

## The Lustig Family Torah

The Lustig family Torah was probably from Unsleben Germany and given to the Fechenbach synagogue by the Lustig family in the middle of the 1800's. The Fechenbach synagogue was probably built in 1832 (the synagogue book was started in that year). The first Lustigs to live in Fechenbach probably arrived around the time of the marriage of Loeb Lustig to Adelheid Kaufmann in 1853 in nearby Wurzburg. Loeb and Adelheid Lustig were the first of the Lustigs to live in Fechenbach.

The Torah is a large Torah for being from the early to middle 1800's. The print is excellent with the letters very easy to read, with no unusual elongation of letters to fill the full width of each row in a column.

In the 19th century, the number of Jewish residents in Fechenbach were as follows: In 1814 – sixty eight, in 1837 - seventy, in 1867 - sixty one, in 1871 - fifty one, in 1880 - thirty two, in 1899 again thirty two in eight households, and again in 1910 - thirty two. In 1924 there were only 20 Jews and regular services were not longer being held for lack of a minyon ( 10 males over the age of 13 ). In 1899 there were only six children of school age in the Fechenbach Jewish community.



The last of the Lustig family in Fechenbach was the family of Leser Lustig. He passed away in October 1931 and his widow Sophie Lustig continued living there until she was taken to Theresienstadt in 1942. Sophie survived the war.

Adolf Lustig, Leser's nephew, had grown up and left Fechenbach in the early 1900's to continue his education in nearby Wurzburg. He eventually became a solicitor, and settled and became married in Munich. In 1933 while living in Munich under Nazi rule, Adolf lost his ability to practice law, however he continued to live off his savings. On May 22<sup>nd</sup> 1937, Adolf was arrested since he was an honorary secretary of the local B'nai Brith. He was then sent to the infamous Dachau concentration camp a few kilometers outside Munich. He was released on August 14<sup>th</sup> 1937, and in April 1938 packed up his family to leave Germany.

While Adolf and his wife Kate were packing to go to Australia, members of The Bavarian Association of Jewish Congregations brought over a wooden box and deposited it in their living room, and said to take it to Australia. In 1974 Kate Lustig recalled:

“While the packers carried our furniture and belongings downstairs to the lift for Australia, they complained to me that the closed nailed down box (with the scroll inside) was too heavy and I answered laughingly: there is GOLD in it!! They looked at each other till the foreman nodded that the box be put into our lift.”

Adolf and Kate and their children Ruth, Bernd and Ludwig arrived in Australia on June 4<sup>th</sup> 1938. Shortly after arriving Ludwig's name was changed to Lewis. About three weeks after arriving, on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1938, Adolf and Kate wrote to Temple Beth Israel and offered to donate the family Torah. The board of Temple Beth Israel responded on July 20<sup>th</sup> 1938 that they humbly accepted the gift. It was officially received in a ceremony on Rosh Hashanah 5699, September 26<sup>th</sup> 1938.

At shabbat services on August 12<sup>th</sup> 1978, Rabbi Levi at Temple Beth Israel talked about the two holocaust scrolls that had been donated to the synagogue in 1938. The other scroll was from Rabbi Herbert Saenger. In a letter to Rabbi Levi, Kate Lustig commented on the sermon and recalled the story of the Torah and how it was brought out of Germany and to Temple Beth Israel. Adolf Lustig had since passed away in 1962. On April 25<sup>th</sup> 2004, Kate's son Lewis also sent his recollections of bringing the Torah out of Germany, to then President of Temple Beth Israel, Mrs. Kathy Kaplan.

Since arriving in Melbourne, several descendants of Adolf and Kate Lustig have read from the Torah for their b'nai mitzvot including their son Lewis Lustig. For the b'nai mitzvot of Adolf and Kate's grandchildren, Danny Lustig (1974), Anne Picus (1976) and Richard Lustig (1979), the Torah was brought to Temple Beth Israel's sister congregation the Leo Baeck Center in East Kew. In addition, Adolf's great-grandchildren Jeremy Lustig (2006), Steven Lustig (2008) and Kate Lustig (2011) read from the Torah for their b'nai mitzvot at Temple Beth Israel.

In 2015, Brayden Lustig, Adolf Lustig's great-grandson, was preparing for his forthcoming bar-mitzvah to be held at Caulfield Shule, about 1km away from Temple Beth Israel. His father Richard Lustig, Lewis' son, asked whether it was possible to use the family Sefer Torah for this purpose. They said yes, provided that it was checked first to see that it was in order. Richard had it checked by the Caulfield Shule Sofer. The ink was found to have materially faded so that it couldn't be used. Hence Brayden used a Caulfield Shule Sefer Torah for his bar mitzvah.

The family considered that it was worthwhile to have it fixed. The Caulfield Shule Sofer organised for the Sefer Torah to be sent (minus the handles) to a Yeshiva in Jerusalem, and for a scholar to re-ink the whole scroll. The process took several months, and Lewis and his wife Eve covered the costs for the repairs. The Sefer Torah was returned, the handles were re-attached, and it was replaced back at Temple Beth Israel where it still is now.

The Torah is still used on occasion for Lustig family events, but due to its age not used on a regular basis. It is well over 170 years old and possibly as many as 200 years old. There is an inscription around the base of the handles: "Saved from the Holocaust by Dr. Adolf and Kate Lustig from Fechenbach Am Main 1938".



Sources:

- Lustig family history 1700 – 1800s – Bernie King-Smith February 2023
- Early Adolf Lustig and Fechenbach history - Bernie King-Smith February 2023
- Torah donation June 29th 1938.pdf – From Ruth King-Smith
- Lustig Torah story August 13th 1978.pdf – From Ruth King-Smith
- Lustig Torah correspondence to TBI April 25 2004.pdf – Letter to Bernie King-Smith from Lewis Lustig