



# Perth Jewish Roots

Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society of Western Australia Inc (JHGS-WA)

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## NEWSLETTER

## JUNE 2025

Welcome to our June newsletter and to advise that our next General Meeting will be held on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2025

Please NOTE there is a **CHANGE of VENUE** on this occasion.

This meeting is now being held at the Perth Hebrew Congregation (PHC).

Entrance is only through the car park in Plantation Street, Menora.

**RSVP** is required for Security Purposes.

Michelle – M:0418 910 258 or email: [michelle.urban@jhgsa.org.au](mailto:michelle.urban@jhgsa.org.au)

Entry fee for JHGS-WA Members: \$5.00 / Non-Members: \$10.00. Usual time 1.30pm for 2.00pm start

**Our Guest Speaker is Rabbi Dan Lieberman**  
**his subject being Rabbi David Isaac Freedman**  
**“The ANZAC Rabbi”**

**Rabbi David Isaac  
Freedman OBE, BA, VD, JP**



RABBI D. I. FREEDMAN



**Wedding of Rabbi David Freedman married to  
Florence Cohen in 1897**

## **Forthcoming Events - Don't forget to Diarise !**

Or ring Michelle M: 0418 910 258 [michelle.urban@jhgsa.org.au](mailto:michelle.urban@jhgsa.org.au)

**Meetings being held in July, August and October are back at  
Noranda Chabad Synagogue**

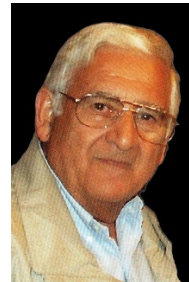


**David Ganon OAM.**

presents

*"An Early Childhood in Egypt  
and Exodus to Australia"*

**Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2025**



**Mackie (Max) Machlin OAM**

presents

*"Machlin Family earliest history  
Including the Menora Theatre &  
Picture Theatre in the 1950s"*

**Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> August 2025**

### **2025 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

It's that time of year again!

**Sunday 24 August 2025**

**1.00pm start**

**at**

**Chabad Noranda Synagogue**

**President, Vice-President & Committee  
Positions ALL vacant**

Why not participate in the Society's decision-making  
process and your ability to express opinions on  
significant issues and make an impact on the future  
direction of the Society.



RSVP: Michelle on

M: 0418 910 258 or

E: [michelle.urban@jhgsa.org.au](mailto:michelle.urban@jhgsa.org.au)



## CHRISTINE SILBERT

On 25 May 2025, a packed audience at the Noranda Chabad Shul were informed and entertained in equal measure with a talk by Christine Silbert, for the Jewish Historical & Genealogical Society (JHGS-WA) presentation series.

Her topic was her own Silbert family and recently self-published book:

### ***“How Did I Get Here?”***



The Silberts have become a prominent Perth family since the arrival in 1886 of their ancestor Abraham Silbert, who came from Bialystok in Poland. Christine reckons to have identified 135 Silberts to be descended from this one Jewish forbear! She surmised that he most probably left his homeland because murderous pogroms were beginning then across the vast Russian Empire. At the time of his leaving, Bialystok was a centre rich in Jewish culture, with 60,000 Jewish inhabitants and 17 or 18 synagogues. Of course, as we now well know, those Jewish citizens who chose to stay, did not do well.

Christine talked about the challenges faced in writing her story of the Silberts who made our State their home. She emphasised the importance of her having made contact with distant relatives and others who were able to add to the information she had gathered from

conversations with her immediate family. Very important too is to question older family members whilst still with us. From them you can learn something of the character of your ancestors, more than their dates of birth, employments and other such facts. Christine said that central to her quest was to discover what her forbears had been like as “real” people.

But of course, if like Christine, you embark on this quest as did she only in her 60’s, now having reached her 80<sup>th</sup>, the opportunity will be forever lost.

Christine concluded the talk with her encouragement for us take up the challenge of writing our family histories for publication. This will take us on a “wonderful journey of discovery and hitherto unknown connections, even outside the family”. She hoped it would inspire us to make a start on gathering precious photos and recollections. As she said in her closing words: “just do it, do it, do it!”



Christine Silbert with  
Hilary Silbert

*Michael Anderson*



Silbert family photos over the years

**MEET MINNIE MASEL**  
**29 May 2025 in Fremantle People**  
Article from the Fremantle Shipping News  
An online magazine all about Freo

*In this article Hilary tells the story of her Grandmother, wife of Barney Silbert  
Minnie Silbert nee Masel. A lovely tale!*

The person Barney Silbert would eventually marry, Minnie, was the youngest daughter of Bella and Joseph Masel.

Minnie, or Chai, Masel was born in December 1886. Chai is a Hebrew word meaning “life” in English and often associated with good luck and blessings. It was a good luck charm for Minnie!

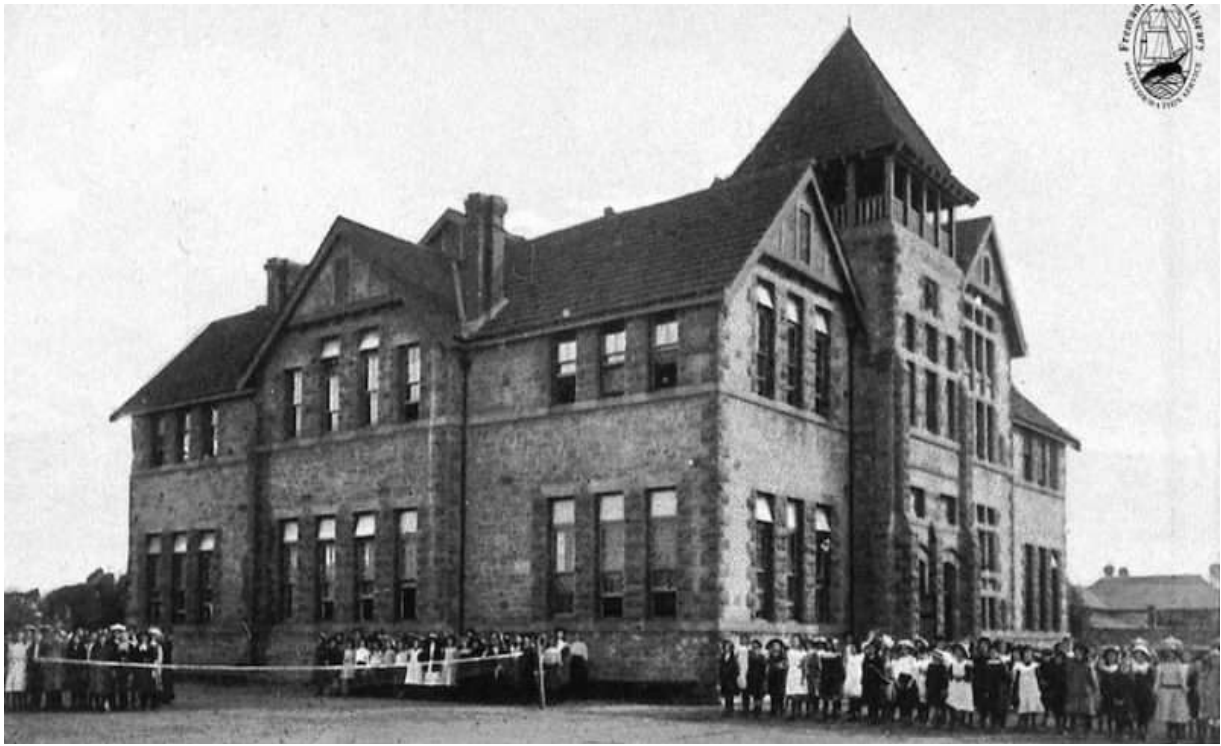
Minnie’s father Joseph, and eldest son Essau, left Europe and sailed to Adelaide to settle ahead of the family joining them. In October 1889, Joseph’s wife Bella left Bremen for Adelaide on the “Hohenzollern”, accompanied by their daughters, Fanny, Eva, Lena, Esther (Pese) and Minnie (3), and by Joseph’s brother Chaim Masel.

The ship’s manifest lists the nine Masels as “British” and travelling steerage as “labourers and domestics”, even though they were Russian and included seven children under 13 years of age!  
So much for historical accuracy.



Young Minnie at her oldest brother’s wedding. She is front row left.  
Her parents Bella and Joseph are to the left of the bride

The family lived in Adelaide until 1893 when Joseph and Bella, their children and Joseph’s brother and sister all moved to Fremantle. Minnie, known to her family as Minox, was educated at Loreto Convent in Claremont and then Princess May School in Fremantle, which was built in 1854 in Adelaide Street and is now heritage listed.



Princess May Girls School, Fremantle. Courtesy Fremantle History Library

Her education in the widest sense was continued when in 1910 she was taken on a business trip to Europe, including Antwerp and Paris, with her father, who was a diamond buyer for Perth firms Levinsons, Stewart Dawson and Caris Brothers.

Joseph was also a champion chess player and while in France won competitions. He taught Minnie to play chess and became her first business mentor.

On 5 March 1913, as stated on their marriage licence: Barney Silbert, storekeeper of 94 High Street, Fremantle, son of Jacob Sholam Silbert ("retired gentleman") and Tamara Rachel Trinkovski, married Minnie Masel, daughter of Joseph Masel, storekeeper and Bella Kabuk.

In fact, by that time, Minnie was in business at the High Street address while engaged to Barney. The shop, Dainty Lady, on the corner of Pakenham Street next to the Commercial Hotel, sold china, jewellery and watches. It was mentioned in the newspapers of the day due to being robbed twice.

The first home for Minnie and Barney was 75 Solomon Street, Beaconsfield. In 1914 they bought land on the south side of Ellen Street from Mrs Alice Pearse and by 1920 had built a federation home at No.74. Today the home exists as No.55 and is a magnificent example of a Federation house of the period. It is beautifully restored with neat gardens featuring the roses Barney loved.





The Ellen Street home built by Minnie and Barney

Keith, Minnie and Barney's first born, was three when they moved in. Then in 1922 Eric was born in the front room.

One memory from son Eric was in regard to the regular Bridge parties held at their home. Bridge was an important social occasion and the house was filled with bridge tables inside and on the large verandah. Eric as a child would place the snacks on the tables before going to bed at the back of the home.

During World War II it is believed the house was requisitioned by the US Navy, and Minnie and Barney moved to Nedlands, though did not sell the Fremantle house until 1946. They bought land further down their street to build the "Ellen Court" apartments, with Minnie obtaining one of the last set of approvals granted during the war. The block of apartments is still there today.

Both Barney and Minnie were well known in Fremantle business and sports communities. Minnie was on the committee of the Fremantle Ladies Croquet Club. She only had to walk across Ellen Street to play croquet or to bowl. In four years of playing croquet, she won the novice championship, B grade State championship and, in 1927, was A grade champion of the Fremantle Club.

In participating in Bowls, she won first prize for mixed fours at East Fremantle Bowling Club; was the first secretary of the Fremantle Ladies Bowling Club; and was in the 1938 Fremantle Women's Bowls A grade pennant team.



Minnie was first violinist for Perth Symphony Orchestra, the future WASO

Minnie was also an accomplished musician. She was first violinist in the Fremantle and Perth Symphony Orchestra, the predecessor to the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra, and gave many performances in Fremantle Town Hall.

She played golf and chess, as well, and was a prolific reader, being a member of the Fremantle Literary Institute.

In 1913, when Minnie and Barney started work at the corner Barney Silbert's Shoe Store, Herb Oxbrow established Pellews across the road. This was four years after Frank Gibson opened Gibson's Pharmacy.

In 1968, these three businesses were said to be the oldest shops still operating in Fremantle, according to the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary feature on Barney Silbert's Shoe Store of that year.

Minnie was closely involved in the shoe store business, serving in the store for many years and looking after sales side during World War II when her two sons were away in the services. Apparently, the shoe store was quite close to a shop selling ice cream. When it was quiet in the shoe shop, one of the girls would quickly purchase vanilla ice creams and smuggle them back to work in a shoebox with holes in the base for the cones. They didn't really think they fooled Mrs Silbert !

Eric believed his mother worked because she liked it. “Without a doubt she enjoyed the business world and didn’t like housekeeping”.

My memory of my grandmother is of her wearing a fox fur wrap, complete with fox head!

Minnie was to live on five more years after Barney died, to 1959. If it is possible to have a choice in how you die, Minnie achieved it: she dressed for bed one night and was found sitting peacefully in the bedside chair the next morning.

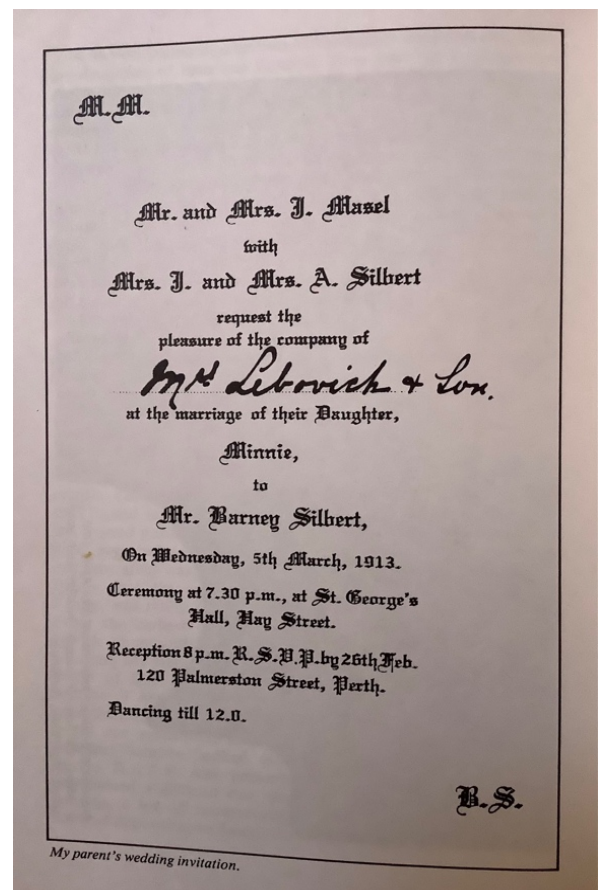
So, wouldn’t it be wonderful to join Minnie (Chai) and Barney (Beril) at the Old Synagogue restaurant building in Fremantle today, proposing a toast at the bar L’Chaim to their lives and their achievements!

*by Hilary Silbert*

*Hilary is the Granddaughter of Minnie and Barney Silbert and daughter of Eric Silbert*



*Minnie Silbert (nee Masei), my mother.*



*My parent's wedding invitation.*

*Wedding Invitation Minnie Masei to marry Barney Silbert Wednesday 5 March 1913*