

Royal Western Australian Historical Society's
Annual Pioneers Memorial Service
on Sunday 7th June 1987 at St Bartholomews Chapel, East Perth Cemeteries,

Commemorating Louis Hyam Seeligson

Citation by Louise Hoffman

The pioneer grave to be honoured is that of the infant son of Louis and Lily Seeligson, Louis Hyam Seeligson, who passed away on 1st September 1896.

He is buried in that small portion of the East Perth Cemetery which was set aside as a Jewish burial ground in 1867. The grant of land was made on the application of Abraham Rosenberg, Isaac Harris and Henry Seeligson. This was the first evidence of any organized Jewish activity in Western Australia despite the presence of some Jewish settlers from the earliest days of the Colony.

The Western Australian Census figures indicate very few Jews in the first fifty years of settlement.

In 1859 the presence of 72 Jews, Mahometans and Infidels was recorded. In 1870, including 4 who were held in convict prisons and outstations, a total of 57 Jews was counted. By 1891 there were 129 Jews of whom 82 were male and 47 female. In 1901 the Jewish population of Western Australia had grown to 1259.

In 1887 a Hebrew Congregation was formed at Fremantle followed by the formation of the Perth Hebrew Congregation in 1892. Congregations were established in the last decade of the 19 century at Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie. In 1896 the Perth Hebrew Congregation commenced; the building of a Synagogue in Brisbane Street, Perth. It was consecrated on its completion in the following year by Rabbi D.I.; Freedman who was its first Minister.

The establishment and practice of Judaism in Western Australia owes; much to the efforts of a small group of pioneer Jewish families dedicated to the task of founding a community wherein they could provide all the facilities and services needed to maintain their Jewish religion.

The Seeligsons were one of those families and the name Seeligson is still closely associated with the Western Australian Jewish Community which benefits from their initiative and generosity. Phineas Seeligson, elder brother of Louis, and uncle to Louis Hyam, bequeathed the greater part of his Estate to the Trusteeship of the Perth Hebrew. Congregation for the purpose of helping to meet the spiritual, educational and philanthropic needs of the Jewish Community.

When Louis Hyam Seeligson died in September 1896 he was able to be buried in consecrated ground according to the proper custom of Judaism. This was due in large part to the efforts of his family and others like them determined to keep alive in this remote corner of the world the ancient traditions and principles of the Jewish faith.