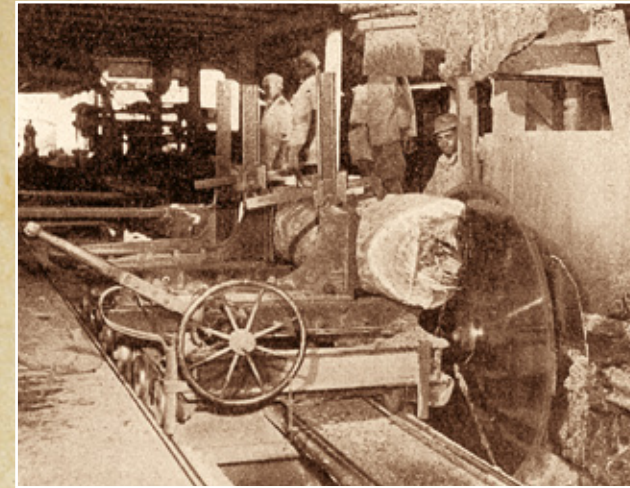


Perils of Life on the Frontier

Cattle-driving in Africa was a hazardous business. Cattle were vulnerable to predators, wild dogs, lions, hyenas, and crocodiles, as well as to disease and to drought. The traders themselves faced almost identical dangers. During the second Barotseland Trading Expedition Elie Susman became desperately ill with Blackwater Fever but was saved by King Lewanika's providing him with a raft, paddlers, and carriers to transport him to a settlement where he could get access to medication. "If Susman dies, you die!" he is said to have admonished the oarsmen. Elie Susman's survival was further attributed to his being persuaded to drink gallons of millet beer, which was thought to flush out the disease.

In the absence of towns, businesses, or banks along the cattle-trading route, members of King Lewanika's tribe were used as runners to transport money between sellers and buyers at far-flung trading posts. The king's runners were absolutely trustworthy: there were no reports of theft; indeed, the only incidence of money going missing was when a runner sadly was eaten by a crocodile!



Workers inside the Zambezi Saw Mills in Livingstone



The train to Molobetsi collected timber for transport to the saw mills

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

In addition to natural predators and disasters, there were fluctuations in the prices of cattle and beef. In order to cope with the risks and to beat the odds traders began to diversify their commercial activities. The Susman brothers combined farming and ranching with running stores and contracting transport. As transporters, they became involved in the timber industry, and hence indirectly with the railways because much of the teak produced was used for railway sleepers. From the early 1920s they held a contract for the transport of timber to the Zambezi Saw Mills in Livingstone.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR, 1914-18

During World War I (1914-1918), Northern Rhodesia was an important supply line for the war against Germany in Tanganyika (now Tanzania) in East Africa. A number of Jewish settlers and traders participated in the East African campaign. They included Oscar, youngest of the Susman brothers, and Moss Dobkins from London. Oscar Susman's health was affected by the campaign. An early Zionist, he died in London in 1920 while on his way to Palestine. A nephew of Rebecca Hochstein of Broken Hill, Dobkins became a trader in Ndola and Chingola and was one of the longest-lived Jewish traders in the country.



In 1913 the Susman brothers sold 50 ox wagons with trained teams of oxen to King Lewanika



Early 20th century photograph of tribal runners in Northern Rhodesia