 'It was a wholesale goods firm what we called 'cattle truck' in those days: blankets, shawls, boots and shoes, more or less everything that the Black community needed. We supplied shopkeepers around the country.'

'In 1931, Louis Isaacson died, aged just 66. His son who inherited the business was not living in Kimberley anymore and I was running the business for him. In 1936, together with my brother who was a traveller on the road for the business, and another friend of ours, Abe Pollen, the three of us took over entirely the business. We bought him out and we became L. Isaacson and Son Pty Ltd. We continued in business till 1965 when this kind of business was no longer viable.'



Gus explained the situation to his interviewer Lynette Douglas: 'Let me put it to you this way, in the early days there were very bad roads in this part of the country, very few firms' travellers ventured out on those roads and our firm was one that did. We used to go right out to the border of Rhodesia through what was then known as the Bechuanaland Protectorate. We had to carry spare springs in case the springs of the car broke. We had to carry chains in case they got stuck in the mud to be pulled out by donkeys. The shopkeepers in that part of the world looked forward to a wholesaler coming along because they were their only source of supply.'

But as time went on roads were improved and more and more competition had to be faced by travellers from other parts of the country, say they would come up from Port Elizabeth or East London, they did not come before, and we had a sort of preserve of our own. Let me put it to you this way, the more the roads were improved, contrary to some ideas, the businesses in the country did not thrive because the customers of those people in the remote areas were able to come into Kimberley more often and they bought goods directly at shops in Kimberley, at competitive prices



and the poor shopkeeper in the country districts was a sort of stop gap. They only went there when they did not have any money and he was able to give them goods on credit.

Thus, we could see that the time was coming when the wholesaler would gradually fade out. Another blow to our sort of business was that in 1925 and 1926, the government encouraged local industry. Previous to that, there was hardly a factory in this country, everything was imported. Once goods were being made in this country, Manufacturers' representatives were going out and these travellers were not only confining themselves to wholesalers like us, they were going directly to the wholesaler's customers and there might have been a discount of five or ten percent on the prices, whereas the wholesaler had to purchase five hundred pairs of trousers, so the whole structure of business changed. We could see the writing on the wall, and the days of the wholesaler as such were numbered. That is one of the reasons that prompted us in 1965 to close down the business.

## Marriage and Family

Gus married Anne and they had one son Ivor. Ivor's friends, Elly Shles, David Allen, David



Levinsohn, Tony Isaacs and Alan Dave had wonderful memories of Anne – they loved her and said that she was their role model of a wife and mother.

Anne was born in Bethal in the Transvaal, in September 1912 and went to school there. She came to Johannesburg to commercial college and met Cokie Lurie from Kimberley (who had two daughters Julie – who married Solly Jacobson and settled in Kimberley having five daughters and Hannah). Cokie invited Anne to Kimberley for the holidays and introduced her to Gus. The shidduch was on!! They married on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1935 at the Berea shul in Johannesburg. Anne worked in the business doing all the secretarial work for many, many years till they closed up in 1965. She had also been a superb Mayoress of Kimberley. She suffered a stroke in December

1983 and came to live with son Ivor and his wife June, with nursing help, as she was paralysed down her right side. She died 3 weeks before Gus in July 1986.

## Civic activities

Gus immersed himself in civic duties. He gave unstintingly of his time and expertise to Kimberley. He was chairman of the South African Permanent Building Society – which had its Head Office in Kimberley at the time. He was Chairman of the Technical College for many years. He was on the Kimberley School Board, a Member of Chamber of Commerce, a President of Rotary, and Chairman of the McGregor Museum.



He was highly regarded for his work as a City Councillor, Deputy Mayor, and Mayor.

Gus was the first Kimberley born Jewish man to be Mayor and as we see above, he was called upon to be Mayor of Kimberley on two occasions, from 1953 to 1955 and again from 1965 to 1967. (Gus says he was actually Mayor four times as each time he was re-elected for a second term). A highlight of his civic life was the scroll of the Freedom of the City of Kimberley bestowed upon him by the State President, Charles Robert Swart, at a gathering of its citizens in front of the City Hall on 20th October 1966.

Gus described why he left Civic Life: 'In 1968 after being on the

council for 23 years, it came about this way, throughout the period of my sitting on the council I was always averse to politics sort of interfering with the decisions that we would take, for arguments sake I would never agree to a road being built through this part of the town or that part of the town because of politics, I could never think of something being demolished on account of politics.

In 1966 when I retired as Mayor for the fourth time, the councillor who succeeded me instead of him being re-elected for a second term, was ousted from his position. Although this was not the law, it was the custom. It seemed that he not acceptable to a new group representing the Nationalist Party who had just won the general election. They had entered the Kimberley City Council that year for the first time. So, because my successor was from the English section, he was not acceptable to the new lot. He and I both decided at that stage, to resign from the Council.

(Daughter-in-law, June Haberfeld donated all Gus's civic and municipal invitations and letters to Nancy Tietz at the Kimberley McGregor Museum.)

## Communal activities

The Shul and the Chevra Kadisha were the true mainstays in Gus's life. He always had the interests of the community central to his heart. He was a shul-goer all his life from a small boy.

Geraldine says, 'One can't ever remember going to shul – the Memorial Road Shul (below) – without encountering Gus's towering presence either in the President's box or in his special pew on the corner opposite the Bimah, always leading the congregation with his impressive figure and full-throated song.'



Here in the interview, Gus says that it was not always like that. He says, 'In my childhood there were three places of worship. Our family used to go to the Zionist Hall service, on a Friday night, come home, make kiddush and have dinner etc. Gus explained; 'Where we lived in Bloemfontein



Road, it was more or less a Jewish ghetto. There were Jewish shopkeepers all the way around, there was a milk dairy there, at the back of the dairy was this man who used to run it had a bit of a cheder, (maybe Mr Jack Maresky [Maresky, Jack, Shim & Helen](#)). Opposite the dairy, we had a kosher butchery, we had all little shops, Yiddish shops around there, and they were all more or less what we called the 'Greener' congregation.

Gus explained: 'When they built the Memorial Road shul for the benefit of the English Jews in 1902, they built the Zionist Hall in Hellenic Street where the Eastern European Jews preferred to worship in the way they were accustomed. Then in about 1910, the 'Greeners' got together. There was a Mrs Cohen who had a plot of ground and they built the greener shul, in Baronial Street which opened in 1911. They used to hold services there on Friday nights, and on Yom Tovim. I don't think they held services on Saturday morning as most people had to open their businesses on Saturday.



They did not have ministers there, only lay readers. In the early days there were Steinberg and Baruch Leib. Later Lipi Weinstein (left). One was a shoemaker, one was a glazier and Lipi was a tailor. I think the Greeners had a more intimate relationship with Jewish life than the others, that is how I saw it. And by the way, we did not class ourselves as 'Greeners'.'

When I was a child, our family would go to the the Zionist Hall then the Greener shul on a Friday night. It was a long way to walk to Memorial Road. We would only go to the Memorial Road Synagogue on the yomtovim (though there were also Yomtov services at the Zionist Hall and Baronial Street.)'

It seems that they all belonged to the one Griqualand West Hebrew Congregation – but there were different places that the members would worship. The communities were friendly with each other. There was no animosity. It was just more convenient and comfortable that way. Gradually by the 1930s and 40s the Memorial, Road and Baronial Street communities merged with weekday services in Baronial Street and sabbath and festival services at Memorial Road.

Gus explained how helpful this was to have just one community. He said: 'You see that is one thing here with Kimberley, apart from Johannesburg or Cape Town, everybody identified himself with the appeals, everybody was a member of the shul, whereas in Johannesburg you could live there without being a member of any shul, without contributing a cent towards any funds because nobody knew who you were and where you were, whereas in a smaller community everybody knew who the next person was.'

There were official minsters in the Memorial Road Synagogue. The first minster that Gus remembers was Rev Harris Isaacs who served in Kimberley from before Gus was born until 1927 –

a record total of 33-years, and whom Gus says was a great influence on him. Read his story here: [Isaacs, Rev Harris](#). Gus with his close association with the synagogues and the community lived through many ministers. He says: I was involved with all of them, I found some of them easy to get on with, some were difficult to get on with.

Gus was on the committee of Griqualand West Hebrew Congregation from 1933 to 1939. In 1939, he became treasurer of the shul, in 1941 or '42 he became Vice-President, and in 1947 Gus became President for seven years till the end of 1954. In 1983 he was elected Honorary Life President.

June remembers that later on when a nursery school had been established, Gus had been reluctant to open the nursery school to non-Jewish children but as the community dwindled in the 1980s it was inevitable, and they had no choice but to do so, to keep the school viable. (Today 2021 it carries on and the children are nearly all black.)

June Haberfeld remembers Kimberley in its heyday – and the decline of the Kimberley community when she lived there from 1971 to 1991. She said: I remember arriving in shul the first Yom Tov in 1971 and the shul was so full that there wasn't a seat for me. In fact, I sat on the steps near my mother-in-law for two to three years eventually finding a place at the back on a chair. When I left, twenty years later, in December 1991 my younger daughter, Nadine, and I were the only two ladies upstairs!!!!

## **Gus and Cyril were involved in Cricket**

Gus says, 'I did not partake in sport at all, but I did take up cricket

umpiring when I was 19 and I umpired for 14 years.

Daughter-in-law June has a special cricket ball from the Cricket Authority, Wisden's that was presented to Gus. As the provincial umpire, and had lodged a query about a rule which they agreed to change. Thus, the inscribed cricket ball (right) that June and family still treasure. He became Secretary of the Old Pirates Sports Club that hosted Cricket and Rugby. His brother Cyril was a great wicket keeper who played for the local Griqualand West team. Apparently, many fingers were broken in the process!



## **The Jewish Guild** established in 1923.

Its objects were 'To encourage, maintain and cultivate amongst its members, intellectual, physical and artistic pursuits'. Gus said that there was an active social life for the young crowd of Jewish men and women, based around The Jewish Guild when he was a teenager and young man. This social club had been revitalised by Rev Maurice Konviser during his eight productive years Kimberley from 1927 to 1935. They put on plays, concerts, and debates, and held monthly dances. There were he says plenty of young Jewish girls in town to go out with.



The office bearers seem to have been the younger generation. The President was Harold Sagar, son of the President of the community William Sagar JP. The Chairman was Rev Maurice Konviser, Vice president J Herman, Treasurer Benjamin Asherson. The Secretaries were the Misses F and G Brenner, 25 Cape Town Road, Beaconsfield. The committee was Mrs Bessie Stoller, Mrs Goldstein, Miss P Herman, Mrs Hoffman, Miss S Konviser, Miss M Cohen, Mrs Julie Sagar, And Messrs Phil Price, H Israel, Jack Frank, Arnold Kretzmar and Adv D Cohen.

You can read about Rev Maurice Konviser in Kimberley here [Konviser, Rev Maurice](#)

## Hebrew Order of David

In November 1931, the Hebrew Order of David came to Kimberley. A new Lodge, No 29, was inaugurated and named for Louis Isaacson, a much loved and admired citizen (and Gus's boss and partner in business) who had died that year. The Lodge began as a Benefit Society. Members paid a weekly contribution according to their age and means, which entitled them to medical assistance, sick and Shiva pay. On the death of a member, the wife received a lump sum and the Lodge contributed to the erection of a tombstone.

During the Second World War many members enlisted in the Army and the Lodge went into recess until 1947 when was rededicated.

Rev Maurice Konviser, who had greatly



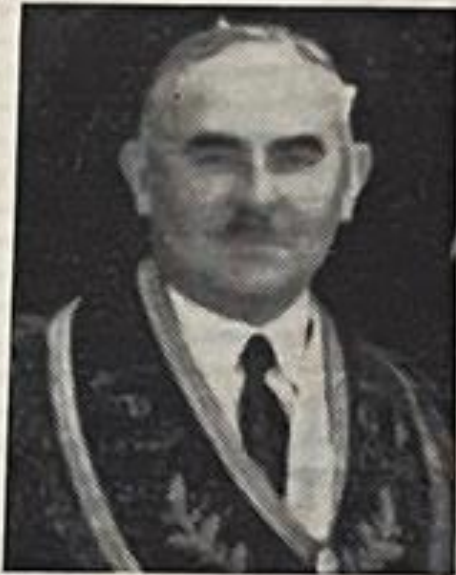
invigorated the community was probably the person who initiated this. Konviser became the first President and Gussie Haberfeld was its first Treasurer. Gus remained an honorary officer throughout its existence. He was President of the local lodge seven times. He became a member of the Grand Lodge in 1964 and eventually a life member of the Grand Lodge. The Hebrew Order of David gave him huge pleasure. (At the end of this story is a report of the Lodge activity in September 1964 – one of the times when Gus was President.)

Gus passed away in August 1986. This was just a few weeks before the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Boys High School where he was due to be the keynote speaker. He had been preparing a speech in Latin as he had done at his school farewell in 1921. Quite a feat! At his funeral, the Mayor at the time, remarked that Gus was 'one of Kimberly's finest sons'



Here below is a report on the Louis Isaacson Lodge from 1964 when Gus was President.

## LOUIS ISAACSON LODGE Kimberley



This year is a most momentous one in the history of the Hebrew Order of David. It marks the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the Mother Lodge. Since then the Order has grown in stature and members can be proud to be associated with an organisation that has done more than any other Jewish organisation to cement the bonds of "chaver-shaft" and brotherly love.

This year also marks the end of an epoch by the retirement of Wor. Bro. H. S. Blank, who has given more than half of the past sixty years in loyal self-sacrificing service to his brethren and the community in general. He will be greatly missed by all of us to whom he was more than the Grand Secretary.

It was our proud privilege to extend congratulations to Bro. Cecil Sussman who has been elected First Citizen of the city of Kimberley. He is the third member of our lodge to hold this distinguished position. To Bro. Archie Sandler we also extend a hearty Mazeltov on his election as President of the Kimberley Rotary Club and also as a member of the local School Board.

We were very sad to bid farewell to our dear Wor. Bro. Louis Segal, who had served the lodge so well and loyally as hon. Secretary for nearly ten years. For one in such advanced years he was a shining example of what can be achieved by dedicated service.



vice.

The highlight of the year's activities was the Second Degree raising at our June meeting. This was conducted entirely by our Past Presidents of whom there were eight present. It was a most impressive ceremony and an inspiration to all present

We join our brethren in the Order in offering our felicitations to the Grand Lodge on the forthcoming celebrations of the Diamond Jubilee and express the hope that the Order will continue on its path of progress, spreading the principles of unity, fraternity and goodwill.

We wish all our brethren a "Shana Tovah" filled with God's richest blessings.

— GUS HABERFELD

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## Cyril Haberfeld



Gus's younger brother Cyril also went to Kimberley Boys High School and left to join Louis Isaacson in the business as a traveller. He travelled for them all over the Northern Cape and Botswana. Abe Pollen was a partner in the business too. Cyril was a great cricketer playing for the province. He never married and lived with Anne and Gus in the house till a few years before he passed away, of emphysema in 1976.

Cyril was also the historian of the community and compiled its story in 1973 on the centenary of its establishment. (1873). You can read it here from the brochure that was produced for the occasion. [Centenary Brochure Cyril Haberfeld 1973](#)



## **Girlie (Henriette) Haberfeld**

Gus's sister Henrietta – known as Girlie, married Herman (Poddy) Shein on 27 November 1947

Girlie had waited all the war years for her boyfriend, Poddy Shein to come home. He had spent another year after the war ended in the DP camps in Italy helping to re-locate Jews from the Holocaust to Palestine.

In this typical group on the steps outside the Kimberley shul, are from the left: the parents of the three brothers, Poddy, Abie and Bennie Shein. (They spoke only Yiddish and Afrikaans) Girlie, the bride and Poddy the Groom. We think the bridesmaid was Bill Lurie's first wife and Cyril Haberfeld is on the end. Standing at the back are Gus and Anne. Girlie helped Poddy build up his white goods business. They had no children. Girlie passed away just five days after Poddy in 1996. Read their story here [Shein, Poddy](#).



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## **Ivor and June Haberfeld**

Ivor, son of Gus and Anne, was born in Kimberley, on 1 August 1935. He finished school at Boys' High and went to Wits University to study architecture, qualifying in 1961. He then went to London for seven years working for Denys Lasden, an architect of renown in England. He returned to

South Africa in 1968. He met June on a blind date in Johannesburg and they were married in March 1969. They settled in Kimberley and had three children.

June remembers Kimberley in its heyday – and the decline of the Kimberley community when she lived there from 1971 to 1991. She said: I remember arriving in shul the first Yom Tov in 1971 and the shul was so full that there wasn't a seat for me. In fact, I sat on the steps near my mother-in-law for 2 to 3 years eventually finding a place at the back on a chair. When I left, twenty years later, in December 1991 my younger daughter, Nadine, and I were the only two ladies upstairs!!!!

As Ivor had been an only child, his large and extended family including five grandchildren. gave him much pleasure. Both their daughters, Jenny and Nadine, are medical doctors, Jenny a radiologist and Nadine a GP. Their son Brandon is in computers with a local bank. They all live in Johannesburg very close to June.

Ivor sadly passed away in June 2018 after many years of suffering. In 2019 June said, 'My children and grandchildren went back to Kimberley a few weeks ago and had such a wonderful weekend of reminiscence. My children are the third generation Haberfelds at both Boys and Girls High Schools and had so much to see and show their own children. They were most impressed with the two Haberfeld Streets in Kimberley – one for each of Gussie's terms of office as Mayor!

June remarried, in January 2021. Barry Saffer, her new husband, had been a friend of Ivor's of many years. They live in Johannesburg close also to some of their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

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**Gussie Haberfeld family story** compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE,

**London, August 2021**

From texts and pictures sent by June Haberfeld/Saffer, Johannesburg

**Updated February 2022** from a transcript of an interview with Lynette Douglas in 1985,

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