JOSEPH KRONHEIMER IN AUSTRALIA

Dr Paul Gardner

Joseph Kronheimer   (portrait in the Austin Research Institute)

Joseph Kronheimer is listed by the Harburg Project as the third child of Moses Hajum Kronheimer and his first wife Margolis (nee Freundlich). Joseph was born in Schopfloch on 6 July 1826. He is described as a "furrier". According to the Harburg Project, he married around 1851, but the family tree does not identify his wife. This statement surprised me, as the family knowledge in Australia (supported by newspaper reports) was that he was single.

The Harburg list notes that he left Schopfloch "after 1860". There is no mention of a destination, although in the case of his older sister Michle (Mina), the wife of Raphael Hoechstaedter, the list notes that the couple "emigrated to Australia about 1860". I have not been able to find any later information about them.

Migration. Many documents are available that describe various aspects of Joseph's life. He migrated to Melbourne, the capital of the newly established Colony of Victoria. (Half a century later, the colony would become a state of Australia.) The precise date of his emigration is unknown; I would estimate it was between the late 1850s and 1860. He was certainly well-established in business by 1865. He was interested in gold-mining in the early years. (His nephew Max Kronheimer, who arrived in Melbourne in 1860, was described as a "gold-seeker" on the shipping record.) However, Joseph's major business interest was clearly the importation and sale of high quality tobacco, a product that was in much demand and short supply. (At one stage in the early history of the colony of Queensland, at a time of shortage of coins and notes, many people temporarily used Kronheimer tobacco as a substitute currency!)

J. Kronheimer & Co.   Over a period of fifty years, Joseph (with support from family members and business colleagues) developed his Melbourne-based business into a major enterprise that spanned the continent, eventually merging with the Sydney-based cigarette manufacturing and distribution company, W.D. & H.O Wills at the beginning of the 20th
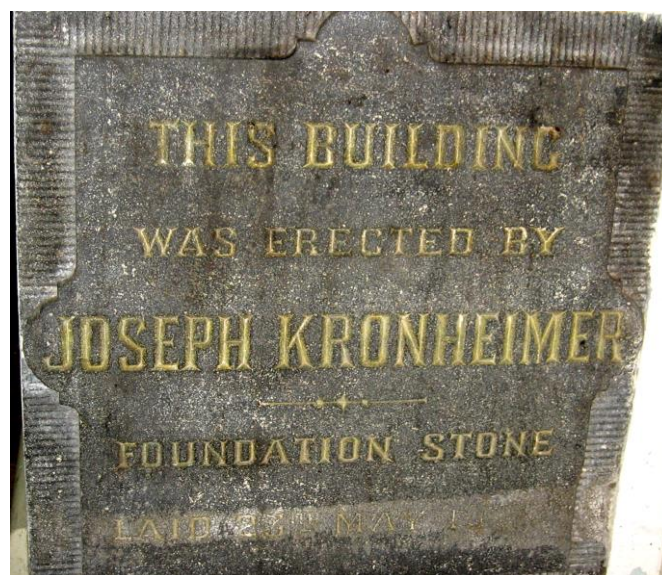
Century. At this point, the conglomerate controlled 85% of the tobacco trade in Australia. Critics attacked it as a monopoly, a cartel. The company defended itself by arguing that it was a voluntary merger of many small businesses who saw advantages in more efficient methods of distribution.

Philanthropist. As the business progressed, Joseph grew extremely wealthy, and he became a generous philanthropist, donating considerable amounts of money to local synagogues, the United Jewish Education Board, numerous charitable organisations (Jewish and in the wider community), and various hospitals. He also gave a substantial sum to an orphanage in Jerusalem, then under the rule of the Ottoman Empire.

In 1903, he donated £5000 to the Austin Hospital in the Melbourne suburb of Heidelberg, the amount being sufficient to pay for the entire costs of constructing a hospital wing for tuberculosis patients. The hospital was the only one in Australia that provided for the care of chronically ill patients. A silent film clip about the tuberculosis wing, made in 1928, can be viewed on-line at http://aso.gov.au/titles/documentaries/austin-hospital-heidelberg/clip1/

The Kronheimer Building, Austin Hospital, Melbourne (www.pictures.libraries.vic.gov.au/)

Foundation Stone, Kronheimer Buiding (Photo: Paul Gardner)

Viewed through 21st Century eyes, one might think that such a generous gift designed to meet a serious medical need would have been unanimously supported, but this was actually not the case. The concept of bringing large numbers of infectious patients together for treatment in a single building was seen by many members of the public as a dangerous idea. Some newspapers railed against the proposal, and the Victorian state Premier, Mr Bent, was opposed to the use of the donation for its intended purpose. Eventually, however, the new wing was opened in 1905. In 2005 my wife and I were invited to the Kronheimer Building to participate in the centenary celebrations. The building was then being used as a medical research centre.

Joseph was, however, more than simply a generous donor. After the Russian pogroms in the early 1900s, the leader of the Anglo-Jewish Association, Isaac Jacobs, returned from an overseas trip and was extremely disturbed by the oppression of Jews in Eastern Europe. He urged the formation of a local branch of the Jewish Territorial Organisation, which aimed at re-settling Eastern European Jews in unoccupied areas of other countries. An inaugural meeting was held in Melbourne on 30 April, 1908, and Joseph was elected president.

Over the course of his life, Joseph encouraged other members of his family to migrate to Melbourne. Two young nephews, Max and Woolf, were early arrivals. Both were children of his oldest brother Heinrich Haium and late wife Sophie, who had died in 1858. A shipping record notes that Max (described as Meier in the Schopfloch birth register) arrived in 1860. He was then aged 15. The arrival date of Woolf (Wolf) is unknown, but he probably came in the early 1860s. Woolf fell seriously ill and after seven months died at his uncle's home in 1870.

Max Kronheimer. Max prospered in the Kronheimer business. By 1876, he is listed in a Melbourne business directory as a partner of the company. He married Adele Segalla and they had two children. Aimee was born in 1891, never married, and changed her surname to Keynes. She died in Melbourne in 1972. The second child, Edgar, died in infancy during 1893. Tragically, later in the same year, Max was travelling to Adelaide by ship on a short holiday excursion, and was lost overboard and drowned. Joseph would have been devastated, as he no doubt regarded his nephew Max as his successor in leading the company.

Jacob Englander. Joseph quickly responded by inviting his great-nephew Jacob Englander (born 10 December 1873) to migrate to Melbourne. Jacob, a grandson of Heinrich Hajum Kronheimer, was then in his early twenties. He arrived in the mid-1890s and by 1897 had been "naturalised", i.e. accepted as a citizen. (That would have meant British citizenship, as Victoria was then a colony of Great Britain. Four years later, in 1901, the Commonwealth of Australia was founded, but the first Australian passports were not issued until 1917. These were simply described as X-series passports; the words "Australian Passport" did not appear on the cover of a passport until 1949.) Jacob became a director of W.D & H.O Wills. He married Edith Silberberg and the couple had several children. He died in Melbourne on 6 July 1959. He was my great-uncle Jack, whom I knew as a teenager.

The Kronheimer Estate. Joseph died in Melbourne on 17 July 1914, aged 88. He left an estate worth more than £800,000, several hundred million dollars in today's terms. A significant proportion of the estate (£300,000) had been bequeathed to relatives in Germany, but, after court actions that went as far as the nation's High Court, these monies were ordered to be retained by the trustees of the estate as money could not be sent to "enemy nationals" during World War I.

This year (2014) marks the centenary of Joseph's death. Several institutions are still receiving annual grants from the proceeds of his estate. To give just one example,

Melbourne's major paediatric hospital, the Royal Children's Hospital, moved into an impressive new building in 2012. The Kronheimer Estate is listed among the many donors.

A brief account of Joseph's life in Melbourne, which quotes a newspaper obituary, can be found at http://www.auspostalhistory.com/articles/2002.php

Elias (Julius) Kronheimer. This article also provides some information about a younger brother, named as Elias in the Harburg list but who called himself Julius. The article mentions that Julius was already in Melbourne prior to Joseph's arrival, and that the brothers worked together to establish their tobacco business. Julius then returned to Germany and handled the export end. He married a cousin, Fanny Freundlich (both were descendants of Meier Isaak Freundlich and his wife Voegele, listed by the Harburg Project). Julius and Fanny had two children. The younger child, Rosa, married Josef Wildberg, and their two grandchildren and three further generations live in Melbourne today.

One discrepancy remains to be explained. The Harburg Project lists Elias (i.e. Julius) as dying on 11 April 1899, location unknown. Joseph's newspaper obituary in 1914 describes him as a surviving brother, living in Hamburg. Newspaper reports can be wrong, or based on outdated information. Documentary evidence would be needed to settle the question.

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Dr Paul Gardner AM, born in Melbourne in 1939, is a retired academic. He is a great-great-great-nephew of Joseph Kronheimer. He regards cigarette smoking as seriously harmful to people's health, and the tobacco business as detrimental to society. However he also acknowledges that the idea that smoking is a health hazard, widely accepted today, was not known in the 19th Century and he therefore believes that more recently acquired knowledge should not be used as a basis for making moral judgements about practices in earlier historical times.