

## The Barnetts in Sydney

This topic revolves around Mordecai's 4<sup>th</sup> daughter, Catherine who married Isaac Barnett in 1869. However, to talk about this, I really need to give some context.

Isaac's father was Asher Barnett and he had 2 brothers and 2 sisters all born in London (1806 – 1824). I just want to talk briefly about the 3 brothers.

**Samuel** (the oldest) married Rachel the daughter of Judah Solomon. Therein lies an interesting tale which I won't cover here other than to say that Judah was the founder of the Hobart Synagogue (look up Judah Solomon). Samuel arrived in Hobart in 1831 with his wife and 3 children (8 more were born in Hobart). He became a pub owner (often buying and selling), took off to California in late 1840's (on the gold trail), then moved the whole family to Melbourne in the mid 1850s

**Barnett** (the youngest son) was a baker in Petticoat Lane. He married Ann Myers and they had 4 children. Had a run in with the law where he was on trial for receiving stolen goods, found not guilty and then moved to Melbourne in the late 1850s. Wife and children stayed behind. There was a bank robbery (Union Bank) in Melbourne around that time and he spent a couple of years inside for receiving stolen notes. In Melbourne he was a grocer. Very wealthy, also Saqui family.

**Asher** (the middle son). Also a baker. Lived in Petticoat lane. Married Catherine Barnett. Had 11 children. Isaac was the oldest. Asher went to debtors jail in London but eventually someone paid his debts and he was released. Went to Australia with 2 or 3 of the older children in the late 1850's. He became a confectioner in Melbourne and was also known as a "shipper". I guess importing goods.

So by the late 1850's all 3 Barnett brothers were in Melbourne. Asher went back to London and later made another trip to Melbourne then returned for good to London.

Isaac (my great grandfather) stayed in Melbourne and aged about 17 set up as a grocer in Melbourne with some business dealings in Bendigo, however around 1860 he too got into financial trouble and ended up in debtors prison. Around 1861 he moved to Dunedin, New Zealand to start a grocery business in partnership with William Jones. In 1862 this partnership was dissolved. So no great business luck so far, but I think it was par for the course in those days.

Isaac's next venture was to form a partnership with Barnett Levy ("Barnett & Levy") selling groceries from premises in Queen street, the main street of Auckland. (*Not to be confused with Barnet Levey who is considered to be the 1<sup>st</sup> Jewish free settler, arriving in 1821 in Sydney. Also considered the father of theatre in Australia and built the Theatre Royal in Sydney in 1833. Also built Waverly House, 1<sup>st</sup> in the district of Waverly*). Details of this significant operation can be seen in newspapers starting in 1865 and continuing through the next decade.

Precisely how Isaac met Catherine is not known (yet), but certainly Simon Lipstine and Myers & Solomon were all doing business in Auckland and I'm sure Isaac who was doing incredibly well by the late 1860's was a good catch. Isaac and Catherine were married in 1869 in Sydney (at Sarah and George Myer's home in Strawberry Hills) and then returned to Auckland to start a family and continue in business. Whilst living in Auckland they started an almost yearly production of children. Asher (1870), Elizabeth (1871), Rosetta (1872), Jane (1873), Henry (1874), Sarah (1876), Esther (1877) were born there. During

this time the family lived at Eden Crescent which was known as the street where many wealthy merchants lived and less than 1km from his business in Queen Street (the main street of Auckland city).

Whilst Catherine was busy rearing the children, Isaac was planning his next move. Their business premises were located next to the Theatre Royal in Queens Street. In 1876 Barnett & Levy purchased the Theatre Royal and totally rebuilt it into "the first theatre of any note in the Dominion" (Isaac's obituary in the Sydney Morning Herald 1912), also "a magnificent theatre, one of the largest and best in the colony" (Auckland Star 1876). Held about 1500 people, used for civic receptions etc.

About a year later Messrs Barnett & Levy were forced into bankruptcy. The reasons aren't clear as their liabilities of about 20,000 pounds was well-covered by their assets. Their predicament seemed to be precipitated by a credit squeeze brought on by the banks. Commercially this insolvency was significant and was well reported on both sides of the Tasman. It was following this event (and must likely because of it) that Isaac and Catherine moved their family to Sydney. Both Barnett and Levy had given personal guarantees when taking loans from the bank so I would assume they were cleaned out.

Once settled down again in Sydney the family production line began once more. Born in Sydney were Ellen (1878), Montague (1880), George (1882), Frances (1883), Alfred (1886), Isidore (1887), Oscar (1889). During most of this period the family lived at "Surry Lodge", Glenmore Rd., Paddington

Barnett & Levy once more commenced trading, this time in Sydney. In 1878 a notice appeared in the SMH indicating that their partnership (of their business operation in Sydney) had been dissolved and that Isaac would pay all outstanding debts and continue trading as I. Barnett and Co., from 620 George Street. This business became insolvent in 1883. Isaac also set up his grocery operation in Newcastle, but longer term it failed. Catherine died in 1896 and Isaac in 1912.

Of their 14 children –

- 1 died as an infant

- 5 stayed single

- 3 married and moved to NZ

- 3 married and stayed in Sydney

- 16 grandchildren

- 26 great grandchildren