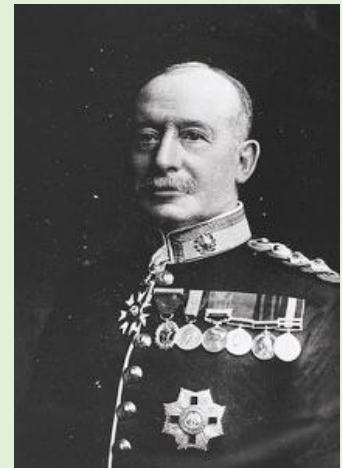


Colonel Sir David Harris (1852 – 1942)

Kimberley Pioneer

The Grand Old Man of South African Jewry



Read Sir David Harris's family story here: [Harris, Col Sir David](#)

Below is an article from the JTA published on November 4, 1931 on his 80th birthday and retirement from directorships.

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Cape Town (November 2 1931)

Colonel Sir David Harris, the "Grand Old Man" of South African Jewry, who will attain his 80th. birthday in July, has decided in view of his age to retire from business life, and he has therefore resigned his directorships of de Beers Consolidated Mines, which he has held for 40 years, the New Jagersfontein Mining and Exploration Company, which he has held for 30 years, the South African Diamond Corporation, the Kimberly Diamond-Cutting Company, the Premier Diamond Mining Company, the Griqualand West Diamond Mining Company, and the Bultfontein Consolidated Company.

When he retired from political life about three years ago, Sir David was the oldest member of the South African House of Parliament, having represented Kimberly in the Old Cape House and afterwards in the Union Assembly continuously for 32 years. Sir David will continue to reside in Kimberly, where he has lived since he came out from England at the age of 19

Born in London, he entered political life in 1897, on the death of Barny Barnato, who was his first cousin. It was he who in the Old Cape House of Parliament introduced the amendment into the Immigration Law recognising Yiddish in South Africa as a European language.

About a year ago, Sir David published a book of memoirs which appeared with a well known London firm of publishers, Messrs. Samson Low & Co., in which he traced his adventurous life and the many important people with whom he had been associated, like his cousin Barny Barnato, Cecil Rhodes, and Lord Plumer in his early days when he was a major in Matabeleland, and Sir David was a colonel and his superior officer, and gave him his first step to promotion, an action which Lord Plumer acknowledged in 1908 when Sir David visited him in Ireland, where he was the General-in-Command, and Lord Plumer gave a garrison mess dinner in his honour, and paid him a high tribute.

In Kimberley Sir David has retained close contact with the Jewish Community, has contributed largely to its funds and was responsible by his efforts and munificence for the buildings of the Kimberly Great Synagogue and the other communal buildings in the city. The site for the synagogue and the communal buildings was presented to the Jewish Community by Sir David's firm, the De Beers Company.

As a boy he was a member of the choir of the Great Synagogue in London, and in the course of his book he recalls that when Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild was visiting South Africa at the end of the South African War, he (Sir David) surprised the Baron by telling him that he had been present at his wedding, as one of the choir boys who had been selected for the choral service.

In the Boer War, Colonel Harris was the Commander of the Kimberley Town Guard, and he planned practically all the fortifications and the mines that guarded the town, and it was largely due to him that the town was kept from falling to the Boers. If Kimberley had fallen, it was said, there would have been a general rising in Cape Colony and South Africa might have been lost to the British Empire.

In an interview with the J.T.A. representative here to-day, Sir David expressed profound contempt for those Jews who wish to disguise or disown their race. Those people in this country who think that their religion is a bar to entrance into society are mistaken, he said. People only think less of them because of that. In any case they cannot disguise their features. Wherever they are, one can always see in them the Rav, the Chazan, the Shochet or the choir-boy, alluding to his own membership of a synagogue choir. At the same time, he concluded, Jews must not isolate themselves from the rest of the Community, and while remembering their religion they must also remember their citizenship of the country in which they live.

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To read Harris' account of a Diamond Fields Campaign click here
<http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol106dh.html>

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