

Benjamin Lyon

Benjamin Lyon (-1855) was a Jewish merchant and trader.

First mention of him is as a clerk in South Australia for successful importer and merchant, Morris Marks¹. He is referred to in a case in the South Australian Local Court of Kooringa on 19 August 1850 where he was involved in a fight with Mary Ann Stark, a servant in a house in which he boarded, because she described him as a “bloody little Jew” and he retaliated by throwing water at her and calling her an “ugly old witch”. The magistrate said it was clear that there had been abuse on both sides. Lyon was ordered to pay the costs of the day and Mary Stark was ordered to pay her own costs.²

On 4 October, 1850, Lyon arrived in the Swan River Colony which was experiencing the arrival of the first convicts, although he retained ties to South Australia by importing luxury goods from there to the residents of the Swan River colony.³ He published a number of advertisements offering merchandise and haberdashery. His first advertisement appeared on 29 January 1851 offering a very long list of goods⁴. The advertisement goes on to say: “The undersigned, in submitting the above list of Goods to the Public, has refrained from affixing his prices, knowing that parties have been guilty of undervaluing his Goods on account of his determined resolution to reduce the heretofore extortionate charges”.

An advertisement on 23 July 1851 with another long list of drapery and clothing ended with the word: “The above Goods B LYON has determined upon selling at a very trifling percentage, having advices of large shipments to follow shortly.”⁵

Lyon conducted his business in St George’s Terrace, Perth, but also had interests in Geraldton.⁶ His precise address was “nearly opposite the Fremason’s Hotel”⁷.

Lyon was one of the first to buy a town lot in York, taking a Crown Grant for York Building Lot No 2 (152 and 154 Avon Tce) in June 1852.⁸ He did not construct any building on the property.⁹

In Perth, he moved to bigger premises in August 1852, publishing an advertisement which said: “B. LYON in thanking the Ladies and Gentlemen of Perth and the surrounding districts for their past patronage, begs to inform them, that he is now about closing his present place of business, in order to make preparation for his entering his new premises, situated

¹ *South Australian*, 2 November 1849, p. 4.

² *The South Australian Register*, 28 August 1850, p. 3.

³ His first advertisement was published in *The Inquirer*, 29 January 1851, p. 1.

⁴ *The Inquirer*, 29 January 1851, p. 1.

⁵ *The Inquirer*, 23 July 1851, p. 2.

⁶ Erickson, Rica [comp] *The Bicentennial Dictionary of Western Australia pre 1829-1888, Vol 3* UWA Press, 1979, p. 1921

⁷ *The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, 12 March 1852, page 3.

⁸ Crown Grant ET1131, Landgate to Benjamin Lyons for the price of 10 pounds one shilling.

⁹ *The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, 10 October 1856, p. 2.

immediately opposite the stores of Messrs Habgood, where he trusts that by increased accommodation and attention, to merit a renewal of those favours so universally conceded to him since his arrival in the colony.”¹⁰

He may have lent money to George Wood, Baker of Fremantle, as several advertisements relate to sale of George Wood’s property in order to pay Lyon¹¹.

He also exported wool to London from Fremantle, advertising that he would “purchase wool for cash or will make advances on the same”¹².

While living in the Swan River Colony, Benjamin Lyon competed in Cargo boat races with his cargo boat *The Ino*¹³. He also owned a racehorse called *Tally-Ho*¹⁴. Otherwise, little is known about his personal life.

In April 1854, Lyon was operating on the Corner of St George’s Terrace and King William Street.¹⁵

Benjamin Lyon sold his business to Mr E Barnett on 6 April 1854, who appears to have put everything up for sale¹⁶, and in that month conveyed the title to York Building Lot No 2 to Robert Doncon¹⁷ for £31.

Benjamin Lyon then left the colony in May 1854 bound for Singapore¹⁸, and appears to have died soon after, before April 1855, as he is described as “deceased intestate”.¹⁹

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¹⁰ *The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, 6 August 1852, p. 2.

¹¹ *The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, 5 March 1852, p. 3 and 12 March 1852, page 3.

¹² *The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, 14 November 1851, p. 1; 22 October 1852, p.3.

¹³ *The Inquirer*, 18 June 1851, p. 3.

¹⁴ *The Inquirer*, 9 June 1852, p. 3.

¹⁵ *The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, 7 April 1854, page 4.

¹⁶ *The Perth Gazette and Independent Journal of Politics and News*, 14 April 1854, p. 2.

¹⁷ Memorial V373/392, 22 April 1854 for £31, Landgate.

¹⁸ *The Inquirer*, 3 May 1854, p. 2.

¹⁹ *The Inquirer*, 25 April 1855, p.2.