THE 7th PRIDE

JACK GOLDFARB traces the history of Zambia's Jews.

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 goods for cattle.

Moving the cattle southward, however, was always a hazardous journey. The Susman's dug-out boats and flat river craft were often attacked by wallowing hippopotamuses, and the cattle herds were frequently stalked and stampeded by hungry lions. No lesser perils in those days were tsetse flies, malaria, and the dreaded black water fever.

Eventually, the enterprising Susmans established extensive cattle ranches, farms, factories, sawmills and a chain of hotels. Their one venture into mining was abortive. Judging claims they had staked in the copperbelt to be of little value, they sold them to a prospector for £500. Today, one of the most productive coppermines in Zambia operates on the site.

THE EARLIEST Jewish community in Northern Rhodesia was established in the town of Livingstone, a few miles north of the Victoria Falls. In 1905, when the newly-laid railway line, extending from South Africa, reached Livingstone, an active Jewish congregation was already there. When the first *huppa* was raised at a wedding in the town in 1910, the Livingstone Jews numbered 38 out of a total population of 260.

Late in the 1920s, the basic economy of Northern Rhodesia was radically transformed by the discovery of huge deposits of copper near the border with the former Belgian Congo. A cluster of little towns in this district burgeoned overnight. The gleam of the Copperbelt lured droves of immigrants from Southern Rhodesia, South Africa and overseas.

Jews contributed much to the growth of the towns and the expansion 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 province of the Congo, where they had settled years before. Scores of Jewish workers and their families settled in the mining towns of Kitwe, Ndola, Chingola, Mufulira and Luanshya, taking jobs as miners, plumbers, electricians and truck drivers. Jewish traders travelled from the Copperbelt far out into the bush country where whites were seldom seen.

In the towns, most merchants lived behind their stores. The womenfolk cooked over fires outdoors. Toilets were some distance away, demanding a constant watch for venomous snakes.

The bustling commercial activity and the mild climate of the Copperbelt soon made the region the vibrant centre of Northern Rhodesian Jewish life.

Former residents of the Copperbelt recall with nostalgia how closely-knit the Jewish communities were in those days. The towns were 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 lifetime friendships.

WORLD WAR II brought a new stream of immigrants, German Jews seeking a haven from Hitlerism. Denied entry by South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, these wandering refugees were ultimately accepted by Northern Rhodesia.

Their acceptance by the Jewish community – mostly of Litvak origin – was not immediate, however. Fearing competition from a more educated and sophisticated group whose work ethic and culture were unfamiliar to them, the earlier settlers were slow to extend a welcoming hand.

Elana Turtledove, who grew up in Luanshya, remembers how impressed she was as a child seeing these better-dressed, better-mannered Jews who spoke a language resembling Yiddish, but sounding more cultivated.

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 uplands, four thousand feet above sea level, Lusaka grew slowly, as did its small Jewish population. In 1942, a gleaming white synagogue with hundreds of little windows was consecrated in the centre of town.

FOUR DECADES later, Lusaka is known as "Africa's fastest-growing city." Its population has quadrupled since independence, reaching over 700,000 today. The cleanliness of its broad streets, lined with jacaranda and bougainvillea trees, the promise in its skyscrapers along the main Cairo Road, the exotic landscape of the Munda Wanga Botanical Gardens, and the diversity of religions manifested in an Anglican cathedral, a Catholic church, a Hindu temple, a mosque and a synagogue, all add to the charm of this pleasant capital of a young nation of six million people.

But today, the majority of the Jews of Lusaka, and of Zambia, who

(Below) Synagogue in Ndola, in the heart of the Rhodesian copperbelt, the country's major business centre.

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 prayers were still being held, at least once or twice a year, on holidays whose names she couldn't remember. The synagogue was always clean and orderly then, she insisted.

My attention focused on the beautifully-wrought copper panels of the ark doors. Ancient Judaic motifs had been hammered into the sheets of reddish-brown metal: Stars of David, menoras, the Ten Commandments. The artwork had been handcrafted by a man named Ephraim Grill, who, I was told, had been a plumber by calling. On the raised *bima* in the centre of the room stood two ornamental candlesticks with wide-brimmed crowns, fashioned, of course, out of resplendent copper.

FOR MANY YEARS, Lusaka was without a full-time rabbi, and services were conducted in this 200-seat house of worship by an Amsterdam-born, amiable scholar named Maurits Prins. A layman himself, Prins came from a family of sages and religious educators which included the distinguished 19th-century, German-Jewish exponent of Orthodoxy, Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch.

After living in New York and London in his youth, Prins came to Lusaka in 1954, attracted by its excellent climate. As a "neutral" Dutch Jew, he served as president of the Lusaka congregation for 12 years, and succeeded with humour and tact in bringing the Litvak and German members of the community much closer together. A man of many *yarmulkes*, Prins also catered to all the religious needs of the Lusaka Jews.

He likewise built bridges to the