

WHEN GOLDA MEIR visited Zambia in Central Africa in 1964, she went to see the Victoria Falls, the prime tourist attraction of that spacious, copper-rich land, and one of Africa's most spectacular sights. After staring at the mighty Zambesi River precipitously plunging at a million gallons of water per second into the gorge below, while a majestic rainbow illuminated the clouds of spray, Golda's *heimische* comment was, "Such a lot of water wasted!"

Mrs. Meir had come to Zambia to participate in the independence celebrations of the newly-proclaimed republic. Formerly known as the British Protectorate of Northern Rhodesia, and later, one of the three members of the now-dissolved Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Zambia was inaugurated into nationhood with much fanfare and patriotic fervour on United Nations Day, October 24, 1964.

After Golda Meir's visit - she was Israel's foreign minister then - hundreds of Israeli experts arrived in Zambia to provide technical assistance in such fields as agriculture, poultry raising, construction and police training.

But Jews had been living in what is now Zambia long before the Israelis came. Larger than Texas, situated on a high, temperate plateau, the sparsely-settled land comprises 73 different African tribes. It was said that the Jews became the 74th.

At the turn of the century, the legendary Susman brothers, Harry and Elie, youthful emigrants from a *shtetl* in Lithuania, were the first Jews to enter Northern Rhodesia. Scarcely out of their teens, the Susmans trekked northward out of South Africa laden in an ox-wagon with salt, beads and other goods for bartering. Crossing the wide Zambesi upriver from the Victoria Falls, the two Yiddish-speaking brothers made friends with tribal chiefs and gradually built up a thriving trade of



Lusaka Jewish leader Maurits Prinz greets Zambian vice president Kamenge at independence ceremonies, 1964.

# THE 74th TRIBE

JACK GOLDFARB traces the history of Zambia's Jews.

sion of the copper industry. They supplied badly-needed transport, opened shops and hotels, and provided many essential services. Jewish small businessmen came down from the neighbouring Katanga pro-

all within an easy hour's ride of each other. As one extended family, the Copperbelt Jews collectively celebrated *simhas* and fetes, cared for one another during grim outbreaks of black water fever, and formed

At around that time, the capital of Northern Rhodesia was moved from disease-ridden Livingstone to the more salubrious climate of Lusaka, near the centre of the landlocked country. Surrounded by savanna in-

numbered 1,500 souls at their peak in the mid-'50s, have moved on to other lands.

The urbanized younger generation went abroad for higher education, and stayed abroad. Parents followed. Other families emigrated to Israel and South Africa. As the community slowly diminished, the synagogues along the Copperbelt closed down, one by one. In Kitwe the building was leased to the Seventh Day Adventists. In Ndola it was sold to the Salvation Army.

WHEN RECENTLY I wanted to visit the Lusaka synagogue on the corner of Katilunga and Cha Cha Roads, no one seemed to know where the key was. But the door of the adjacent building, the former Jewish communal hall, was open. The hall had been added on to accommodate overflow worshippers on holidays. It was now a nursery school for African children. As I came through the door, the bright-eyed youngsters glanced up quizzically at the stranger, then went back to their colouring books. High on the wall a faded Star of David was still visible.

At the connecting doors that once led from the communal hall to the synagogue, I twisted the handles sharply. A latch clicked. I pushed hard on the door and felt the resistance of heavy objects. As they shifted backwards, I managed to thread my way through jumbled stacks of tables and chairs that had been lodged against the door to secure it.

On the grainy wooden benches, piles of prayer-books were mantled in dust. A few scattered chinks of sunlight that penetrated through the drawn window-blinds did nothing to dispel the atmosphere of sad disuse. The derelict room was crammed with the muffled echoes of a bygone era.

One of the black nursery teachers came in to assure me smilingly that