

The Copperbelt Communities

MINING IN ZAMBIA FROM ITS EARLIEST BEGINNINGS

For centuries, indigenous people, in particular the Lamba, mined copper oxide ores on what is now the Zambian Copperbelt. By the 1920s, however, there were extensive new mines developing in the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt to meet an increasing demand for the metal and to exploit improved technology for its extraction.

While few Jews were employed on the mines themselves, Jewish entrepreneurs took advantage of the commercial opportunities they provided, establishing hotels and general dealerships. Over time, Jewish medical practitioners, lawyers and members of other professions set up their practices in the new mining towns. The Susman Brothers combined with the Sussman Brothers (no relation) and the Kollenberg family to establish companies that ran butcheries, bakeries, and hotels. Among the most prominent independent traders were the Gersh brothers who founded trading stores, cinemas, garages, and an iron foundry in Livingstone (but later moved to Kitwe) and in Chingola; Londoner Sid Diamond, who founded Standard Trading in Kitwe, the Figov family in Luanshya, the Schulmans and the Lowenthals in Ndola, and the Menashe family in Chingola.

Two families of German Jewish origin were major investors in the Copperbelt mines: the American Hochschilds, through the Rhodesian Selection Trust, and the South African Oppenheimers, through the Anglo American Corporation. Among the mines developed by these companies in the 1920s and 1930s were the Roan Antelope Mine at Luanshya, the Nkana Mine at modern Kitwe, the Nchanga Mine at Chingola, and the Mufulira Mine at the town of the same name. While the mines initially struggled during the Great Depression, they were economically reinvigorated by the requirements of the Second World War so were able to make major contributions to the Allied war effort. Production and employment reached an early peak in 1944 when there was an extended boom, with a further peak during the war in Korea, in the early 1950s.



Sid Diamond, founder and developer of Standard Trading



President Kenneth Kaunda greets Dennis Figov circa 1968



Dennis and Maureen Figov outside their store in 1989