

Expanded Issue

# SA-SIG

*The journal of the Southern African Jewish Genealogy Special  
Interest Group*

<http://www.jewishgen.org/SAfrica/>

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

JewishGen runs a number of unique projects to which interested genealogists can contribute. Most of us are aware of the *JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR)*, a searchable database of more than three million names and other identifying information from cemeteries and burial records worldwide, covering 7,000 cemeteries in 125 countries.

<https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Cemetery/>

But few of us seem to know about some of the less-visible projects, such as the following.

- The *JewishGen Memorial Plaques Project*, which maintains a searchable database of more than 100,000 names and other identifying information from Jewish synagogue and memorial records (“Yahrzeit Plaques”) worldwide. The searchable database is a compilation of two linked databases: a database of memorial plaques, and a database of information about each particular synagogue. The Memorial Plaques Project’s aim is to catalog extant data about Jewish synagogues and memorial records worldwide.

<https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Memorial/>

- More focused on South Africa is the *JewishGen KehilaLinks* (formerly *ShtetLinks*) project, which instantiates web pages which commemorate the places where Jews have lived throughout the world. These web pages may contain information, pictures, databases, and links to other sources providing data about that place. Many of the KehilaLinks pages cover Southern African towns and cities, and a substantial number of the Southern African pages have been created by Eli Rabinowitz, a former South African, now living in Perth, Australia. (Eli also maintains his own blog, titled *Tangential Travel and Jewish Life*.)

Home page:

<https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org>

Southern African pages:

<https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Asia.html>

Tangential Travel and Jewish Life blog:

<http://elirab.me/>

### The Southern Africa Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group (SA-SIG)

The purpose and goal of the Southern Africa Special Interest Group (SA-SIG) is to bring together Jewish genealogy researchers with a common interest in Southern Africa and to provide a forum for a free exchange of ideas, research tips and information of interest to those researching Jewish family history in the communities of South Africa, Lesotho (Basutoland), Botswana (Bechuanaland), Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia), Zambia (Northern Rhodesia), Swaziland, Mozambique, Kenya, and the former Belgian Congo.

The SIG has been producing a quarterly Newsletter since 2000 in which is included articles on personalities in the Southern African Jewish community, religious congregations, communities – past and present and general news about the lives our Southern African families led.

Further information on how to subscribe to the Newsletter, as well as an archive of previous Newsletter issues, can be found at:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/SAfrica/newsletter/index.htm>

If you would like to contribute articles to the Newsletter, accounts should include descriptions of families of the community, aspects of local Jewish life, its institutions and particular character. Jewish involvement in the community at large, its history, business life and development could be featured as well.

Articles for inclusion in the Newsletter, or any general enquiries, should be sent to Roy Ogus, Editor, at [r\\_ogus@hotmail.com](mailto:r_ogus@hotmail.com)

The SA-SIG maintains a set of Web Pages that can be found at: <http://www.jewishgen.org/safrica>

#### SA-SIG Board

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- Recently the FamilySearch web site offered a new database which contains Namibian Dutch Reformed Church records for the period 1904-1984. I looked up the names Cohen and Lev(e)y, and not surprisingly, I found the records for a significant number of Cohen and Levy men who had married Afrikaner wives, as well as the records of their descendants who had kept the original surnames for many generations!

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2365261>

- The Travelling Rabbi, Moshe Silberhaft, periodically travels around South Africa, visiting the country cemeteries and helping with the restoration activities where necessary. He posts this information regularly on his Facebook page.

<https://www.facebook.com/ravmoshe.silberhaft>

We are always on the lookout for *Mohel* (circumcision) Registers. Many of these are in private hands or lying in *shul* offices. So if you have information these records, or can contribute to the above projects, please make the necessary contact and contribute!

### **Saul Issroff**

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## **EDITOR'S MESSAGE**

Welcome to the latest edition of the SA-SIG Newsletter, once again a significantly larger-than-usual issue that is crammed full of interesting and thought-provoking items! As always, I have worked hard to continue our tradition to produce a high-quality journal that is filled with interesting and compelling content covering a wide range of topics of interest to Southern African genealogical researchers. I hope that you enjoy this issue as much as I enjoyed producing it!

This year, on May 14, we celebrated the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The historic vote in the United Nations General Assembly, which took place on November 29, 1947, partitioned Palestine into independent Arab and Jewish States as well as the

city of Jerusalem. This vote paved the way for Israel to declare its independence nearly six months later on May 14, 1948. However, on May 15, the day after the declaration of independence, Israel's Arab neighbors invaded the area, taking control of the Arab areas and attacking the Israeli forces and several Jewish settlements, and launching Israel's War of Independence which persisted until July 1949 with Israel's victory.

To help protect Israel's survival during and before the conflict, a large number of volunteers from all over the world streamed to the area to help. South Africa was, by far, the largest per capita contributor to the volunteers, and eventually sent over 810 volunteers to the country. The story of the South African volunteers has been comprehensively captured in Henry Katzew's seminal book, *South Africa's 800: The Story of South African Volunteers in Israel's War of Birth*.

In recognition of Israel's momentous milestone this year, this issue of the Newsletter contains two articles about the South African involvement in the 1948 War of Independence. David Sandler, in his article found on page 19, recounts the vivid story of the South African volunteers using material from Katzew's book, including direct accounts from several of the South African volunteers. And, in the article, *A Kibbutz Called Jan Smuts*, Peter Dickens tells the story of the kibbutz Ramat Yohanan, named after the South African Prime Minister, who was a strong supporter of Israel's independence. The kibbutz played a crucial role during the Israeli War of Independence.

Nearly 20 years later in 1967, a considerable number of South African volunteers also dropped everything and raced to Israel to offer help and to play their part to secure the survival of the fledgling Jewish State during the Six Day War. One of these volunteers was Manley Perkel, and he recounts the story of his involvement in his article *Reminiscences of a Volunteer*.

In addition to the above articles, the rest of this issue of the Newsletter once again presents an assortment of engaging articles as well as many other items of interest to Southern African genealogical researchers. In addition to the full-length articles, this issue also contains a number of other features, including the descriptions of several recently-published South Africa-related books, and an interesting letter I received from a reader. And, as usual, I have included my comprehensive

compilation of new information, resources, and other items available on the Internet that should be relevant and of interest to researchers.



To learn more about the origins of their families, many South African Jews have visited Lithuania to visit the birthplaces and the towns where their ancestors lived, and during these life-changing journeys, the visitors have not only rediscovered their family roots, but have often managed to actually touch artifacts from their own personal or family history. In her article, Gillian Klawansky describes the stories of a few of the many whose visits have helped them connect deeply with their past (including those of SA-SIG Board members Saul Issroff and rose Lerer Cohen).

I recently came across two fascinating articles which describe visits to Jewish communities in Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) that were published on the *Roads and Kingdoms* web site. Written by author and photographer Andrew Harris (born in Johannesburg, who now lives in Melbourne, Australia), the two stories describe very different experiences: both report on Andrew's recent travels to that part of the world, but the two articles describe quite dissimilar aspects and perspectives of the communities he visited. I found them to be fascinating reading. Since I am unfortunately not permitted to republish either of the articles in full in this Newsletter, I have instead provided a lengthy excerpt from each article to give you a sense of the story, and you can then read the full articles at the links provided. You can find this description in the article titled *Two Tales of Zimbabwe*.

Today, with people dispersed, far from the place where their families originally settled and where they grew up, communities are becoming fragmented and detached. However, in this day and age, there is a solution and a way of bringing people back together to acknowledge their past and document their stories – in a virtual town or city. In her article, *A Virtual City – And How To Achieve It*, Geraldine Auerbach, a Kimberley native, describes the process that she went through to create the *KehilaLinks* web page for the town of Kimberley. In addition, she also provides suggestions and pointers for the creation of similar virtual city pages for your own town of interest. The Kimberley site is now hailed as one of the very best of the *KehilaLinks* sites, and is thus an

excellent model for the creation of other *KehilaLinks* sites.

Abel and Glenda Levitt, born in South Africa and who have been living in Israel for more than a quarter of a century, say that Lithuania has been and will always be in their hearts. The couple has been visiting the country since 1998, and the preservation of Jewish culture and its memory in the country is one of their main goals. Lithuanian author, Stasė Eitavičienė, a teacher, journalist, and Lithuanian public figure, met with the Levitts in the town of Biržai in 2015 when they arrived in the town for their second visit. Stasė published an article about their conversation on the Lithuanian web site *Šiaurės Rytai*. A translation of Stasė's account can be found in the article, *Fates Lost And Found in Vicissitudes of the Lithuanian History*, in this Newsletter.

Photographer Jono David specializes in documenting Jewish communities around the world in photos and words, and one of his photographic goals is to contribute to the permanent record of Jewish life and culture worldwide. His *HaChayim HaYehudim* Jewish Photo Library is the largest photo archive of its kind in the world. David recently completed a four-year project to capture emerging Jewish communities in Africa, and, in her article, Melanie Lidman describes the story of this project which culminated in an exhibit at Tel Aviv's *Beit Hatfutsot* Museum in 2016.

It is not an easy task to write about one's family for publication, but Maurice (Mo) Skikne has undertaken this job, and in his interesting article, he describes the story of two branches in his family: his Skikne paternal branch, and the Scop branch on his maternal side. As you will discover, some of the family members became quite well-known in various circles!

A *Boerejood* (farmer Jew) is the term used to identify South African Jews who have acculturated themselves to the Afrikaner language and culture. The group differentiates itself from South African English-speaking Jews in a number of different ways, and many have successfully learned to amalgamate the Jewish and Afrikaner identity in a way that enriches both interest groups. More details of this interesting subset of the South African Jewish community, as well as some

notable members of the community, can be found on the article on page 36.

Many of us who grew up in South Africa have memories of our visits to the beach town of Muizenberg, near Cape Town. In Ivor Kosowitz's entertaining article, found on page 38, he paints a vivid and amusing picture of life in the Jewish community in the town during the 1950s and 1960s.

South African deceased estate files may contain a goldmine of genealogical information. These documents are kept at the various Master of the Supreme (now High) Court offices around the country, but older files have been moved to the provincial State Archives, and more recently, some of the older estate documents have been made available on Internet sites such as *familysearch.org*. In his article, Louis Zetler, provides a comprehensive description of the contents of these estate files, and he describes how they can be of value to your family research. Louis also offers suggestions for an approach to finding these valuable documents for your deceased family members.

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As usual, all the past issues of the Newsletter are available on-line on the SA-SIG web site at:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/safrica/newsletter/>

In addition, an index of all the surnames that are mentioned in this issue of the Newsletter has been compiled on the last page.

Please let me know if you have any comments or questions about any of the articles in this issue, and I encourage you to submit your own contributions for inclusion in a future edition of the Newsletter.

I hope you find the latest issue of the Newsletter engaging, interesting, and informative. Please read and enjoy!

### **Roy Ogus**

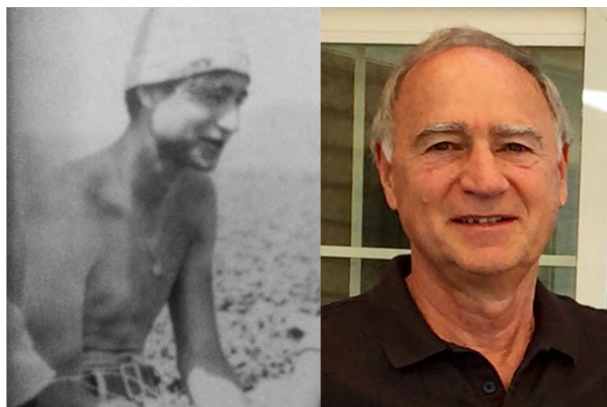
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## **REMINISCENCES OF A VOLUNTEER**

*Manley Perkel*



*Manley Perkel after arriving at Kibbutz Dafna in June, 1967, and Manley today.*

It was June 5, 1967. I was awoken by an eerie, loud wail coming in through an open window. The room was bright, the sunshine pouring in through the window. Through sleepy, half-open eyes, I peered around the large room I was sharing with three other young men, all around my age, on the second floor of the nondescript hotel in Tel Aviv that we had been sent to the day before. The other beds were empty. The room was empty. No-one was to be seen or heard. I forced open my eyes, fully taking in my aloneness. What was going on? The shrill sound stopped abruptly but what was it?

I got up and almost immediately the sound started up again. I gradually realized it was a siren, or what I imagined was an air-raid siren, and walked over to the large open window to see what I could see. Our room was at the back of the hotel and the view, unfortunately, told me nothing. I saw no roads, no shops, no sidewalks. No one was walking around in the opening between my hotel and the other buildings in front of me, neither to the left nor to the right. Nobody! Nothing!

What was going on and where were my roommates? It seemed such a long time since it had all started, roughly four weeks before ...

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It was mid-May, 1967, in an early morning mathematics class at the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) in Johannesburg, South Africa. The lecture theatre was a tiered, large, old-fashioned room, about 10 rows deep, each

containing a long writing desk with the seats behind them, the rows gradually sloping upwards towards the back of the room. It was on the hour, and a half dozen students, myself included, sat huddled in the middle of the back row trying to listen to a small transistor radio one of us had brought to the class. We had to keep it really low for fear the professor would hear the radio, but also loud enough for us to hear. We tried to listen to the whispers of the radio while pretending to listen to the lecture, simultaneously copying the copious notes written by the professor on the large, multi-sectioned blackboard in the front of the room.

In those days South Africa had no television. There were only two government-run radio stations, one in English, and one in Afrikaans, with a third, commercial station carrying mostly music. World news, roughly ten minutes long, was carried maybe four or five times a day. So, other than reading newspapers, to get up-to-date news required you to turn on a radio at exactly the right time. We, second-year Jewish, Zionist, mathematics students, had no other choice but to furtively listen in class to know what was happening.

Tensions had been rising in the Middle East, particularly between Israel and Syria. Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser was now demanding that U Thant, Secretary General of the United Nations, remove the UN peacekeeping forces stationed in the Egyptian Sinai Desert, all the way up to Israel's western Negev boundary. These UN troops had been there since the 1956 Suez War, forming an Egyptian-Israeli buffer zone in the Sinai. When U Thant complied, Nasser sent Egypt's army across the Sinai Desert, and they were encamped along Israel's border. And on another day in May we heard that, in violation of international law, Egypt had set up a blockade of the Straits of Tiran, thereby cutting off all shipping, especially vital oil shipments, destined for the southern port of Aqaba.

Things looked very ominous. War was on the horizon and seemed inevitable. Israel was calling up reservists to supplement its standing military and its soldiers-in-training. At the age of 18, following high school, every Israeli was required to enter military service – 30 months for men, 18 months for women. After that Israelis were considered reservists until their 50's and could be called up at any time.

As young Zionists in South Africa, we were in a state of unrest. What was going to happen? What could we do to help? Most of us belonged to one or other of the Zionist Youth movements active at that time. The movements were co-ed and similar to scouting groups (for Jewish youth). The largest were Habonim, affiliated with the Socialist party governing Israel, and Betar, associated with the Revisionist party, the main opposition in Israel, but there were a few others as well (for example Bnei Akivah and Hashomer Ha-Tzair). Each had an ideological basis but I, and most of the youth I knew, were part of one or other movement for social reasons; for example one's friends belonged, or meetings were close to home, or one's parents had belonged in their youth, and so on.

The older teens met weekly on Sunday nights to partake in various activities and to socialize. During this crisis many knowledgeable, Jewish community leaders who had connections in Israel came and spoke to us, updating us on the situation in Israel. In addition to the serious security situation, by far the biggest crisis was to Israel's economy. With all the reservists being called up, Israel's all-important agricultural industry was in dire straits. The business sector, of course, was also in trouble. But what could we do? Appeals for financial donations for Israel poured in to the Jewish community, and many people contributed.

Egypt's Nasser was very busy with the Pan-Arab alliance, meeting with the Jordanians, the Syrians, and other Arab countries to plan a campaign for the annihilation of Israel. Of these, the most dangerous to Israel were the Jordanians (reinforced by the arrival of Iraqi troops) and the Syrians. After 1948, the Jordanians had annexed the West Bank between Israel's eastern border and the Jordan River, and so their troops threatened Israel's heartland and population centers, its industrial centers, and Israel's modern and largest city, Tel Aviv. The Syrians were massed on the Golan Heights, the northeast border with Israel. These heights overlooked and threatened the agricultural settlements hundreds of feet below, in the Galilee plain – very vulnerable to attack and to being overrun. To the north, Lebanon was slightly more westernized, had its own social and political problems and did not have a very large army. So it could be contained but, nonetheless, was still a serious threat. If the Saudis got involved they could possibly join up with the Egyptian army at

the narrow southern tip of Israel, at the port city of Aqaba, and take over the southern Negev Desert.

At its narrowest point Israel is less than 10 miles wide, and the Arab goal of pushing the Jews into the sea seemed attainable at last. The situation was dire and things did not look good.

Towards the end of May we began to hear rumors of “volunteers” going to Israel but for what purpose, whether to fight in the army or in some other capacity, was not at all clear and the subject of much speculation. Word quickly spread that the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the umbrella organization of the South African Jewish community, was to hold a meeting on the evening of Saturday, May 27, at the Zionist Federation Center in Johannesburg, where we would find out more.

I remember that, on Friday night, May 26<sup>th</sup>, after a family Shabbat dinner, my father and I went for a walk around our neighborhood. It was a warm autumn evening, the sky was clear, and we could see the multitudes of stars visible in the Southern Hemisphere, the Southern Cross and other constellations. I had previously expressed my desire that, should Israel need volunteers, I would like to go. Being 18, I would require the permission of my parents (in South Africa the age of majority was 21). Even though I sensed my father was sympathetic to my wishes, I was certain my parents would not give permission, should I have to join Israel’s army or engage in any sort of fighting.

However I also understood my parents’ conflict. I was born in 1948, two months after the declaration of the modern state of Israel. Israel, Zionism, and the birth, growth, maturity and, in particular, the destiny and survival of Israel was the mother’s milk of my world-view. When I was born my uncle, Dave Magid, (then 25 and engaged to my mother’s sister Frouma), arrived at the hospital to say goodbye to my mother. He and his brother, Eddie, were leaving for Israel to join its newly-formed army in Israel’s fight for survival in what came to be called Israel’s War of Independence. The story of how Dave came to visit my mother in hospital to say goodbye was a legend in our family and household. Both he and Eddie survived the fighting and, I think, my mother in particular recognized that my desire to take part in ensuring Israel’s survival was partially a fulfillment of my destiny and something I would have to do. But she wasn’t happy about it!

While walking and discussing the recent events my father suddenly asked me what I thought would happen if all of Israel’s enemies attacked at once. I had to think about that – in my youthful zeal I had not actually given it much thought before. After walking a little while longer I answered that I thought that, if a few of the countries attacked, Israel’s army was strong enough to repel them but I supposed that if all the Arab countries attacked at once, it was possible that Israel would be overcome and annihilated. As I said this I was awash with emotions and silent thoughts. Here I was saying that, if my father gave me permission to go, and if all Israel’s enemies attacked at once, Israel would be destroyed and I could be killed. He would never see his only son again. I could not imagine what was going on in his mind as I answered him.

On Saturday night, May 27<sup>th</sup>, the meeting was packed with parents, young adults, and children. South Africa’s Jewish community at the time was estimated to be roughly 125,000, nearly half of which lived in and around Johannesburg. It seemed like almost the entire community was there. After various updates of the situation in Israel, the announcement came that Israel’s Jewish Agency had issued a call for volunteers to come to Israel in its moment of need. It was emphasized that this was not a call for military volunteers but rather for young people to come and engage in agricultural work in the fields, the labor that had had to be abandoned by the call-up of the Israeli army reservists. We would be sent to *kibbutzim*, *moshavim*, or other agricultural settlements to engage in agricultural labor. We were asked to meet with our youth movements the following Sunday night, when representatives from the Zionist organizations would attend to answer questions and to get a sense of the members’ desire to volunteer.

During the next day, Sunday, I had serious discussions with my parents. They asked me not to rush anything but, now that volunteers were not going to have to engage in military actions, they were more willing to give me permission to go. Of course we all recognized, without stating it out loud, that should war break out and Israel start to lose, volunteers would no doubt get caught up in fighting and some would never return.

Then my mother raised another obstacle. We were approaching the middle of the academic year and I was a second-year student at WITS. If I went to

Israel I would have to abandon my studies. What then? The university system in South Africa was similar to the British university system. Academic courses were not divided into quarter or semester units but ran for the entire academic year with a massive final exam on the entire year's work at the end of the year. In addition, getting into a university was competitive. Not every high school graduate was admitted to a university, let alone one of the country's top universities. If I abandoned my studies not only would I have to repeat the entire year when readmitted, but there was a more-than-likely possibility I would not even be readmitted at all.

At the Sunday night meeting on May 28<sup>th</sup>, after answering our questions, the Israeli representatives told us that there was a possibility the first planeload of volunteers would be leaving on Saturday, June 3, in just six days' time. I expressed my interest in volunteering but needed to check on my academic situation first. I was told to let them know as soon as I could the next day, or else I could not be on the Saturday flight.

The rest of that week was a blur of activity. The first thing I did on Monday morning was go to the university to speak with the Dean of the Faculty of Science (as the college of my studies was called). He wasn't in and I was told to make an appointment for the next day. When I cried out my urgency, the dean's secretary relented and I was directed to a hothouse on campus. The dean was a biologist, actively engaged in research, and busy with his projects that day.

I entered the hothouse, and can still remember being surrounded by tables of plants and greenery. At one end stood the dean, a kind-looking elderly man, with a sprayer in his hand. He was surprised to see anyone entering the greenhouse, but I introduced myself and explained that I needed an assurance that, if I left the university immediately, around the middle of the year, before mid-year exams, I would be readmitted into the second-year program when I returned. To my great relief he was entirely supportive of what I was trying to do and gave me assurances that I would indeed be readmitted into WITS. He told me to go back to his college office and tell the secretary what he had told me, that she was to write in my file that I was leaving WITS and should be readmitted. That was that! As far as I can recall I was not given a

written assurance but it was understood that, since he had given his word, so it would be!

I immediately left, went to the Zionist Federation office, and put my name on the list of volunteers from my youth movement. Now another big obstacle emerged. I needed a passport. In the South Africa of those days getting a passport was a bureaucratic nightmare that could take many, many months. Multiple forms, photos, tickets to prove travel plans and reasons for travel, source of financial support while away (since currency restrictions in South Africa only allowed a limited amount to be taken from the country) were needed. In addition, Wednesday was May 31<sup>st</sup>, Republic Day, a national holiday when no government offices would be open or working. How would it be possible to get a passport within three days, before Saturday?

To South Africa's credit, the government expedited the entire process. Monday afternoon I went to get my passport photos, and the photo company agreed to rush it so I would have them on Tuesday. Tuesday I took my photos and went to apply for a passport. I filled out the forms. No other supporting documentation was needed. I was told the passport would be ready Friday morning – amazing! The rest of the week was spent running around doing various last-minute shopping chores, meeting friends and family to say goodbye, meetings at the youth movement house, at the Zionist Federation office, meetings with various officials.

Finally Saturday night came and I was ready. The departure lounge at Jan Smuts Airport in Johannesburg was a mob scene. More than 50 volunteers were leaving on that first flight, and families, extended families, and friends, plus other well-wishers from the youth movements, were there to see the volunteers off. Finally came the hour to board. We passed through the gate and walked in the semi-darkness across the tarmac to the stairway of the plane ahead. As we walked we looked backwards and waved at who-knows-who standing at the large window of the departure lounge, overlooking the runway, where we saw a mob of people waving frantically at us. Suddenly, before we reached the plane, a police escort that I hadn't noticed called us to attention. We stopped in our tracks, turned around and heard the officer in charge call his men on the tarmac to attention. With our backs to the plane we followed along,



singing aloud the (then) South African national anthem, *Die Stem*. After that, without police prompting, we volunteers continued standing at attention and broke out into a spontaneous, emotion-filled rendition of *Hatikvah*, the Israeli national anthem. Then we boarded and left. It was the first time that I, and most of the others, had flown on an airplane.

On Sunday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, we arrived mid-morning at what was then called Lod Airport, near Tel Aviv. I was lucky that my older sister, Ruth, was living in Israel, and she and her husband and in-laws met me in the arrival lounge with hugs, gifts of clothing, and well-wishes. We were also met by representatives of the Jewish Agency and given a card hand-printed with the name of our destination. Members of the various youth organizations were naturally kept together. Some were to go by bus immediately to Kibbutz Me'en Baruch in the Upper Galilee, some to other destinations. They all boarded their buses and left immediately, without any fanfare. The roughly 12 members of the group I was with were to go to Moshav Amatzia near Jerusalem, located adjacent to the (West Bank) border with Jordan. To our surprise we were told we would not be going right away, but would leave the next day. We were told we would be put up for the night in a small hotel in Tel Aviv, the hotel from whose window I now peered, on Monday morning, June 5<sup>th</sup>, wondering what was going on and where my roommates were ...

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Had I overslept? Had they all left for Amatzia without me, not realizing that I was not on the bus? I immediately dressed and went downstairs. To my relief, on entering the small dining room, I saw my comrades sitting around, talking in excitement about what was happening.

The war had started! My roommates had been woken earlier by the sound of a single siren. They were told it was an air raid siren, and they had to go into the basement bomb shelter. I was still asleep and no one had thought to wake me! And so I blissfully remained sleeping through the beginning of the war. What apparently had woken me was the first wail of the all-clear siren, some thirty minutes later. No bombs had been dropped – indeed planes had barely been heard. Turns out the air-raid siren was a cautionary warning to the Tel Aviv residents to get into their bomb shelters as the war began. There was much nervous speculation,

as none of us knew what was going on or what was going to happen to us.

After a short breakfast, the Agency's representatives came in to let us know that we would not, after all, be going to Moshav Amatzia. War had started that morning and Amatzia was too close to Jordan and the fighting. We would instead be going to Moshav Misgav Dov, south of Tel Aviv. We correctly concluded that we had not been permitted to go to Amatzia the day before because the Israeli military had known an attack by Israel was planned for Monday morning, June 5<sup>th</sup>, and had prohibited any travel to the border areas. That was why we had been sent to Tel Aviv, and why other arrangements had had to be made for us.

So off we went. I lived in Misgav Dov with a very poor family whose oldest son had been called up for the war. They desperately needed someone to help with maintaining their agricultural fields and with feeding their cows. They spoke not a word of English so I made do with my erratic Hebrew. We only saw some military activity on two days, once on the Monday after we arrived, and on the Tuesday, when, from far away, we saw Israeli air force planes flying over the Mediterranean towards the Egypt-occupied Gaza Strip and the Sinai.

I worked fairly hard in the fields but enjoyed the evenings, walking around and talking with my fellow volunteers. We met some younger Israelis still in high school. One, in particular, engaged me in Hebrew conversation, and I still remember talking with him one evening, when suddenly all the Hebrew grammar and vocabulary I had learned in high school in South Africa kicked into gear and came together. Suddenly I was conversing quite smoothly in Hebrew without thinking about it. It was one of those *AHA!* moments one reads about.

The war ended after six days, on June 10<sup>th</sup>. The following Wednesday, June 14<sup>th</sup>, the Jewish Agency took us on a tour of the newly united Jerusalem, the Western Wall and through the West Bank. It was still a militarized zone so we were forbidden from bringing our cameras. Afterwards we were told to pack our bags, and the next day we were taken by bus to work in Kibbutz Dafna in the Upper Galilee, not far from Me'en Baruch and the Golan Heights. While there we were also taken on a tour of the Golan Heights and the much-damaged Syrian town of Kunetra, where we saw much military destruction and abandoned military hardware in the fields.

There were many jobs to do on the kibbutz. The one I enjoyed the most was also the hardest: we called it *kash* (Hebrew for “straw” and rhymes with “rush”), involving working in the wheat fields. Since others shied away from it, four other like-minded friends and I were always able to get assigned to this job, especially when, after a few weeks, I was asked to take over the nightly scheduling of the volunteers’ labor assignments for the following day. I enjoyed “kash” because it was very physical and active, unlike, say, cotton-field work or picking fruit.

Because of the intense summer heat in the afternoon, we had to get up extremely early, before anyone else. We climbed into the back of a truck, and the kibbutz member assigned to oversee us drove us to the fields to load very heavy bales of straw onto the truck, and then drove us back to the kibbutz where we unloaded the bales into a pyramid structure, and then drove us back for another load to do it over again. The loads were so huge, the truck so top-heavy with bales of straw, that with the truck swaying from side to side, we drove back to the kibbutz very slowly. After the second load was deposited, it was lunchtime. We were hot, sweaty and exhausted, and had already worked for eight hours, so we were done for the day. We had the whole afternoon to ourselves to swim in the kibbutz pool, or to relax, sleep, or whatever.

After two months at Kibbutz Dafna, our group was again moved, this time to Jerusalem. There we lived in Har Tzion, Mount Zion, in a two-story, rectangular, brick house with a flat roof. Before the war Israeli soldiers had occupied this house, as it was right at the former border with Jordan. On two sides its walls were pock- marked with deep bullet holes. From its flat roof one could see, no more than 50 yards away, a former Jordanian military encampment. When we went down to visit it we discovered its paths had been paved with tombstones taken from the ancient Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives, which had been desecrated while under Jordanian occupation.

The house was located close to David’s tomb, and one day after work, while visiting this structure, I discovered a short-cut through the tomb buildings, along a narrow path, past the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, whose cone-shaped roof had a hole from a shell right through it. I was then in the Old City of Jerusalem and found the road to take me to

the Jaffa Gate, and from there on to the new city from where I could take a bus to visit relatives who lived in Jerusalem. I did this so often that eventually, when I returned home late at night, I could find my way through the unlit, dark streets of the Old City, feel my way through David’s tomb in pitch darkness, and finally get back to the house. Quite an adventure really!

Our work on Mount Zion and the Old City consisted mainly of a variety of odd jobs. We spent many days cleaning up a main square on Mt. Zion that was covered with the refuse of war. One day a busload of American tourists stopped near us and we pretended to be Israeli laborers who could not speak English. They poured out of their bus with their still and 8mm. movie cameras, excited to film Israelis doing an honest day’s labor in the service of their country! Eventually someone caved in and told them who we were, and we had a wonderful conversation with them.

On one other occasion an amazing coincidence occurred. It was around the Jewish Festival of Succot, or Tabernacles. We were asked to assist a religious Jewish charity group based on Mt. Zion with their international solicitations of money for charity. Our job was to take a flyer, fold it with small paper items from Israel, and insert and seal the result into a pre-addressed envelope. We were seated at a table with hundreds of pre-addressed envelopes in the middle and dozens of flyers in front of us. The addresses on the envelopes were mostly in England and the USA, obtained no doubt when people had previously contributed to the charity.

Out of curiosity we would look at the addresses as we sealed the envelopes – our geographical knowledge of the USA and England was rather sketchy and very few of the cities and states had any meaning for us. Occasionally an address in another country or part of the world would appear, even some from South Africa. Suddenly I let out a screech! There, right in front of my nose, was an envelope with my mother’s name and our address in South Africa! I could barely believe it and showed it around to my co-workers. Of all the hundreds of envelopes there, what were the odds? I quickly got a pen and wrote her a brief message and sealed the result in her envelope.

Finally, after roughly two months in Jerusalem, we were told to get ready for our return to South Africa in a few weeks. With about 10 days to go,

five of my friends and I were given permission to go on a six-day trip to Turkey, via Cyprus, by ship. After a few more days with family, I flew back to South Africa, arriving early in November. This was an experience never to be forgotten!

### Postscript

1. The South African Jewish community, at that time totaling roughly 125,000, was very pro-Zionist. The number of volunteers South Africa sent to Israel during and after the Six-Day War, while not the most numerous of all countries, was the largest, relative to the size of its Jewish population.
2. In February 1968, I returned back to re-start my second year at WITS. To my surprise, one of my classmates in a statistics class, a young student whom I had admired from afar the year before, was also in the class. What had happened? Had she failed the class the year before and was now repeating it? Eventually I got up the courage to ask her. Turns out she, too, had been a volunteer in Israel the year before. She'd not been on my flight but had arrived right after the war, stationed at Kibbutz Me'en Baruch. I'd had no idea. Eventually we started to date and, to cut a long story short, we married in South Africa on July 4, 1971, moved to the USA and have lived here ever since. A reward for my volunteer service!!

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*Manley Perkel is Professor Emeritus at Wright State University in Ohio, from which he retired in 2006. He has B.Sc. and B.Sc.(Hons) degrees from the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) in Johannesburg, and a Ph.D. degree in mathematics from the University of Michigan. After a brief stint post-retirement as a visiting faculty at the University of Puget Sound, he and his wife Barbara (Kark) moved to Arizona where he now pursues interests too often overlooked during a busy professional career. He says: "Life couldn't be better!"*

*This article was originally published on the Arizona Jewish Life magazine web site in June 2017, and is republished here with permission. A shorter version of the article was included in the Rosh Hashanah 2017 edition of the SAJAC News magazine. The AZ Jewish Life web site can be found at <http://azjewishlife.com>.*

## TOUCHING THEIR OWN HISTORY IN LITHUANIA

*Gillian Klawansky*



*In delving into their ancestry, many South African Jews have travelled to Lithuania and not just rediscovered their roots, but actually touched their own personal history on these life-changing journeys.*

An estimated 70,000 Lithuanian Jews came to South Africa mainly in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through taking trips to Lithuania, either to visit their own birthplaces or those of their ancestors, these are a few of many whose journeys helped them connect deeply with their past.

### Joyce Levin and Dora Seeff

Joyce Levin first travelled across Lithuania with her parents, Dora and Morris Seeff, and with her uncle Sydney Seeff in 1992, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Seeff brothers were invited on a family tour taken by Mendel Kaplan, as they had come from the same shtetl as Kaplan's grandmother.

Joyce was invited as a member of the next generation. "We went to my father's shtetl, Krakenowa," she explains. "We were there all of 20 minutes, but it was the most important 20 minutes of my entire life.

"My father threw down the stick he used to walk with and just started running around the entire town, recognising the shul, houses and so on. It was up to me to capture this for my family with my cameras and audiotape. It was quite dramatic and my dad got quite ill the next day. The experience had such an impact on me."

Joyce and Dora returned to Lithuania for a family reunion in 2009. “A group of 37 of us went back to Ramygala where our grandfather came from and we had a big family photograph there – we had four generations with us.

“I returned to my father’s shtetl and because he’d now passed away, I became my father and jumped off the bus and ran around.”

Also in the process of doing research between the two trips, Joyce found her mother’s sister’s birth certificate, which said she was born in Ukmerge Street in Ponevezh. “When we got to the street, my mother said: ‘You’ll find nothing’ and then she got off the bus ... Looking around, she saw a green door and said: ‘I know that door – that’s where my sister was born.’”

“She told me how she’d been sent to a neighbour when my granny gave birth and she remembered returning to the news of her sister when she came back through that green door. I fell apart,” said Joyce. “It was amazing to be with my mother, a living person who remembered that detail.”

### **Carole Smollen**

Textile artist Carole Smollen was so struck by her visit to Lithuania, that she began making Torah scrolls and even wrote a book about the experience, detailing three generations of her family: *Linking the Threads: A Tribute to a Litvak Tailor*.

Born in Port Elizabeth, Carole developed a love of cloth in her Lithuanian grandfather’s tailoring room. Years later, living and working in London, she was invited to Vilnius to make a mural for the previously communist Tolerance Centre that was being rebuilt. She used the opportunity to trace her heritage.

Armed with only a photograph of her great-grandparents, as well as her grandfather’s ticket to South Africa, bought in 1906 in Lithuania, Carole flew to PE to visit her grandparents’ gravesites to find her great-grandparents’ names, Reb Shlomo and Gittel Levinthal, before departing.

“In Lithuania, I took a car and a guide and I went to all the shtetls and found my great-grandfather’s house,” she says. “Opposite the house was their shul, all boarded up, but still standing. The last Jew in Zagare remembered my great-grandfather. It was indescribable – I had goose flesh,” she says.

“I also found a miniature Torah at the Tallin Museum. I proceeded to make 150 miniature Torah mantles and I exhibited them at the Yeshiva Museum in New York and also in London.”

These mantles told the story of Carole’s family exodus from Lithuania to South Africa, incorporating fragments of family travel documents and ketubot, photographs, and other memorabilia.

“Now the mantles I make are ordered for special simchas. By going to Lithuania, I gained a whole life – I gained my ancestors, and the inspiration for all the art I’ve done for the last 10 years.”

### **Dina Diamond**

Together with two friends, Sorelle Cohen and Michelle Rosen, Johannesburg-based businesswoman Dina Diamond, recently returned from a weeklong journey to Lithuania and Latvia.

The friends decided to make the journey, when they travelled to Poland two years ago, which awakened a desire to explore where they came from.

“Before we left we all did a huge amount of research,” says Dina. “I had a book that my gran’s brother had written about their lives in Lithuania before they left, but it all became more real for me when we were there.

“We were referred to genealogist and tour guide, Regina Kopilevich, who helped us in Lithuania. We went to the archives in Vilnius and found amazing things. I found the physical shipping ticket for my great-grandparents and grandmother from 1935 when they escaped Lithuania, which blew my mind.

“We hired a car and drove through the towns we’d heard about – there are over 200 shtetls in Lithuania and they’re still shtetls – but without Jews! It was such a rich but bittersweet trip.

“Sorelle found the grave of her great-great-grandfather in a decimated cemetery and Michelle found a family grave too. There were 240,000 Jews in Lithuania at its peak and of that 220 000 were murdered. Today only about 5,000 Jews remain in Lithuania.

“All that our grandparents spoke about came alive during the trip – I can still hear them with their

Yiddish accents. I went to my grandmother's school in Ponevezh; it was absolutely surreal. I phoned my father and said: 'Can you believe where I am?' It gives you an appreciation for how we live today – for the freedoms and quality of life we have – all because our families decided to leave. If they hadn't left we all would have perished.

"We'd been told to find Fania Brantsovsky, a woman who escaped the Vilna ghetto with a friend of hers two hours before its liquidation. We didn't have time to look her up, but coincidentally, we went to the Paneriai Forest where 70 000 Jews were killed and when we got there, she was there conducting a tour! It was an honour to listen to her; she was a survivor who was literally giving us a part of her life."

### **Dr Saul Issroff**

Born in Port Elizabeth, Dr Saul Issroff grew up in Johannesburg and moved to London in 1980. Currently the project manager of the Migration and Genealogy project at the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre at UCT and deputy chairman of the International Institute of Jewish Genealogy headquarters in Jerusalem, Dr Issroff is a retired dermatologist.

"My *bobba* used to tell me stories of the shtetl Linkuva and our family in Lithuania. She came to South Africa in March 1905 with my father, aged nine, and his two younger sisters. My mother came from London and her parents were from Marijampole in south-east Lithuania," he says.

"With the fall of the Soviet Union, I visited in 1993. Four of us went from a genealogy conference in Jerusalem. In a week, we covered a lot of Lithuania. I'd been told about one Jew, Isak Mendelsohn in Zagare.

"Our guide was adamant that no Jews were alive, yet he helped us find him. Isak had been to school with Grunjia, an elderly cousin of mine; he thought she'd been killed in the Holocaust.

"When I told him she was still alive in Israel, he actually cried. We became friends and he took us all over. He described how, when the killing started in the town square, he was 16. He rode his bike to Riga in Latvia and joined the Red Army. He took out his jacket with medals to show us.

"When he got back, amidst the chaos of the defeat of the Germans, he found out that his friend from

school had actually killed his parents. He described to me in Yiddish how he went in the middle of the night and strangled the man. Isak became secretary of the Co-operative in the area. His wife Daljia helped him maintain the local cemeteries.

"A very moving experience for me was also finding the tombstone of my great-grandmother, Grunjia Girs in Linkuva. I had a photograph taken by my father in 1923 when he went back to Lithuania, a distinctive tombstone which had a rounded top in a brick *ohel*. The brick had disintegrated, but I actually stumbled over the stone in thick grass, as though I had been led there!

"To me, the most important aspect of visiting Lithuania was meeting the people, especially the elderly men like Josefus Levinsonas who catalogued around 220 mass murder sites – it's estimated there are over 250 sites."

On visiting the mass murder sites, the group realised that no one knew who was killed there.

"With Rose Lerer Cohen, I started a project researching the names and published *The Holocaust in Lithuania, a book of Remembrance 1939-1945*. The list is still incomplete though."

### **Dr Rose Lerer Cohen**

Genealogist, provenance researcher and independent Holocaust researcher, Dr Rose Lerer Cohen has been to Lithuania more than 20 times. Now based in Israel, she hails from Parow in the Cape.

"I embarked on family research and decided to visit the places where my parents were born and meet survivors of the Holocaust of my family," she says. "On my first visit in 1993, a few months after my father passed away, I met my father's sister who survived the Holocaust (now deceased) and his cousins, who were born soon after the war and whose father survived the Holocaust.

"My travels have been of family discovery. My son Ari accompanied me in 2016 to participate in the 75th anniversary memorial of the murder of my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins in the Pasilve Forest in Uzventis in Lithuania.

"We travelled to places of interest relating to both our personal history and the history of the Jews of Lithuania. The destruction and murder of our family in particular, and of the Jews of Lithuania in

general, moved him deeply. He couldn't understand how neighbours and friends turned on one another.

“Watching my son walk down the streets of Uzventis and Plunge where his grandparents had lived before immigrating to South Africa and take photographs at the Telz Yeshiva building where his grandfather after whom he is named studied for 10 years, was most rewarding, and proved the worth of my research of 27 years; it closed a circle.”

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*Gillian Klawansky is a freelance journalist, and a project editor at Ndalo Media in Johannesburg, South Africa. This article was originally published on the South African Jewish Report web site in July 2017, and is republished here with permission. The SAJR web site can be found at <http://www.sajr.co.za>.*

## TWO TALES OF ZIMBABWE

*Roy Ogus*

I recently came across two fascinating articles which describe visits to Jewish communities in Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) that were published on the *Roads and Kingdoms* web site. Written by Andrew Harris, the two stories describe very different experiences: both report on Andrew's recent travels to that part of the world, but the two articles describe quite dissimilar aspects and perspectives of the communities he visited. I found the articles to be fascinating reading!

Born in Johannesburg, Andrew Harris is a writer and photographer who lives in Melbourne, Australia, with his wife and two young sons. Members of his father's family were prominent industrialists in Southern Rhodesia (and then Zimbabwe). The Harris family made a strong contribution to the country's economic development, establishing a grain milling business that ultimately became National Foods. His great-grandfather and great-uncle were both mayors of Bulawayo, and their portraits hang in the Bulawayo Town Hall to this day.

The first article, titled *Zimbabwe Family Tree*, describes a 2013 trip during which the author explores his father's heritage first by interviews

with his father and other relatives, and then by visiting the towns of Harare and Bulawayo, where his father was born. He finds his father's old home in Harare and talks to the current owner of the house. He then visits the location of the family's former milling company, now long out of his family's hands, and spends some time with the current CEO, who provides him with the details of the company's history which is being written. He sees many references to and artifacts from his family at the company headquarters.

The second article, titled *Shabbat in Zimbabwe*, focusses on the Jewish culinary traditions that still live on in the local community. Meeting with Stella Hanan, one of the few remaining Jews in the Harare community, Harris learns about the story of her Sephardic family roots, and he is treated to both an “ordinary” Thursday night dinner, as well as to a Friday night Shabbat feast, both of which feature traditional Jewish Sephardic delicacies.

Since I am unfortunately not permitted to republish either of the articles in full in this Newsletter, I have instead provided below a lengthy excerpt from each article to give you a sense of the story, and you can then read the full articles at the links provided.

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## ZIMBABWE FAMILY TREE

*Andrew Harris*



In 2013, I took a five-night trip to Zimbabwe, where my father was born. It was a diversion from a family trip to South Africa for my cousin's wedding. My father refused to travel across with me; he said he wanted to remember Zimbabwe how it was. I wanted to see things as they were, and to

gather some sense of where my dad's side of the family came from, and what happened to the community they left behind.

I was born in Johannesburg, and though we emigrated to Australia as a family nearly 30 years ago, I have maintained a strong personal connection to the place. My mother and both her parents were born there too, but I am the only one of my immediate family of four who has retained a South African passport. It's part of my identity.

My father's side, on the other hand, is firmly rooted in a historical paradise that vanished before I was born, with its independence in 1980 – Rhodesia. But my memory of the place it became is of sweaty, hurried stopovers on the way to Johannesburg to visit my grandparents. Under Apartheid-era sanctions, the closest direct flights to Joburg from Australia were to Harare, Zimbabwe's capital. But each time we transited we never left the airport.

Then, in 1997, my parents took my sister and I to Zimbabwe, with the aim of seeing the wildlife and Victoria Falls. At that time, there would still have been some relatives of my father's living there. And yet, perhaps due to the increasingly tense political climate, we never deviated from the magnificent touring itinerary planned; any memories of the Rhodesian idyll left relatively undisturbed after an incredible couple of colonial nights at the Victoria Falls Hotel.

We drove at high speed through the bush in an open-topped game-chasing vehicle during an awesome electrical storm. We visited a local school starved of books and arranged to send them a box or two; we marvelled at loaves of bread inflated to Zim \$2,000 (maybe \$2USD at the time) a loaf; gawped at the ubiquity of Mugabe's portrait. Dad's Swiss Army Knife was stolen from his hotel room bedside. I refused to trade my Nike baseball cap for a soapstone carving and ate myself up with confused 13-year-old guilt afterwards. Victoria Falls was unforgettable from a chopper piloted by an unhinged ex-military pilot. That's more or less what we did in Zimbabwe.

But ever since then, I grew ever more curious about father's past there in Harare and Bulawayo, the country's second city, known for main thoroughfares built by Cecil

Rhodes wide enough for a turning span of oxen. My father left for Jo'burg with his family at 17, so that he could avoid the draft into what would have involved fighting on the wrong side of history. The Rhodesian Bush War, or the Second Chimurenga, was an insurgency and counter-insurgency that raged for 15 years, eventually establishing majority rule, promising a new beginning for Zimbabwe under the leadership of Robert Mugabe. While he finished high school in Johannesburg and eventually met my mother, a number of his childhood friends were drafted and killed.

The full article can be found at:

<http://roadsandkingdoms.com/2016/zimbabwe-family-tree/>

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## **SHABBAT IN ZIMBABWE**

*Andrew Harris*



Stella Hanan's home in the middle of suburban Harare is a Mediterranean island in landlocked Zimbabwe. The walls are adorned with her own brightly allegorical paintings on mystical themes reflecting Southern Africa, where she grew up; Spain, where her ancestors come from; and her Jewish identity, which forced her family to journey across continents in search of peace and stability.

On a cool, damp Friday in June, I joined Hanan at her home as she prepared a traditional Sephardic Shabbat dinner. As a child, she told me, she would ask her mother how the challah dough should feel when it's ready to shape. Her mother would offer a typically idiosyncratic answer: "Like the texture of the lobe of your ear." "I would

ask, what do you mean?” Hanan recalls. “And she’d say, ‘Like that of your underarm,’ and I’d ask her, ‘When you’re young or when you’re old?’ “

Hanan was born in Salisbury, Rhodesia, (now Harare, Zimbabwe) to Sephardic Jewish parents with roots in coastal Turkey and Greece. Married in Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi in the Democratic Republic of Congo) in 1947, Hanan’s parents returned to Rhodesia and quickly became an integral part of a Sephardic Jewish community that, at its peak prior to the intensification of the Zimbabwean War of Independence in the 1970s, numbered more than 1,000 people.

Hanan is now one of about 40 or so Jews remaining in the city. She is also one of only a few able to converse in Ladino, a richly expressive language rooted in 15th-century Spanish, with a polyglot peppering of Hebrew, Greek, Arabic, Turkish, and other tongues, that is intelligible to speakers of modern Spanish.

The full article can be found at:

<http://roadsandkingdoms.com/2017/shabbat-in-zimbabwe/>

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*Andrew Harris’ photography can be seen on the Flickr site:*

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/andharris/collections>

*He can be followed on Twitter ([https://twitter.com/and\\_harris](https://twitter.com/and_harris)), Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/and.harris>), and on LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/andharris/>).*

*The Roads and Kingdoms web site is dedicated to the idea that knowing more makes travel better. The site features talented local journalists, deep storytelling, and the good things in life – food, music, and booze – to inform and inspire their readers about destinations around the globe. The site can be found at:*

<http://roadsandkingdoms.com/about/>

## A VIRTUAL CITY – AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT

*Geraldine Auerbach*



*Interior of the Memorial Road Synagogue in Kimberley*

Today, with people dispersed, far from the place where their families settled and where they grew up, communities are being fragmented and detached. But, in this day and age, there is a solution and a way of bringing people back together, acknowledging their past and documenting their stories – in a virtual town or city.

Fortunately, in the South African context, the need for doing this is largely celebratory, not like the Yizkor books which needed to commemorate communities almost completely annihilated. The South African groups made the necessary and inevitable organic migration with each generation. Itinerant *smouse* became stabilised general dealers and concession store owners. And as the members of small spread-out communities gained in economic terms and in education, their children became masters of industry and professionals in medicine, law and accountancy and cultural leaders, as writers, musicians, academics and politicians.

It is my view that South Africa could not contain the number of high flying deans of medical schools, actuarial, business and cultural entrepreneurs, that this relatively small, mainly Litvak community produced. They had to gravitate to the main cities and from there all over the world, particularly to the UK, USA, Israel, Canada and Australia to achieve their potential, and to give their services to the world at the cutting edge.



I believe that it's worth documenting in detail the story of each settlement, and seeing what contribution the Jewish pioneers and those that made their homes and worked there, made to their local environment and community and ultimately to the world at large.

Therefore, I commend JewishGen for hosting the *KehilaLinks* web sites, and I am delighted that we have been able to create a meaningful, navigable, and expandable site for the place I grew up in – Kimberley in the Northern Cape.

### A virtual cemetery?

The need for some sort of collective action became evident when the remnants of the community appealed to its diaspora, through an ex-pat. They needed to build a wall around the cemetery that was being vandalised and were seeking donations. It made me think that, as so few people were local anymore to tend to and visit their parents' and grandparents' graves, it would be very helpful to those spread around the world, to have a virtual cemetery – somewhere on the internet to visit our loved ones' graves, leave a stone, and spend some contemplative time with them from wherever we are now. We could also, if we were a cohesive group of ex-patriates, support and help those remaining in Kimberley with the work they do to preserve the Jewish heritage, the remaining elderly members, and Jewish buildings.

And indeed, my thinking went on, if we had this virtual cemetery site, we could also write about our loved ones and put up pictures of them, and chronicle the landmarks in their lives and the Jewish lives of our towns and cities. So, the idea of a permanent world-wide-web presence grew within me.

Having set my heart on achieving this, I considered how it could be done. In my researches, I discovered the website for the Zimbabwe Jewish Community. This is a fantastic site, and it instantly became my role model. It has everything I wanted. It's well organised and easy to navigate and fascinating to peruse the history of the community, personal biographies, graves, newspaper articles, *ketubot*, photographs, and so much more. (The site can be found at: <http://www.zjc.org.il>.)

I immediately contacted the curator of this site, Dave Bloom, now living in Israel. I wanted his template, but he said he had been developing the

site over many years and now it needed upgrading to a new platform and he couldn't oblige. But I had seen that this sort of thing could be done and I was more determined than ever.

Now that we had a kind of template I approached the remnant of the Kimberley community, whom I hoped would be keen to participate. But I soon learned that the 'awesome foursome' as they called themselves, were far too busy tending to the needs of the remarkable historic Jewish buildings; the elderly members; as well as still being heavily involved in their own businesses and on various Kimberley cultural and business boards and committees, to attend to websites, or even to write an occasional Newsletter to a diaspora that Rabbi Silberhaft, the travelling Rabbi, had identified for them.

As is my wont, if I can't find people to help, then, like the Little Red Hen, I do it myself. I am happy to pass on my trajectory of creating the virtual community for Kimberley, in case there are others that would like to achieve something like this for their own community.

I suggest the following steps:

1. **Create a Database** of people that might like to be involved and who have some knowledge and whose lives you want to document. The travelling Rabbi or the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBOD) might help, and you may want to contact those you know and requesting their help. There are some internet sites, and, of course, the JewishGen site, that can uncover those that might be of help. Don't be surprised if other organisations are not keen to divulge any such information.
2. **Circulate a Newsletter.** You need then to communicate with as many email addresses as can be found of people who lived, or have lived or have some connections with living in your *dorp* or city. In this communication, you have to introduce your purpose, but also give some tantalising snippets of history or even gossip that might get them interested in responding. Printing pictures of children and asking them to identify them may also stir people into responding.

You can see all the Newsletters that I wrote to Kimberley ex-pats from the very beginning in

August 2013 on the Kimberley KehilaLinks site in the 'News' section:

<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/News.html>

3. **Find out more about the people.** The first – and maybe subsequent Newsletters as you get more addresses – should contain a questionnaire to find out who the people are, about their parents, grandparents, when they left and why, what they do now, and about their spouses and children. You can see the questions we asked under the Contact pages of the Kimberley site:

<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/Contact.html>

Don't be disappointed if response is slow; it will build up, and at the same time you can start to put together what history you can of the community.

4. **Finding an appropriate organisation to host a website** – and someone to build it. The breakthrough came for me when Saul Issroff of South African JewishGen introduced me virtually (at the memories of Muizenberg exhibition opening in London) to Eli Rabinowitz, a South African expat, now living in Perth, Australia. Eli is very involved in documenting Eastern European *shtetlach*, and had begun to document South African communities on the *KehilaLinks* section of JewishGen. I contacted Eli, who was by chance passing through London the following week on his way to Lithuania. He was able to stay with me, and we spent quite a few late nights going through how we wanted the site to look and what it should contain and most important how to logically flow through it.

5. **Create the site:** With Eli ready to go, we were all set to actually create the site in 2015 – after having been sending Newsletters twice a year for two years, and receiving more and more information and suggestions. We realised that we needed 11 main headings on the site: all entries could then be neatly incorporated and easily looked up, under one or other of these headings: Home, About, Community, Synagogues, Cemeteries, Families, Articles, News, Visitors book, Photos, and Contact. You can see how these work on the Kimberley site:

<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/Home.html>



We are pleased to say that the Kimberley site is now hailed as one of the very best of the KehilaLinks sites. It has a community time line from the discovery of diamonds in the *veldt*; details of diamond pioneers as well as of trading and professional families that came to settle and work there over the years. Stories have been sent in, and questionnaires make interesting reading. Wedding pictures are a favourite, and we now have 16 that took place between 1925 and 1964, many taken on the steps outside the front of the *shul*

The pioneering Jews who came from Britain – and especially from Germany to this barren piece of *veldt* when diamonds were discovered in 1868 – played a significant role in the transformation of South Africa from a Dutch agricultural backwater into a modern British industrial country. Most of these German-Jewish pioneers, who took their capital, made in Kimberley, to the Transvaal goldfields, became British subjects and settled in mansions on Park Lane or thereabouts. You can read their stories on the 'pioneers' pages, including an extensive story I have compiled about the real life of Alfred Beit, the most impressive of all mining pioneers in Kimberley and then Johannesburg – yet hardly known as he shunned publicity and would rather his admired friend Cecil Rhodes take all the credit.

There are descriptions and beautiful picture galleries of the exquisite Memorial Road synagogue built in 1902 by the diamond magnates on land donated by De Beers (of which many were directors), as well as the *Grinne shul*, built later to the taste of the Eastern European immigrants who came in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are videos from SABC programmes commemorating the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *shul* in 2012, and an article on the history of 100 years of the community which started in 1873.

We have miraculously found pictures of every grave in both the old and current Jewish cemeteries taken by a British-American young man living in Japan! You can see it all on the KehilaLinks site.

This is a labour of love by Eli and myself, but it is also loved by others who contribute stories and pictures, comments, and questions. It is admired by

organisations that link to it. I hope it inspires others to do the same.

This is an ongoing project. If you would like to receive the Kimberley Newsletter, please send me your email address. We welcome anyone with an interest in the Kimberley Jewish community to contact me or Eli Rabinowitz with any relevant information or questions. We will do our best to help.



*Born in Kimberley, South Africa, Geraldine Auerbach (nee Kretzmar) settled in London in 1962 with her husband Ronnie, who became an ENT surgeon. She was trained in fine art in Johannesburg and taught drawing and painting at a school in Harrow for 26 years. With an interest in music, she developed a month-long Jewish music festival which ran every two years from 1984 – 2000, and included, opera, concerts recitals and illustrated lectures. Events took place in prestigious concert halls, synagogues, and churches including special events in Canterbury Cathedral, York Minster, and St Paul's Cathedral. There were many premières and new commissions performed by outstanding local and international artists. Several performing groups were specially created. She was the founding Director of the Jewish Music Institute, which in 2000 was invited to be based at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. JMI supports a lectureship in Jewish music there as well as evening classes, workshops and summer schools. With the Millennium Commission, she created a day of Jewish Culture in the Millennium Dome and in partnership with SOAS, got a grant to give awards to individuals for projects in Jewish music. (Many recipients are now professionals in Jewish music as teachers and performers). Working with the Mayor of London's office she was the driving force for public events 'Simcha on the Square' in Trafalgar Square (2006 – 2008, and later 'Klezmer in the Park' in Regent's Park. She encouraged and helped develop a number of Jewish cultural institutions around the world, including Jewish Music Centres in South Africa and Brazil, Jewish Renaissance magazine, the International Centre for Suppressed Music, the Jewish East End Celebration Society.*

*Her work in Jewish music was recognised in 2000 with the award of an MBE and in 2008 she was made an Hon Fellow of SOAS. In 2011, she*

*relinquished the role of Director of JMI, and has since worked with experts in their fields, to set up the European Cantors Association as well as on other projects that interest her such as bringing the Kimberley community back together, and creating the Kimberley KehilaLinks website with Eli Rabinowitz and spending time doing gardening, art work, and other activities with her 4 grandchildren who are all close by in London.*

*Geraldine Auerbach can be reached at [geraldine.auerbach@gmail.com](mailto:geraldine.auerbach@gmail.com); Eli Rabinowitz can be reached at [elirab@jinet.net.au](mailto:elirab@jinet.net.au)*

*Editor's Note: The Kimberley KehilaLinks site can be found at:*

*<https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley/>*

*The JewishGen KehilaLinks home page can be found at: <https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/>*

## **SOUTH AFRICAN PARTICIPATION IN ISRAEL'S WAR OF INDEPENDENCE**

*David Solly Sandler*

Seventy years ago the historical United Nations General Assembly resolution was passed to partition Palestine into a Jewish State and an Arab State,

The voting took place late Saturday night on 29 November 1947, South African time, and telephones rang late into the night and there was great rejoicing as the news spread.

In the days following, there were numerous meetings and gatherings and speeches and collecting of names of South African ex-servicemen in Johannesburg:

- Meetings were held and speeches given on Sunday 30th November
- On the Monday, Maurice Mendelowitz, a South African ex-serviceman, arrived in the Zionist Federation office to offer his services.
- On Tuesday, there was a very large gathering at Balfour Park where many speeches were made.

- On 7th December at the Great Wolmaran's Street *shul*, a Chanukah service of the South African Jewish Ex-Service League was held.
- Three days later at a South African Zionist Council meeting, hundreds of young men put their names down to serve in Israel.

In January 1948, there were four emissaries from Israel. Another four arrived in February 1948, including Pagli and Boris Senior. They started recruiting ex-servicemen volunteers who were being despatched clandestinely to Israel with the active support of the South African Zionist Federation. A secret pilot's training school was established in Germiston, and attempts were made to buy aircraft to be sent to Israel.

By April 1948, there were over 5,000 young men and woman from Zionist youth movements under training on weekends on a farm on the way to Krugersdorp. While shooting was forbidden, training was offered for the assembly and disassembly of small arms, and during the week many instructive lectures were held. A small percentage of these youth were sent to Israel after they protested that only ex-servicemen were being sent.

South Africa was by manyfold the largest per capita contributor to the volunteers, and eventually sent 810 volunteers. There were approximate 300 Canadian volunteers, 350 from the United Kingdom, 600 French, 950 United State, and 600 from several other countries including 16 listed on the *Machal* website as Australians. 24 Machalniks were from Arcadia (the South African Jewish Orphanage in Johannesburg).

I attribute South Africa's large contribution to the fact South Africans are mainly Litvaks, and very Zionist. Unlike the English Jews, who strived to be more English than the English, and did not want to be seen as different, the Litvak Jews had grown up with a very proud Zionist tradition.

The story of the South African volunteers is comprehensively told in the book, *South Africa's 800: The Story of South African Volunteers in Israel's War of Birth*, by Henry Katzew, and I have used this material as the source of this article. Katzew's book has not only the names of the South Africans who served in Israel in 1948-9, but also those who served from 1956 to 1972.

In his book, Katzew asks:

What impelled the young Jews of South Africa to volunteer in their thousands to fight alongside their brothers in Israel?

Part of the initial research for a book about these volunteers was a questionnaire sent to a representative selection of volunteers. Their collective answer was illuminating, not only for what they said, but for what they did not say. There was not a single expression of hate, resentment, anger, or contempt for the Arabs. The protest of the young men and women was against the Jewish condition, for which, as I have indicated, Christian and Moslem have a shared guilt. The Jews had had enough. They were resolved after Hitler that they would never again be the toy of gangsters in politics and wolves in mobs. Whether explicitly or implicitly, they became Zionists.

Let the volunteers speak for themselves:

**Cyril Steinberg** (leading navigator, of Johannesburg):

My family was steeped in the Zionist faith. In World War II, I was in a SAAF bomber squadron. In December 1947, I went to a mass gathering of the Jewish community at Balfour Park to celebrate the United Nations partition of Palestine into a Jewish State and an Arab State. Chief Rabbi L. I. Rabinowitz, always an impressive speaker, asked those who had war experience to put their names down in case they were wanted. I put my name down. My decision flowed from my Zionist education and from the mark left on me by the slaughter of the Jews in Europe. I was qualified to serve and help my people.

**Jack Weinronk** (pilot instructor, of Port Elizabeth):

I was educated into a great feeling for Eretz Israel. My grandparents were buried on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives. In 1935, my dad, then a sick man, visited Palestine and, returning, added a clause to his will that he wished to be buried in Jerusalem. He died in 1942. I was then a pilot in the South African Air Force. We fulfilled his wish. When the Israel war broke out in 1948, I decided I had to go.

**Joe Leibowitz** (air gunner, of Johannesburg):

It's a strange story. I was born in Lithuania where a Jew knew what anti-Semitism was, and came to South Africa at the age of nine. Then, three years after World War II, came the prospect of a Jewish State. I was torn to pieces inside. I had a strong feeling that we had a moral pact with the slaughtered Six Million. This was the first chance to fight back against a world that hadn't cared.

85 South Africans have fallen in the defence of Israel including four from Arcadia.

Henry Katzew, in the introduction of his book, tells of the leading role played by the South African ex-servicemen in creating "something out of nothing" in the newly established Israeli Air Force. Mr. Ben Gurion, the then Prime Minister, honoured the South Africans by mentioning them first in this significant tribute to the Air Force volunteers:

The pioneers of the air and our Air Force in the earliest period were sons of the Land of Israel and the part played by Israeli pilots in the operations, victories and battles of the Air Force is not small.

But we would not have reached and maintained an Air Force that in a short period became one of the decisive forces in the War of Independence without volunteers from abroad, professionally trained and experienced in the Armies of the Allies during the Second World War. Never has the unity of Israel been revealed in so tangible and clear a manner, and there has never been, it seems to me, a body of Jews which has embodied so fully an ingathering of exiles as the Defence Force of Israel. But in no fighting force did the volunteers from abroad fulfil so important, responsible and blessed a role as in the Air Force of Israel, since this force demanded more expertise, professionalism and experience than any other branch in our armed forces. And from the midst of the Jews of South Africa, England, America, Canada and other countries, were forthcoming the experts and men of experience who volunteered their lives to the War of Independence in our Land.

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*David Sandler was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, but all his forebears originated in*

*Lithuania. After the death of his mother in 1956, he was placed in the care of Arcadia, the South African Jewish Orphanage. There he spent his childhood, completed his schooling, and was given a Jewish upbringing. He left Arcadia in 1969 after matriculating, and then served in the South African Defence Force. In 1976, he qualified as a chartered accountant. In 1981, he emigrated to Perth, Australia, where he now lives. He is the father of two daughters. In 2007, he retired from his profession to compile books on Jewish History.*

*David has completed a number of volumes on the story of Arcadia, several books related to the Ochberg Orphans, as well as other compilations of the Jewish story in Lithuania and South Africa. A list of his books can be seen at:*

*<https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/johannesburg/Solly.html>*

*If you are interested in more information about David's books, or about anything in this article, please contact David by e-mail at [sedsand@iinet.net.au](mailto:sedsand@iinet.net.au)*

*Editor's Notes:*

*Henry Katzew's book, South Africa's 800: The Story of South African Volunteers in Israel's War of Birth, can be viewed at this link:*

*<http://www.machal.org.il/images/stories/machal-sa800.compressed.pdf>*

*In addition, the account of another South African volunteer to Israel during that period, Lionel Hodes, can be read at the following link:*

*[http://machal.org.il/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=845&Itemid=1269&lang=en](http://machal.org.il/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=845&Itemid=1269&lang=en)*

*See also the article describing David Sandler's most recent book in this issue of the Newsletter on page 24.*

*David is also working on a new book about the South African landsmanschaften (town-related mutual aid societies with members from the same town in Eastern Europe). Starting from about 1900, a number of these landsmanschaften were formed for the towns of Anykster, Birzer, Chelm in Poland, Dwinsk, Keidan, Kelmer, Kovno, Krakinover, Kroze, Kupisker, Kurland and Riga,*

Lutzin, Malat, Minsk, Ponevez, Poswohl, Plungian, Rakishok, Schavlaner, Schawler, Shater, Tels, Utianer, Wilner, and Zagare. David is seeking copies of any landsmanschaft publications including booklets, minutes, literature, or articles that readers may have. He already has booklets for the towns of Keidan, Krakenowo, Poneves, and Malat. If anyone owns any such publications, please contact David at the e-mail address mentioned above.

## A KIBBUTZ CALLED JAN SMUTS

*Peter Dickens*

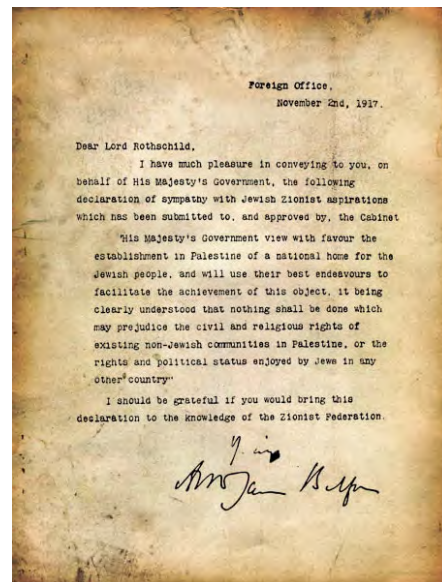


*Top row: Jan Smuts and Chaim Weizmann*

*Bottom row: Left – Early IDF soldiers using adapted South African designed and manufactured Marmon-Herrington armoured cars. Right – Flag-raising of the Israeli flag once independence was fully established.*

Did you know that Jan Smuts has a kibbutz named after him because of his support in founding the state of Israel, and that this kibbutz was at the centre of the 1948 Arab Israeli War (also known as the Israeli War of Independence)?

Jan Smuts was a supporter of the Balfour Declaration, first adopted in November of 1917 and then again reaffirmed in 1922 in the League of Nations British Mandate for Palestine which set forth British policy towards the establishment of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine.



*The Balfour Declaration*

Smuts became personal friends with Chaim Weizmann, who would go on to become the first President of Israel and Smuts and he saw to it that his government voted in the United Nations in support of the creation of the State of Israel. As a consequence of this a Kibbutz near Haifa is named after him, Ramat Yohanan.

Smuts' relationship with the idea of a Jewish state started when South African supporters of Theodor Herzl contacted Smuts in 1916. It was in London that he met and became friends with Chaim Weizmann, the President of the Zionist Organization. Weizmann went on to become the first President of Israel. He was elected on 16 February 1949, and served until his death in 1952.

In 1943, Weizmann wrote to Smuts, detailing a plan to develop Britain's African colonies to compete with the United States – essentially a United States of Southern Africa – something which appealed to Jan Smut's ideology of a "union" of former colonies and states in Africa for the greater good of all (his philosophy of Holism at work).

When South Africa became a "union" in 1910, it was originally envisaged that Bechuanaland (modern-day Botswana) and Southern Rhodesia (modern-day Zimbabwe) would also form part of the newly created South Africa.

Political maneuvering (mainly by the British) meant it was not to be, and South Africa forged ahead as a union of the British Colonies of the

Cape and Natal and the two Boer Republics – the Orange Free State and Transvaal (the South African Republic) only. The idea of a regional superpower union was never really lost though and only fully put to bed when the National Party came to power in 1948, effectively ending any further union ideas with commonwealth countries in Southern Africa.

During his service as Premier, Smuts also personally fundraised for multiple Zionist organisations.

Now to Ramat Yohanan (Hebrew: רַמַת יוֹהָנָן, meaning Yohanan Heights), a kibbutz in northern Israel, named after the then South African Prime Minister and wartime leader – Jan Smuts.

It was the location of the Battle of Ramat Yohanan during the 1948 Israeli War of Independence. In April 1948, the Druze regiment of the Arab Liberation Army was engaged by Jewish Haganah soldiers in a hard-fought battle at the kibbutz.

The Druze attacked Ramat Yohanan and other neighbouring kibbutzim in order to try to take the roads leading to Haifa. The attack was unsuccessful and the Druze withdrew to their base in Shefa-'Amr with a high number of casualties, this action led to a non-aggression treaty which was signed by the Haganah with the Druze. Throughout the kibbutz, there are still scattered defence towers used by the kibbutz to defend itself.

The Haganah was a Jewish paramilitary organization operating in the then-British Mandate of Palestine, which went on to become the core of the Israel Defence Force (IDF).



As an interesting fact, in 1941, Yitzhak Rabin joined the Palmach section of the Haganah during his stay at Jan Smuts' kibbutz – Ramat Yohanan. He was the fifth Prime Minister of Israel, serving two terms in office, 1974–77, and 1992 until his assassination in 1995.

Today, the kibbutz grows produce including mainly avocado, lychee, and citrus fruits; raises both meat and dairy cattle; and is the home of a Palram plastics factory. They also produce a small quantity of olive oil and dairy products, much of which is used and sold on the kibbutz. For several years, Ramat Yochanan has run an *ulpan* program that serves primarily American and Russian students.



*Modern day Shavout festival at Ramat Yohanan*

The last official act Jan Smuts carried out before leaving office in 1948 was to recognise the independent State of Israel, fulfilling his long standing commitment to Chaim Weizmann.

Most of Jan Smuts' history has been downplayed significantly in the years since his death, his politics and endeavours largely glossed over by a Nationalist government and overshadowed by the implementation by the Nationalists of Apartheid in 1948.

This history lies largely forgotten to most South Africans today, but the fact remains that other than Nelson Mandela, not too many South African leaders since Smuts have had such a presence and role in shaping world politics as we know it today,

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*The author, Peter Dickens, maintains a blog, The Observation Post, with a goal to keep contemporary South African military history alive, and to reveal where historical accounts of certain events and happenings may not have been fully or accurately reported, or may have been skewed to meet some or other political agenda.*

*This article originally appeared on his blog in May 2017, and is republished here with permission. The home page of the blog can be found at: <https://samilhistory.com/>*

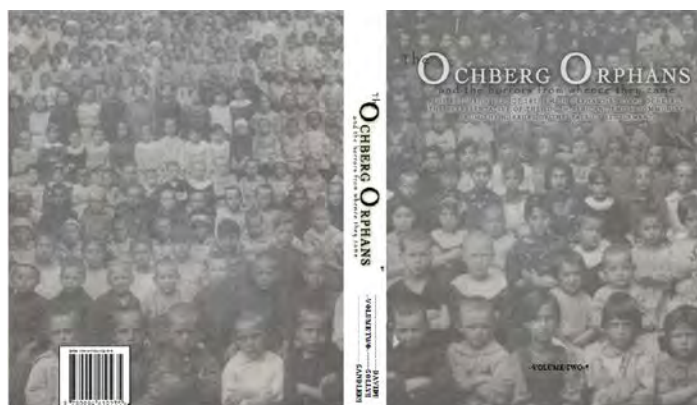


## ***New Book***

# **THE OCHBERG ORPHANS AND THE HORRORS FROM WHENCE THEY CAME – VOLUME TWO**

***The rescue in 1921 of 177 Jewish Orphans from the pogroms in the Pale of settlement by the South African Jewish Community***

*Compiled by David Solly Sandler*



*This book, numbering 360 pages, is a sequel to the first volume with the same name, which was originally published in April 2011, and includes not only additional histories of specific Ochberg Orphans (who were initially known as the Ukrainian War and Pogrom Orphans) that have come to light since 2011, but also the many events and celebrations that have taken place over the past six years to remember Isaac Ochberg and the outstanding work done by the Isaac Ochberg Heritage Committee in Israel. This committee was established mainly through the efforts of Bennie Penzik, the son of two Ochberg Orphans.*

This volume commences with an introduction to the Ochberg Orphans by the late Sir Martin Gilbert, the British historian and author. The introduction is followed by details of the horrors that faced the Jews in the Pale of Settlement during the 1920's, and the help given to them by the Jewish communities around the world.

The next section of the book is devoted to the three Pinsker Orphanages that are very much part of the Ochberg Orphan story as 44 children were selected



from these orphanages to go to South Africa. They were accompanied by Alter Bobrow who had helped establish these orphanages together with his comrades, and the stories of these children are included in this volume.

The book also describes the work of the Pinsker Orphan Relief Fund of London by John Cooper, whose grandfather was on the Fund's committee. The Fund brought out 19 Pinsker Orphans in 1924 and 34 in 1926 for adoption in London.

The book includes newly uncovered histories of Ochberg Orphans, as well as those that were previously published in *More Arc Memories* in 2008 and for completeness a limited amount of material from the first volume

The book then fast forwards to the twenty-first century to reveal the events, ceremonies, books, and the documentary that have honoured Isaac Ochberg since his death in 1937. The main event, no doubt, was the two-day ceremony held in Israel in July 2011 culminating in the dedication of a memorial site at Ramat Menashe to Isaac Ochberg and the orphans he saved.

The book ends by detailing the good work done by the Isaac Ochberg Heritage Committee, and this section is followed by an addendum.

As with the original volume this edition has three aims:

- To record the forgotten history, the horrors suffered by Jews in the 'Pale of Settlement' from 1914 to 1922 and the help given to them by their brethren, the Jewish Communities worldwide.
- To provide a legacy for the descendants of each of the Ochberg Orphans; a book which presents the history of the original Ochberg Orphans and preserves the life stories of their descendants.
- To raise funds for Arcadia and Oranjia, the two Jewish Orphanages in South Africa, in whose care the Ochberg Orphans were placed. Both of these institutions still exist today and continue to take care of Jewish children in need. All the proceeds from the sale of this book, as with my previous compilations, will be donated to them.

The author offers a special thanks to Bennie Penzik and Lionel Slier, both descendants of Ochberg Orphans, who always encouraged, helped, and contributed towards the creation of this volume. Sandler also thanks the many people who have helped him to collect the life stories, and those who have opened their hearts and shared their, or their parents' stories. He dedicates the book to the Ochberg Orphans and the Arcadians who have passed away, and to the generosity of the South African Jewish community which has always taken care of its own.

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*Editor's Notes: For more information about David Sandler, see his article in this issue of the Newsletter on page 19.*

*For further information about the two Ochberg Orphans books, or to obtain a copy of either of them, please contact David Sandler at:*

*sedsand@iinet.net.au*

*Proceeds from the sale of this book will be given to the Arcadia Jewish Orphanage, the Oranjia Jewish Child and Youth Care Centre, formerly the two Jewish Orphanages in South Africa.*

*Note that the SA-SIG Board has no financial interest in these books.*

## FATES LOST AND FOUND IN VICISSITUDES OF THE LITHUANIAN HISTORY

*Stasė Eitavičienė*

*Abel and Glenda Levitt, born in South Africa and who have been living in Israel for more than a quarter of a century, say that Lithuania has been and will always be in their hearts. The couple has been visiting the country since 1998, and the preservation of Jewish culture and its memory in the country is one of their main goals. The author of this article, Stasė Eitavičienė, a teacher, journalist, and Lithuanian public figure, met with the Levitts in Biržai in 2015 when they arrived in the town for their second visit.*



*From left to right: Abel Levitt, Merunas Jukonis, Glenda Levitt*

### **Litvak couple in Cape Town**

Abel and Glenda Levitt say that about 40,000 Lithuanian Jews arrived in South Africa in the period between 1875 and 1913. According to Abel, life was not easy for the Jews in Lithuania and there were few prospects to make a living there. Abel's grandfather, a small flax merchant with eight children, could not imagine a bright future for his children there. Just at that time, according to the interviewer, the New World opened up – America and later, when diamonds were found, Africa opened up. After gold was discovered [in the Transvaal], more Jews went to South Africa. The mining and trade of gemstones and gold allowed Jews who arrived from Lithuania to make a living, bring their families to settle as well, and some of them did exceptionally well and created

new industries. And thus, the Litvak community expanded in South Africa.

When the discussion turned to Lithuanians having lived and living in South Africa, Glenda said jokingly that she knows of only one Lithuanian, the painter Pranas Domsaitis who arrived in South Africa in 1949. Glenda studied art, and when she saw Domsaitis' landscapes and religious compositions, she became fascinated by them. "I assumed that he was a Greek," Glenda said. However much later, while visiting Palanga she noticed a book with the painter's name on a museum shelf. "It was a real surprise, and I got to know that one of my favourite artists was actually a Lithuanian! I bought his book." Glenda tells that the painter's works gained public recognition in South Africa. His paintings can be found in museums and private collections and in 1964, Domsaitis received the prestigious South African art award: "Artists of Fame and Promise."

### **The tribute to Samogitia, Abel's parents' homeland**

Abel Levitt's father went to South Africa from Plunge, his mother from Kretinga. His father died when Abel was a child, but he said that he always knew that the Jewish *shtetl* (small town) in Lithuania was part of his origins in Lithuania. His father was from a large family of eight children, but those who remained were murdered during the Holocaust. "I had been thinking about the fate of my relatives in Lithuania for many years, but Eastern Europe was ruled by the communists, and was a 'black spot' for us. We did not know anything, we could not come here."

Abel and Glenda first visited Lithuania in 1998. They went to visit Jakovas Bunka, the last Jew in Plunge. He had dedicated his life to commemorate the memory of the Jews killed in his town.

After visiting several times, Abel and Glenda helped to establish the Tolerance Centre in the "Saule" Gimnasium of Plunge. They established an arts competition, named for the famous playwright and screen play writer Ronald Harwood, a schoolboy friend of Abel's.

Only many years after they left school, did Abel discover that his childhood friend's father, had, like his own, come to South Africa from Plunge! The arts competition helps students to learn about

Jewish culture and everyday life, and about the Holocaust.

Abel and Glenda, together with Eugenijus Bunka of the Bunka Fund, helped to erect a Memory Wall in the forest of Kausenai. It was there that 1,800 Jews were murdered. The memorial was the first in Lithuania, with the names of the victims on a memorial at the site of the mass graves where they were buried. Abel says that the cost of the memorial was covered by contributions from family and friends. Not a single person who was approached refused to donate money.

The wall was unveiled in 2011, 70 years after the genocide. "Our main objective was to build a memorial so that each murdered person would have his or her forename and surname on the wall," says Glenda. She emphasizes that she and Abel got to know not only about the tragic massacre of the Jews in Plunge, but also about the heroic deeds of some of the local population who rescued Jews. For their memory, and in their honour, the Levitts, together with Eugenijus Bunka created the "Alley of the Savers" where the names of those who saved Jews are commemorated. This is unique – you will see this type of a memorial nowhere else.

Abel was keen to go further afield in Samogitia, and he and Glenda are happy to have recently discovered Birzai.

### **Unexpected links with Birzai**

Glenda regrets that in her youth she did not really know about her parents' roots. "I knew that my father was from Ukraine and that my mother was born in Rokiskis." Both Glenda and her sister, who lives in Israel, regret that nobody knew about their father's family, but they have even less information about their mother's family. "We did not even know our grandmother's maiden name," says Glenda's sister, Rolene.

Once, while visiting Plunge, Ingrida Vilkiene, the coordinator of education programmes of the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Nazi and Soviet crimes in Lithuania, invited Abel and Glenda to Birzai. "We did not want to go as we had never heard of Birzai, however Ingrida said that we absolutely had to go and become familiar with the activities of the *Ausra* School and meet Vidmantas and Merunas Jukonis (father and son, both history teachers). Glenda remembers: "Birzai made an impression on us."

A short while after the visit to Birzai, Glenda and Abel were on holiday in South Africa. They went to visit a friend, and asked him to help with funding of their activities in Plunge. He told them that his family roots were in Birzai, or Birzh as it was known to the Jews at that time. They mentioned to him that they had been on a recent trip to Lithuania and had visited Birzai. And thus was born the Birzai-Birzh Memorial Project.

Soon after returning home, Abel attended a prayer evening for the son of old friends. While there he heard a surname that sounded familiar. He approached the man and said that he thought that there was a family connection to Glenda. The man asked them to visit him at his hometown in the south of Israel, and to look at his family tree. There Glenda and her sister discovered that their grandmother's maiden name was Pesachowitz, her first names were Ada Blume, and that she had been born in Birzai. Glenda's grandfather was from Rokiskis.

It was when Glenda examined the list of victims of the Jews murdered in the forest of Pakamponys that she found the names of two of her grandmother's family. Birzai now became very sad and personal connection.

### **A love story worth a movie**

Another task that Abel and Glenda Levitt had to complete in Birzai would be really worth memorializing in a novel or a movie. They were asked to visit a 102 year old woman who had loved one man all her entire life, but did not have the opportunity to go through life with him.

The story began before the war, around the 1930's when the young Lithuanian girl and a young Jewish boy fell in love with each other. As there were Jewish dignitaries in the young man's family, it was unlikely that they would accept their son's friendship with a Christian girl. The couple used to meet secretly near the castle ruins, and it seemed that no one would prevent their happiness, but the Second World War broke out, and the young man in 1938 emigrated to the United States, hoping that his beloved would soon come to him. During the war, she not only hid Jews and wore a yellow star to take food into the Kaunas ghetto, but she always kept her lover's name in her heart as well.

She tried to go to her beloved, but first America did not want to let her in as she was only a fiancée,

not his wife. Later it was the Soviets who did not release her. Moreover they mocked her by replying that in Lithuania there are enough men to choose from.

Although he got married, they wrote letters to each other until the man's death in 1985. The woman had corresponded with the beloved man's son since he was a child, and she met him when he made an illegal three-hour visit to Lithuania before it became independent. His son keeps his father's 700 page diary written in Yiddish and Hebrew. There are plenty of poems and many sweet words dedicated to his beloved and about the era of a Birzai Jew's everyday life in this diary. Maybe one day someone will translate it? Though the woman does not want to be in the public eye, she was happy to meet Abel and Glenda.

### **The Jewish unity is taught from an early age**

It is known that, sometimes Lithuanians are surprised and angry, or even mock the Jews' ability to help one another. That's why it was interesting to hear the opinion of the visitors, how such a concern for one's fellow is through education, or perhaps it's just in the nature of Jews?

Glenda described how Jewish children are taught creative thinking from an early age, moreover there are ongoing debates in which each child can give his own opinion by arguing to defend it. Abel said that Jewish schools in Europe were opened without governmental help. If a family did not have enough money for a child's education, the community would collect it for them.

"Every child has the right to get a Jewish education, and that is not because the Jews have a lot of money, but because they feel responsibility for their children and their own future," said Abel.

"On Friday evenings the whole family must be together, as the family members are like a fist, supporting one another. For instance when a stranger is noticed in the synagogue he or she is invited to the group because during celebrations no one should be alone or feel lonely," continued Abel.

"Years ago each Jew at home had a money-box, a so-called blue box, where coins were collected for the creation of the State of Israel. Now we have our state, but the tradition of saving for any noble purpose, such as tree planting, for example,

remained," remembered Glenda. "In schools in Israel at the age of 14, every teenager has to become a volunteer and help in their town where it is most needed. Furthermore, the children all over Israel go from door to door and collect donations for any good purpose, for instance to aid the blind or disabled." These Jewish youth education features were mentioned by the Levitts.

### **What has Birzai lost and what does the town have to discover.**

"During the Holocaust, and because of emigration, Lithuania lost a lot of talented, creative and business people. The Jews constituted a middle class, they were educated and had their own culture, which undoubtedly would enrich Lithuania," said Abel.

"But what has been will not return. Now however, it is important to preserve the memory about the large Jewish community in Birzai" replied Glenda.

The Levitts are determined to help the Tolerance Education Centre to equip a class with mobile poster stands about the Jewish life in our city before the war, the Holocaust and its consequences. Moreover they plan to establish a fund that would finance various creative competitions and would organize student trips to discover Lithuanian areas related to the preservation of the Jewish memory.

The Levitts, on behalf of the Birzai-Birzh Memorial Project would like to help Birzai's Sela museum develop a rich museum exhibition about the Jewish life in Birzai, and to build a memorial on which the names of those buried in Pakamponys, the mass murder site near Birzai.

"We can see that during the last dozens of years the people's, especially the young ones' attitude towards the history, the memory and the Tolerance has changed significantly, however it is not enough. We have to talk about it more." said the Levitts.

"We who are alive, we need to honour this memory, because those who are dead cannot. Mainly because we should not let the history recur." These were the final words said by Abel and Glenda, who promised to return to Birzai soon.

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This article was originally published on the Šiaurės rytai web site in December 2015, and is republished here with permission. The article was translated by Vida Samulionytė and Aida Kairienė, and edited by Allan Evans. Additional revisions were made by Abel and Glenda Levitt. The original article on the Šiaurės Rytai web site can be found at:

<http://www.siaure.lt/article/view/14006/?SearchText=Abelis>

## LONG ISOLATED, AFRICA'S JEWISH 'ISLANDS' BRIDGED BY PHOTOGRAPHER'S LENS

*Photographer Jono David completes a 4-year project capturing emerging African Jewish communities, shown at Tel Aviv's Beit Hatfutsot Museum*

Melanie Lidman



*Spiritual leader Alex Armah (center) with community members at shacharit (morning) service at Tifereth Israel Synagogue, House of Israel Jewish Community, New Adiembra, Ghana. February 2014. (Courtesy Jono David)*

The synagogues of emerging Jewish communities in Africa are often modest affairs at the end of bumpy dirt roads, communities which feel a historical or spiritual connection to Judaism, but are struggling to practice fully in their isolated conclaves. Judaism has always had a presence in North Africa, and later, in South Africa. But in the middle of this vast continent, dozens of new Jewish communities are beginning to reach out to the wider Jewish world.

Some, like Ghana, believe they are historical descendants of Jewish traders<sup>1</sup> in the Sahara. Others, in Uganda<sup>2</sup> and Kenya<sup>3</sup>, have felt a spiritual pull to Judaism. Photographer Jono David, 50, has attempted to capture intimate moments of small, emerging Jewish communities across Africa in 30 different countries and territories. An exhibition of some of those photos, *The Children of Abraham and Sarah*<sup>4</sup>, is now featured at Beit HaTfutsot, the Museum of the Jewish People<sup>5</sup>, through December. It is part of an installation that also includes Nina Pereg's two videos, filmed at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, showing preparations to flip the holy site from a mosque to a synagogue and vice versa, during the two days each year when the whole complex is open to either Jews or Muslims.

David's *HaChayim HaYehudim* Jewish Photo Library<sup>6</sup> boasts over 100,000 photos from 145 countries and territories on six continents. He has visited hundreds of Jewish communities, documenting how they combine their spiritual identity with local customs.

"I've always identified Judaism as being centered with Europe," said David, who was born in England but grew up outside of Washington, DC. Like many American Jews, he comes from a mix of Russian and Polish Jewish heritage. He visited his first small Jewish community in 1988, in the Amazonian jungle in Manaus, Brazil.

"In 1997, I was doing a big trip, traveling from Beijing to London by train, stopping in various places," said David. "As I went along that journey, I felt a pull to Jewish connections ... It was more about social contacts, not religious, and those were the early seedlings of getting interested in doing what I'm doing now."

That 1997 trip led David to seek out Jewish communities wherever he went, traveling hours to reach remote villages and meeting people through the network of remote Jewish geography. David has lived in Japan for the past 22 years, where he teaches English at the Osaka City University, among other places. This gives him long vacations when he can travel the world between semesters.

Five years ago, after reading the book *Black Jews of Africa*<sup>7</sup>, David decided to focus his itinerant wandering on the biggest project he has ever undertaken: attempting to photograph every synagogue and cemetery in Africa.



*Ancient synagogue. Dura Europos, Syria in February 2003. (Courtesy Jono David)*

After a year of research and making connections, he started his first trip in August of 2012. He took eight trips to 30 countries over three and a half years, constituting some 60 weeks of travel. He finished his journey in April of this year. The last leg of his last trip was to come to Israel to visit the Beit Hatfutsot exhibition.

David eventually realized that there were simply too many synagogues and cemeteries to try to photograph them all, so he concentrated instead on trying to reach every community. There are a few communities where he couldn't establish connections, such as the Rusape Jews in Zimbabwe and a community in Madagascar that recently underwent a large conversion in May<sup>8</sup>. Additionally, there are always new communities that are coming out into the open.

“The people seeing [this exhibit], these are people who are probably not going to have any idea that these communities exist, that it’s emerging thing going on in Africa,” David explained over Skype from his home in Osaka.



*Photographer Jono David in the Jewish Pioneers' Memorial Museum (former Raleigh Street Synagogue) in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. (Courtesy Jono David)*

The purpose of his photography project was twofold: to document the presence of these isolated

Jewish communities, so their unique traditions could be preserved, and also to try to connect them to the outside Jewish world.

“I wasn’t the first person to go there, and I won’t be the last,” he said. “Some were hesitant to be photographed. After I took a lot of photos, people became suspicious, asking me, what are you doing with these photos?”

“I told them that my goal is to get a light shined on your community so people will know about you and people will come here so they can support you,” said David. “I hope that I can be a voice to the outside by taking photos, through a website, through an exhibition, maybe a book, so people will be drawn there. It will help you to unite with other communities who are not so far away.”

Generally, the communities were excited to see him, and gave him “royal rock star treatment,” said David. He is grateful that people would often leave their work in order to show him around or unlock a synagogue in the middle of the day. “As far as I can tell, these communities are welcoming because they’re craving people to recognize them and welcome them and help prop them up to learn,” he said.



*The Jakab and Komor Square Synagogue, aka Great Synagogue in Subotica, Serbia, photographed in August 2004, is one of David’s favorite synagogues in the world. (Courtesy Jono David)*

Some organizations, such as Kulanu<sup>9</sup>, Be’chol LaShon<sup>10</sup>, and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism<sup>11</sup> are currently involved in development or religious education projects with communities across Africa. David works independently, concerned that some organizations are introducing “brands of Judaism” that do not necessarily fit with the communities’ needs.

Few of these communities in Africa are considered halachically Jewish, although some communities

are undergoing conversions with the Conservative or Orthodox movements. In Uganda's Abayudaya community, this has even led to an internal community rift, meaning that even in rural Uganda, there's a synagogue you don't go to<sup>12</sup>. In other places, people start as Messianic Jews and feeling the pull towards Judaism. David said that while he could have visited Messianic Jewish communities, who often call themselves Jewish, he declined to do so.

"I have been introduced to emerging communities that were not born Jewish but have it in their hearts to be Jewish," he said. "They are so eager to learn and live Jewish lives."

"I don't go into any of these communities to judge them in any way, shape or form, whether they're Jewish enough," David added.

He noted that he was born 100% Jewish on both sides, but as a non-practicing "cultural Jew," few ultra-Orthodox Jews would consider him a "true believer." "I think it's more about what is in your heart and what you practice," he said. "We don't choose who our parents are, or the color of our skin."

"As long as their hearts are true, I'm not saying they have to live ultra-religious Jewish lives, but I think they should be considered Jewish," he said.



*Beth Yeshourun Jewish Community spiritual leader Serge Etele (L) inspects a new mezuzah (at Ambomo family home). Douala, Cameroon. February 2014. (Courtesy Jono David)*

One major difference for emerging communities in the past decade is the prevalence of the internet. The leader of the Abayudaya of Uganda decided to become Jewish in 1920, but it wasn't until the mid-1990s that they realized there were other Jews in the world.

Now, simple internet searches are connecting Jewish communities in Gabon and Benin, Zimbabwe and Cameroon, enabling them to find each other and canvas the wider world for support. Kenyan Jewish leader Yehudah Kimani<sup>13</sup> turned to Facebook, running a crowdfunding campaign that enabled him to send every Jewish child in his community to school.

With the support of Kulanu and Facebook friends made entirely online, he is now studying at the Brandeis Institute in California and has spoken in numerous states across the US. This is less than 15 years after his father, a former deacon in Kenya's Messianic Jewish Church, decided to break with that community and become Jewish.

"The internet has really sped up the interest curve and the learning curve of a lot of these communities," said David, who makes most of his initial contacts online. "Absolutely, the internet has been really life-changing."

David hopes to turn his Africa photographs into a book. Future exhibitions are planned at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Center, the Moroccan Jewish Museum in Casablanca<sup>14</sup>, the Rockville, Maryland Jewish Community Center, and the Jewish Museum of Australia in Melbourne<sup>15</sup>. David would like to do a similar project with emerging Jewish communities in South or Central America, but only if he can find external funding. He has funded and organized all of his previous travel.



*Women of the Lemba community. Manavhela, Limpopo Province, South Africa. August 2015. (Courtesy Jono David)*

David's exhibit stayed at Beit HaTfutsot until December 2016. The photo of the plastic sheeting synagogue in Kenya is located around the corner from a room filled with intricate models of European synagogues, majestic houses of worship with carved moldings, beautiful stained glass, and

soaring ceilings. In another wing of the museum, a video of the spacious synagogue in Lincoln Center, New York City, shows a small community of older Jews, filling up just a few seats in the cavernous hall.

Up the stairs in David's exhibit, the small synagogues at the end of dirt roads are bursting with people, a study in contrasts.

"Certainly my connection to Judaism in a cultural, historical, and belonging sense has been strengthened by my travels," he said. "I always say I'm the guy behind the lens, behind me there's a whole Jewish community that helps make the photographs possible."

One of his favorite memories is the welcome he received while visiting the Lemba tribe in South Africa. "Just as we pulled in, these women came out all wearing their finest traditional dress," he said. "They started singing and dancing and surrounding the car, and it was amazing. I couldn't photograph because I hadn't been introduced yet. I just went out and danced with them."

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*Born in England but raised in the United States, photographer Jono David resided briefly in Israel, but for more than 20 years, he has lived in Osaka, Japan. He specializes in documenting Jewish communities in photos and words, but he has also written about and photographed topics as wide-ranging as travel, World War II history, dolls, Japanese shochu alcohol, and the human body. One of his photographic goals is to contribute to the permanent record of Jewish life and culture worldwide, and his HaChayim HaYehudim Jewish Photo Library is the largest photo archive of its kind in the world.*

*Melanie Lidman is a freelance journalist living in Israel. Originally from Boston and a graduate of the University of Maryland, she works for the Times of Israel and also covers Africa and the Middle East for the Global Sisters Report, a project of the National Catholic Reporter. Previously, Lidman was the Jerusalem metro reporter for the Jerusalem Post. Though Israel has one of the highest concentrations of journalists in the world, Lidman is one of the only reporters who travels to news events almost exclusively by bicycle, which she calls savlanut (patience)!*

*This article was originally published on the Times of Israel web site in July 2016, and is republished here with permission. The original article can be found at:*

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/long-isolated-africas-jewish-islands-bridged-by-photographers-lens/>

*Editor's Notes: The following references provide additional information about Jono David's work:*

- *The Jewish Photo Library home page can be found at:*

<http://www.jewishphotolibrary.com/home>

- *The collection of South African images on the JPL site can be found at:*

<https://jewishphotolibrary.smugmug.com/AFRICA/AFRICASouth/SOUTHAFRICA>



- *A 100-image slide show featuring Jewish life in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Paarl, and Cape Town, South Africa can be seen in the following video:*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s\\_ielkSFT EU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s_ielkSFT EU)

- *A preview of Jono David's Jewish Africa photo show at the Bender Jewish Community of Greater Washington (Rockville, Maryland, USA), which took place from March 10 to April 16, 2017, can be seen at:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=caT8EkxPJ ZI>

- *Interview with Jono David by Israel's i24 News channel:*

<http://www.i24news.tv/en/tv/replay/holyland-uncovered/x3qfqh8>

## RETROSPECTIVE ANECDOTES OF AN ACCLAIMED FAMILY

*Maurice (Mo) Skikne*

It is not an easy task to write about one's family for publication in an erudite journal, but the time is probably appropriate for it now. One has to see that although in some ways two branches of my family have no common route, in reality the families concerned do have connection. The reader will observe that, in fact, there are relevant linkups, although they are rather somewhat tenuous.

The families in question are my own: the Skikne family, that on my paternal side, and the Scop family, on my maternal side. On the Skikne side, the acclaim centres on one man who made his mark in history in the acting world, both on the stage as well as on the movie screen. There he acted under a stage name of Laurence Harvey, but he was born Tsvi Moische Skikne in Lithuania.

On the Scop family side it took the marriage of one of the daughters of a Scop to marry a cousin of Queen Elizabeth, the late queen mother of the incumbent and beloved Queen Elizabeth II. But, more discussion on that particular tale further on in the article.

For the first family, we return to the person Tsvi Moische ben Berel Skikne. He was born circa 1928 in a little Lithuanian town in the mid-north of the country called Joniškis (the town's name was referred to it's Yiddish equivalent of "Yanishok" by the Jews). Tsvi was the third of three male siblings. His father, Berel, was a house painter and a bit of a decorator almost his whole working life. His mother, Ola, whose maiden name was Zotnik, was a very highly-strung and nervous woman, given to emotional outbursts, especially when it came to her children.

The elder two sons were not boisterous, but Tsvi was inclined to be very lively. He loved showing off in the market square on Saturdays, and on other market occasions. As a result, he was in constant strife with Ola. On the other hand, his siblings Nochum and Ytzchak were more mature, staid, and influenced by Ola's sister, Chava, who was a Trotskyite. They thus had little strife with their mum.

In the meantime, Berel had emigrated to South Africa and was working toward bringing Ola and the boys to the country, to what everyone hoped was a better life. This happened in circa 1931. Thereafter, they set up home in Doornfontein.

The older two boys were already old enough for high school, and immediately got started with their education. Young Tsvi, or Hirschele, as he was known, started in primary school but was always a very restless child, and, being a pretty good mimic, he soon developed mimicking and cultivating an American style accent. His speech, though, was basically a cross between a guttural South African accent and an American style of pronunciation. Harry, as he was also known, was pretty bright, but hated the encumbrances of regulated school. Thus, by the time he entered high school, with World War II already in progress, he already had a plan to join the South African Army.

In the meantime, at Athlone High school (in Johannesburg), he had already tried acting in plays and had scored some success in the play, *The Man who Ate the Popomac*, by W. J. Turner. Also, he had performed in some other plays as an amateur at the Alexandra Theatre.

It is thought that it was at this juncture that he discovered he was bisexual. This discovery spurred him to make his way to Cape Town to join the Navy. Once billeted there (barely 15 years old, but

tall for his age), the naval recruiter in Simon's Town discovered his youth, found his home address, and phoned his mother. She by this time was nearly hysterical. But, she immediately caught the train to Cape Town, arriving duly in Simon's Town. There she had him called out from the barracks and brought to the office. Here he denied knowing her, but after giving him a *frask* (smack) with her handbag, they were on their way back to Johannesburg!

Back he went to a boarding school, and he eventually matriculated. By now he was already 17, and he was determined to join the Army Entertainment Corps. This time, however, he warned Ola that if he was not allowed into this adventure, he would run away and never see his parents again.

With misgivings from them, he joined up again, this time to end up in North Africa and Italy. On this occasion, however, recruiting officers allowed him to join, as the war in any case was drawing to an end, and he was going to be assigned to a non-combat unit.

Harry was under the aegis of one Sid James [the South African-born British comedy actor], who determined him to be a cheeky but talented little upstart. There in the film troupe he developed a hilarious jive dance routine which amused the troops immensely. By now, the Italian invasion campaign was drawing to an end, with the Corps on the point of demobbing. Harry thus requested that the Army not pay him a gratuity, but instead send him to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London. The course ran for a year and the Army thus sponsored his education there.

While studying at RADA, students were allowed to take jobs in acting to supplement their sponsorship. Thus, Harry luckily managed to secure a billet in Manchester, where he earned enough to rent a little garret flat in London. However, he was perpetually poor and could hardly afford decent meals. His luck changed a little when he met a leading actress, Hermione Baddeley, who took him on as her "toy boy." Thus, he moved in with her, found a place to sleep, and started enjoying regular meals.

Harry had, by this time, developed a very sharp and filthy mouth, and he smoked cigarettes through a long holder. In this way, he cultivated a place at particular restaurants where he would give forth of

some absolutely filthy patter and humour. Harry began to be noticed by the thespians that frequented such places. Leading stage actors like Anthony Quinn and Sir Lawrence Olivier soon enough noticed and befriended him which led to his finding breaks at Stratford-on-Avon.

Soon he was acting in Shakespearian plays. This earned him a reputation as a budding stage actor, but the salaries were paltry (about 50 pounds sterling per week). This could hardly keep him in rent, running a little old car, and wearing smart suits.

But he was determined to succeed, and that he achieved. He began to reach notoriety with his Shakespearian roles. In particular, his break came when he played the part of Romeo in the play of *Romeo and Juliet*. This brought him an eventual contract to do the play on film by an Italian director.

Thus, Harvey became "saleable". He now became contracted to Remus Films, an English movies studio, and proceeded to make a number of minor films. His claim to fame had thus begun to ascend, and it was in 1959 that Harvey made his first real money spinner, the film *Room at the Top*. For this movie, Harvey was nominated for an Oscar, for Best Male Actor. Charlton Heston, however, received the award at the ceremony that year for the chariot race in the film *Ben Hur*.

However, Harvey also appeared in major roles in the film *Storm over the Nile* with Anthony Steele. Then, he appears in the role of Lionel (Buster) Crab, a diving saboteur in the 1958 film, *The Silent Enemy*. In between, Harvey played on stage at the London Palladium as Captain Jack Absolute in Sheridan's *The Rivals*, also earning him some sorely-needed reputation and money.

By this time he was married to Margaret Leighton, his first wife (older than him by 3 years). Harvey now went on to become much in demand, both in the UK and the USA. *Camelot* was another minor money spinner, this leading to him making three more major triumphs on the American silver screen. The titles of these movies were *The Alamo*, appearing as Colonel Travers (with John Wayne and Richard Widmark); *The Manchurian Candidate*, as Sergeant Shaw (co-starring with Frank Sinatra and Janet Leigh); and finally, *Butterfield 8* (with Elizabeth Taylor).

The latter Ms. Taylor and he became very good friends. He had in the interim married Joan Cohn – a widow, and heir to the Columbian Film empire, who was some 10 years his senior. This marriage was not to last long, because he later teamed up with and married a beautiful British model, Pauline Stone.

It was at this time, he fathered his only child, Domino, a very beautiful model (who eventually died of a fatal drug overdose in Hollywood in 2005). At this time, the marriage was not to last long as Harvey had already become fatally ill with stomach cancer, and he passed away in 1973 at the age of 44.

Although Laurence Harvey never achieved the epitome of fame he had hoped for, he starred in some 43 movies and about 26 stage plays, leaving behind a pair sorrowing old parents and his two siblings. One of his kindest critics came in the form of the late Percy Baneshik, who eulogised him especially in *The Star* newspaper at that time. Extolling his amazing versatility and ability both on the screen and stage, he accorded Harvey with the talent to be able to play many types of roles. In many ways Harvey might have achieved greater success had he lived longer. It is also a pity that he was never given recognition in the Special Acting issue of the Jewish Affairs newspaper that was published in 1976.

Harvey had some important abilities which he developed. He could memorise his parts and play them without any prompting, he was always on time for his filming and rehearsal engagements, and never had problems with his dress and continuity.

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To now address the other part of the notoriety of my family: Just recently, an e-mail appeared on my computer informing me that the Scop family (my late mother's family) was related to royalty. I am, it appears, distantly related to Prince William, the Duke of Cambridge, a grandson of Queen Elizabeth.

It seems that Prince William is related to me as follows:

*“Prince William is my first cousin twice removed's wife's first cousin once removed's, wife's sister's ex-husband's second cousin twice removed!”*  
Quite a mouthful to ingest!

The relationship works as follows this: It seems that my great-grandfather's (Leib Itze Scop) brother, Yankel Behr Scop had a son Heske Harry Scop. Harry married Ethel Barris, whose father Maurice (Morris) Barris had a mother, Bella Barris (Beinashowitz). Her brother, Abraham Leib Beinashowitz had a son, Jack Beinashowitz Baynash. Jack's wife, Esther Golda Beinashowitz, had a sister called Fanny (Fay) Rose. Now, this is where the fascinating part begins. Fay was in one of a woman's auxiliary groups assigned in Cairo, Egypt, during World War II. There, at an officer's club she met, fell in love with, and married Captain Hubert Malcolm Bowes-Lyons, Jr. Hubert was the son of Hubert Ernest Bowes-Lyon whose father was the Hon. Ernest Bowes-Lyon. Then, his brother was Claude, the 14<sup>th</sup> Earl of Strathmore and Kinghorne, and this Earl's daughter was Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon (the late Queen's mother), the great-grandmother of Prince William. Complicated, isn't it?!

It transpired that Fay-Rose fell out of love with Hubert, and sometime after the War they divorced. Fay made Israel her home, from where she was periodically invited to special occasions at Buckingham Palace, which she attended. Unfortunately, her history has become obscure from then on. She remained in Israel, but the rest of her life is unknown to me. Perchance one day the rest her life story will be uncovered. Who knows?

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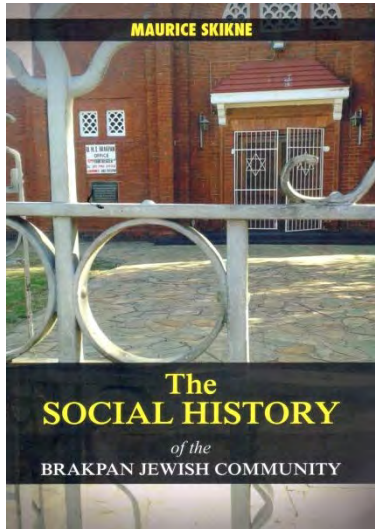
*Maurice (Mo) Skikne, who lives in Johannesburg, was a biologist who specialized in human pathology at the molecular biology level for some 23 years. He was also a high school teacher (for 6 years) and a university lecturer for nearly 38 years. He has thus invested his working life in the field of education. He is currently retired and devotes his twilight years to his family, including grand- and great-grandchildren, and to journalism. He recently published a book, The Social History of the Brakpan Jewish Community, an account of the history of the Jewish community in the town in which he grew up. Mo has been involved in Jewish genealogy, as well as motorsport and cycling for many years. He recently celebrated a second Bar Mitzvah.*

*Editor's Note: Laurence Harvey and the Mo Skikne are second cousins, twice removed. See also the description of Mo's book about Brakpan on the next page of this Newsletter.*

**Book**

**THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF THE  
BRAKPAN JEWISH  
COMMUNITY**

by Maurice (Mo) Skikne



Published in 2017 by Reach Publishers,  
Wandsbeck, South Africa  
Website: [www.reachpublishers.co.za](http://www.reachpublishers.co.za)  
Pages: 140  
ISBN: 978-0-620-71276-7

This book contains an account of the social history of the Jewish community of a Witwatersrand town in South Africa called Brakpan. The book is essentially a reflection of how raw Jewish immigrants, mainly from Lithuania, encouraged the formation of shopping areas and professional services for the population of this South African Reef town.

Brakpan was initially a suburb of adjacent Benoni, mining initially coal and later gold. Brakpan was a unique environment in which many families strove to become self-sufficient. The stories told are also examples of the ambitions of immigrant parents who encouraged their progeny to aspire to become better educated and possibly progress to a tertiary level. The book covers the town's birth and growth, and also offers an example for many other similar towns in South Africa.

The book is divided into eleven chapters, and also includes essays that were previously published in

the *Jewish Affairs* journal, as well as in the SA-SIG Newsletter. Included is a listing of families who lived in the town, as well as a compilation of the cemetery burials. The book also includes a number of photographs.

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*Editor's Note:* For more information about the author, see Mo Skikne's article on page 33 of this issue of the Newsletter.

Note that the SA-SIG Board has no financial interest in this book.

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**AFRIKANER JEWRY IN SOUTH  
AFRICA**

South African History Online (SAHO)  
project



*Pieter-Dirk Uys is an important public figure, who identifies himself as an Afrikaner Jew.*

**The identity of the Afrikaner Jew – what personifies the *Boerejood*?**

A *Boerejood* (farmer Jew) or *Boerejode* (plural) is the term used to identify South African Jews who have acculturated themselves to the Afrikaner language and culture [1]. The identity group differentiates itself from South African English Jews in a number of ways: their geographical locale is usually either on the periphery or in rural areas, and their education and extramural activities are conducted in Afrikaans. Afrikaner Jews have successfully learned to amalgamate the Jewish and Afrikaner identity in a way that enriches both interest groups.

**Arrival**

The South African Jewish population underwent a significant increase in numbers due to the epoch known as the gold rush [2]. The majority of these

immigrants hailed from Eastern Europe, more specifically from Lithuania and Russia, in areas such as Minsk, Vitebsk and Mogilev [3]. According to the figures obtained, the population increased from a mere 4000 in 1880, to a sizeable 38,101 in 1904 – this meant that the Jewish population of South Africa at the time constituted 3.7 percent of the overall white population in South Africa [4]. The reason behind immigrants opting for South Africa as their new home continues to be a severely neglected field of study [5]. One can only speculate that the immigrants acted in response to proclamations made by fellow countrymen, having already established themselves in South Africa. Furthermore, European and American newspaper reports at the time rendered South Africa as a land with a great deal of affluence [6] in an attempt at populating colonies.

### **Settling**

Eastern European Jews favoured settling in the countryside of South Africa as urban areas were breeding grounds for Anti-Semitism [7]. Eastern European Jews who found a base in the rural parts of South Africa tended to possess a strong sense of social responsibility and community, characteristics which were perfectly suited to the South African rural lifestyle [8]. The adoption of Afrikaans by Eastern European Jews is often cited to be due to their amicable relations [9]. Less can be said about the relations between the Jewish and the English-speaking White population. Whereas the Boers welcomed the Jews onto their farms, relations between the English and Jews was limited to the urban setting [10].

### **Assimilation**

A potential explanation for the Jewish adoption of Afrikaner culture and language could perhaps be traced to the notable support showed by the Russian Empire towards Afrikaners during the South African War (1899-1902) [11]. War sentiments often prevail long after the ending of the war, although, as this article finds, it would be reductionist to rationalise certain Jews' preference for Afrikaans solely on the position assumed by the Russian Empire.

Samuel Zetler, a descendent of Jewish Russian immigrants, was once completely candid in an interview and stated that he favoured Afrikaans-speaking individuals over English-speaking individuals [12]. The Zetler family is a wealthy

agricultural family based on the outskirts of Stellenbosch. The family has firmly acculturated themselves to the Afrikaner language and culture. According to Mendelsohn and Shain (2008), these *Boerejode* have not necessarily assimilated, but have rather acculturated themselves to the Afrikaner language and culture, as *Boerejode* are more likely to be found in rural areas where they naturally adapt to the cultural setting of their town [13]. Often, these rural towns only had Afrikaans schools, and thus Jews had no choice but to adapt. Despite their change in language, these Afrikaner Jews remained faithful to Judaism. In all essence, *Boerejode* are Jewish by religion and Afrikaans by culture and language.

Another well-renowned farmer was Israel Lazarus, more prominently known as the *Mealie King* [14]. Lazarus was a Jewish Lithuanian immigrant who had arrived in South Africa just before the South African War [15]. Lazarus's maize ('*mealie*') farms of Middelburg, Eastern Transvaal, were of such importance during the Second World War that the South African government asked him to delay retirement [16]. He is said to have had a major influence on the production of maize, and is also said to have been adored by many Afrikaner farmers [17].

The South African Jewish population is an economically wealthy group, despite their small numbers. They have successfully embedded themselves in the South African economy, largely in white-collar fields of occupation (services, office work, etc.).

The adoption of the Afrikaans language by Jewish immigrants who chose to reside in the rural areas of South Africa reflects the sheer measure of influence these immigrants had in integrating themselves into South African society [18]. Some of the most celebrated South African public figures personify the Jewish adoption and relative assimilation to the Afrikaans language and cultures, including the likes of Pieter-Dirk Uys, Olga Kirsch, and David Kramer, all three renowned for their contribution to Afrikaans literature.

### **Endnotes** (see also list of References below)

- [1] Mendelsohn & Shain, (2008:215)
- [2] Arkin, (1984:3)
- [3] *ibid.*
- [4] *ibid.*

- [5] Shain & Mendelsohn, (2000:102)
- [6] *ibid.*
- [7] Burden & Weil, (2002:94)
- [8] *ibid.* p.99
- [9] Shain, (1983:4)
- [10] *ibid.*
- [11] *ibid.*
- [12] Burden & Weil, (2002: 103)
- [13] Mendelsohn & Shain, (2008:215)
- [14] Berger, (1976: 115)
- [15] *ibid.* p.117
- [16] *ibid.*
- [17] *ibid.* p.118
- [18] Segall, (2008: 13)

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*This article originally appeared on the South African History Online (SAHO) project web site in February 2017, and is republished here with permission. SAHO is a non-partisan people's history project which is concerned with the presentation of a critical, open access, and democratic history of South Africa. SAHO's home page can be found at: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/>.*

## MEMORIES OF MUIZENBERG, SOUTH AFRICA 1950s to 1960s

*Ivor Kosowitz*

Little did the Jews who lived around the “South Beach (SoBe) *Shtetl*” in Miami, during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, have any idea that there were Jews in “Darkest Africa”, living almost exactly as they were, in a place called Muizenberg, the “Muizenberg *Shtetl*”, near Cape Town.

Our US cousins came from Eastern Europe, as did our *bubbes* (grandmothers) and *zeidas* (grandfathers) too, but in SoBe and Muizenberg, they all ended up sitting in rickety, rainbow-striped, folding chairs on the warm sand.

These Jews, who were persecuted in the Old Country, just wanted to escape to a better place. So they went to the “Golden *Medina* (city).” Most went to USA, but a whole bunch went to South Africa where the “real” gold was.

Many ended up in Cape Town where the gold was not! But they discovered a seaside resort called “Muizenberg”, and they unofficially took it over and made it theirs.

I have a photo of my mother and her three siblings taken there in 1923. Jews must have been going there even before then. They went for the “*yam luft*” (sea air) to make them well.

I must have gone there even before I was born! In summer, on a Sunday, and if you were Jewish, this is where you went. Most Jews lived in the City Bowl, up from Cape Town Harbour (Docks). The journey from there to Muizenberg took about one hour or more. In the 1950's, the roads were not great, and there always was a bottleneck near the *Spotty Dog*. (This was a café built in the shape of a dog.)

Once we passed this landmark, we would watch the “Disappearing House” which seemed to vanish as the road curved at the bottom of the *berg* (small hill or mountain). From there we had about ten minutes to reach the entrance of the town, passing under the railway bridge.

Now, this is when the “fun” began! Every parking space was usually taken by the time my family

arrived at about 12 noon. So, we would circle around. Usually we found a space on the edges near where the houses were. Sometimes my dad would drop us off with all our *peklach*: beach umbrella, beach chairs, etc., so we did not have to walk far. Then, you tried to find a space on the sand!

The beach area was broken up into sections. On the left, you had the Snake Pit which was in a triangle formed by the promenade, multi-coloured beach boxes, and the Pavilion. The beach boxes were hired annually from the town council. The Snake Pit was where the teens and people in their 20's would go.

The Pavilion had change rooms, offices, an ice-cream parlour, and a hall where functions and concerts were held.

On the other side of the Pavilion, was the Balmoral Beach. This thinned into a narrow strip which became known as the "Gaza Strip," and was as congested as the real place.

Then, there was the toilet block, and another strip that opened up. They turned this into a kids play area with swings, sea-saws and roundabouts.

This whole area was separated from the sea by a double row of beach boxes.

The swimming was great. This was the Indian Ocean, and the water temperature was usually warm between 68 and 72 degrees Fahrenheit. The temperature was always written on a chalk board hanging near the ice cream parlour in the Pavilion. Surfing, too, was great. Most of us had a surf (body) board, or an inflatable lilo (air mattress).

Sometimes, there were blue bottles in the water. If you were stupid enough, you went in and got stung. You came out and went to a station where someone covered the sting with "Recketts Blue".

Often, we would get to the sea at the same time the fishermen were hauling in their nets. Then everyone would grab the ropes to assist to bring in the catch.

After our first swim, it was time for lunch. But this was a Jewish lunch, comprising *matzo* and chopped liver, chicken, salad, polony (bologna) on rye bread covered in chicken *schmaltz*. Then you had water and/or rock melon (*spaanspek*), peaches, and grapes.

We used to take our own cool drinks. Sometimes we had Nicols or Sparletta or Canada Dry.

Off course, we always had hawkers trying to sell something. First there was the camera man. He would take photos, and give you a yellow ticket if you wanted to buy the photos a week later.

Then, we had a Cape Coloured vendor selling popsicles. Either, a vanilla ice cream coated in chocolate, or a Granita, which was an orange frozen water ice. The vendor's friend used to sell shelled peanuts in little white bags. Later in the day, others would come to sell peaches and other fruit.

In the 1950's, there was a very athletic young couple who always played beach bats in the late afternoon when there was more space on the beach.

Before we went home, we usually got a sixpence coin to spend at the shop. So, we went to Norman's or the Maccabi café. I used to buy sixpence worth of one-penny sweets! Sometimes, we stayed later so we were allowed to buy a hot dog. Someone said that the sausages were Kosher, so we ate them, even if they were not.

Every few years, my rich uncle and aunt would come down from Northern Rhodesia on holiday. They stayed at one of the kosher hotels. So we got invited there for a Sunday lunch. This was the best treat you can imagine. Sometimes, they stayed at the big hotel near Seaforth. This was another seaside town about 15 km south.

As a special present, we got 2 shillings and 6 pence to spend. This was like wining the Lotto! I could buy a comic, chocolates, as well as 6 one-penny sweets. No wonder our dentist became wealthy.

Well, all this happened in the 1950's. Then the 1960's arrived. Things started to change. They built a pool where you could hire a powered boat for 20 minutes. Also a train ride, and then a mini-golf course (putt-putt). At night, they had a rock and roll dance floor – in the open. This was very popular.

During the day, they had Uncle Vic's talent show. The acts were pretty bad, followed by the kids singing songs or telling jokes. A boy who could sing well won every time. He was Benny Kapplinski. Benny now sings as the Cantor in a Sydney temple.

During the late 1960's, it was decided to demolish the old promenade, and build a new one that extended further and ran parallel to the sea. Later the Pavilion was knocked down too. This changed the whole character of the beach, and I think from then on, fewer and fewer Jews went there. The kosher hotels closed down.

I left Cape Town in 1975, and have never returned. So, my re-collections of Muizenberg, or "Jewsinberg" as it became known during its heyday, have come to an end.

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*Ivor Kosowitz was born in Cape Town. He went to Herzlia School, then the University of Cape Town (UCT), where he studied construction management. In 1975, he left for Israel where he spent 3 years, including time working on a petrochemical plant near Akko.*

*He married an English woman in Nahariya. He then spent 16 months in London before moving to Perth, Australia, in 1980.*

*Ivor has operated a Microsoft training and software company since 1985. He has 3 children, one of whom is married and lives in Rehovot, Israel.*

## **New Book**

# **THE UNBROKEN CHAIN – THIRD EDITION**

**Volumes 1 and 2**

*By Neil Rosenstein*



Neil Rosenstein, a retired doctor living in New Jersey, has been researching his roots ever since his childhood in South Africa. Born in Cape Town in 1944, he studied medicine there and completed his internship in Israel. Despite the rigors of medical school, he never abandoned his family tree research for very long.

Over forty years ago in 1976, he published the first edition of what has become his *magnum opus*, titled *The Unbroken Chain*, an extensive study of the genealogy of the major rabbinical dynasties of Ashkenazi Jewry from the 15th century onwards. *The Unbroken Chain* documents the descendants of Rabbi Meir Katzenellenbogen of Padua (1482–1565) and Rabbi Judah Lowe of Prague through 22 generations. Among the descendants of these two Torah Giants are numerous famous persons including Martin Buber, *Rebbetzin* Esther Jungreis, Karl Marx, Moses and Felix Mendelssohn, Yehudi Menuhin, Moses Montefiore, Helena Rubinstein, and Judge Judy Sheindlin.

The 1976 edition of the book was published as a single volume. An expanded two-volume, second edition of the book was published in 1990. In December 2012, Rosenstein began a major update



of the work, planning to publish a significantly enlarged Third Edition comprising five volumes.

Volumes One and Two of the Third Edition are now available from *Avotaynu.com*. Volume One, which contains Chapters One, Two, and Three, consists of more than 750 pages of text and photos, plus a 16,000-name index. Volume Two, which includes Chapters Four and Five, consists of 638 pages of text and photos, plus a 14,000 name index.

Avotaynu.com provides the following comparison between the Second and Third Editions:

<i>Second Edition</i>	<i>Third Edition</i>
Published in 1990	Published in 2017
Two volumes: 1,350 pages	Five volumes: 3,500 pages
20,000 names	42,000 names
Surname-only index	Full name index
No illustrations	300 illustrations in Volume 1 alone
1,600 footnotes	1,000 footnotes in Volume 1 alone
Up to 16 generations	Up to 22 generations

For more details about the Third Edition, read genealogist Bill Gladstone's review that appeared in August 2017 on the Canadian Jewish News website at:

<https://www.cjnews.com/culture/books-and-authors/unbroken-chain-jewish-genealogy>

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#### Editor's Notes:

- *Copies of Volume 1 and 2 of the Third Edition can be purchased from Avotaynu.com at:*

<http://www.avotaynu.com/books/UnbrokenChain-1.html>

- *The Avotaynu web page also provides links to download the free tables of contents and complete name indexes found in the first two volumes.*
- *Author Neil Rosenstein's website can be found at:*

<http://www.neilrosenstein.com/>

*Note that the SA-SIG Board has no financial interest in these books.*

## **SOUTH AFRICAN DECEASED ESTATE FILES**

*Louis Zetler*

South African deceased estate files can contain a goldmine of genealogical information. The deceased estate files are kept at various Master of the Supreme (now High) Court offices. New Masters offices have been opened since 1994, e.g. in Johannesburg and Durban, and in other more outlying cities. In the older Masters Offices, the old files have been moved to the provincial State Archives.

The most important document in each file, and usually the first document in the file, is the Death Notice (which is distinct from the Death Certificate). The Death Notice has, of course, evolved over time, but each form requests the following basic information: where the deceased was born, the names of his/her parents (and whether they are alive or not), the last known address, age at time of death (now dates of birth and death), name(s) of spouses and whether deceased, divorced or alive, names of children, and, if no children, names of siblings. At the bottom one is asked whether the deceased had fixed property, movable property, whether the value of the estate exceeds a certain minimum value (if less than the minimum value there is a shortened procedure), and whether the deceased died testate or intestate, i.e. whether there is a will or not.

Thus, if the form is fully filled out, there may be a wealth of information in the document.

Ascertaining dates of birth in the old files is a problem. As mentioned, the age of the deceased is required on the form – to be stated in years and months. Sometimes the date of birth has been added next to the age on the Death Notice or on the Death Certificate. If the estate file contains a copy of the ANC (ante-nuptial contract), the dates of birth of the parties may be indicated. In rare circumstances, you will find a copy of a Deed of Transfer of a property, in which case the date of birth will definitely appear in it.

Sometimes the maiden name will not appear in the Death Notice, in which case look for it on the Death Certificate, the will, an ANC or a title deed.

Sometimes it appears only in the heading of the Liquidation and Distribution account.

The primary purpose of the Death Certificate is to indicate the cause of death. Although it is the most important document indicating why a deceased estate file has been opened, it is often not scanned by the Church of the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) for their records – I will come back to the Mormon records later. In addition to the cause of death, older Death Certificates also usually contained the maiden surname of a married or divorced female, the magisterial district where the death occurred, the deceased's marital status at the time of death, the deceased's occupation at the time of death, and occasionally, the date of birth.

If there is a Will, it can be very important. Although the deceased usually bequeaths his/her assets to the spouse and/or children, sometimes bequests are made to siblings, nephews and nieces, sons- or daughters-in-law, etc. Remember that in the Death Notice, if there are children, the names of siblings are not required.

In certain circumstances, where the names of the beneficiaries are not clear, e. g. money is left to each of the grandchildren born or to be born as at the date of death, the Master will require the completion of a next-of-kin affidavit, in order to establish the rightful beneficiaries.

Sometimes a simple *acquittance*, i.e. the receipt by a beneficiary, can be of interest. I was once looking for the married surname of a daughter of the deceased. She was a spinster at the time of death, but by the time she received the inheritance, she had married and signed the acquittance with her married surname.

A list of all the files which have been archived in the provincial National Archives has been placed online. Go to the National Archives of South Africa (NASA) Database Selection page (called NAAIRS) found at:

<http://www.national.archsrch.gov.za/sm300cv/smws/sm300dl>.

Then select the repository (province) where you expect that the person lived in before he died. I have a habit of putting the surname in the top line and the first name on the second line – not more than one name should be inserted per line. The problem with this database is that if you do not

enter the spelling of the name exactly as the data was loaded, you will not see the file. In other words, sounds-like searching is not offered.

As an example, if you look up Zetler in the Cape Town archive, there is no reference to an application for naturalization, so I assumed that my late grandfather, Mendel Zetler, had not been naturalized. But my oldest brother mentioned that he had sailed to Israel in the 1950's. Thus, he must have had a passport, and so he must have been naturalized because he was born in Belarus. So I searched for "Mendel" instead. Bingo! I found him – his surname Zetler was spelled "Zelter"!

If you find the file that you are looking for, you normally would have to physically go to the Archives to look up the contents of the documents. However, the Latter Day Saints (Mormons) have scanned thousands of archived estate (and other) files and placed the images online.

To find these files, you should go to the Mormon FamilySearch search page at:

<https://www.familysearch.org>

Click the "Search" tab to bring up the FamilySearch page titled "Search Historical Records."

At the right side of the page, you will see a world map in the section titled "Research by Location/" Click on Africa in the map, and then select South Africa when the "Choose a Location" pop-up window appears.

This will bring up the page titled "South Africa Indexed Historical Records" which contains two sections. First, at the top of the page is a search template to locate records which have already been indexed. You can search for names in the records directly from this search page. Currently there are 16 collections included in the search, currently shown under the heading "Filter by collection." The following collections contain estate documents:

- South Africa, Cape Province, Kimberley, Probate Records of the Supreme Court, 1871-193
- South Africa, Orange Free State, Estate Files, 1951-2006 90,610 16 Feb 2017
- South Africa, Pietermaritzburg Estate Files 1846-1950 214,77804 Oct 2017

- South Africa, Transvaal, Probate Records from the Master of the Supreme Court, 1869-1958

Any of the above collections can be searched or browsed directly.

At the bottom of the page, in the section titled “South Africa Image Only Historical Records” a set of record collections that have not yet been indexed can be found. These collections can be browsed only. Included in these collections are the following sets of records that contain Estate documents:

- South Africa, Eastern Cape, Estate Files, 1962-2004
- South Africa, Transvaal, Estate Files, 1950-1993
- South Africa, Western Cape, Estate Files, 1974

Although for Transvaal, the collection name states 1950-1993, only some of the files for the period 1955-1960 have been put online. Thus, if you find an estate during this period, you may or may not be in luck and find it online.

A word of warning and advice: in most cases there are more than one estate per film – sometimes more than 100. The estate numbers indicated are often incorrect – sometimes there are missing files, sometimes there are files that are not listed in the index. Often the files were not filmed sequentially.

Another word of warning: there are files which are not listed under the correct year, e. g. I found 1951 files included in the collection that was named 1957 files. Note, however, that an estate is given a file number (usually) in the order that the application is received by the Master’s Office. Consequently, the first few hundred files of a particular year relate to deaths that occurred in the previous year, but a file may also relate to an estate of someone who died many years previously.

Over the past two years, I have gone through all the films and created 2 databases – a database of all the Transvaal files which are now online (19,750 files) and extracted from this a database of the Jewish deceased estates (1,468 files). In the general database I have only recorded the surname, first name/s and maiden (where ascertainable). In the Jewish database, I also added the dates of birth (where ascertainable) and death, names of parents, children and siblings and in which cemeteries (and plot numbers) they were buried (where

ascertainable). If you have any problem finding the Estate document for a particular person, let me know, and I will try to help you.

Note that estate files exist not only for people who lived in South Africa. Anyone who had assets in South Africa at the time of death will have to have an estate file opened after death. Thus, you will find estates of British admirals and aristocracy, one of the famous Rothschilds (including his will and codicils thereto), and people who died in the Holocaust.

Happy hunting!



*Born in Stellenbosch, Louis Zetler practiced as an attorney in South Africa, and is now an advocate living in Israel. Formerly the president of the Galilee Genealogical Society, he started creating databases of South African and ex-South African births, marriages, and deaths records in 2001. Louis can be reached at: arlene@012.net.il.*

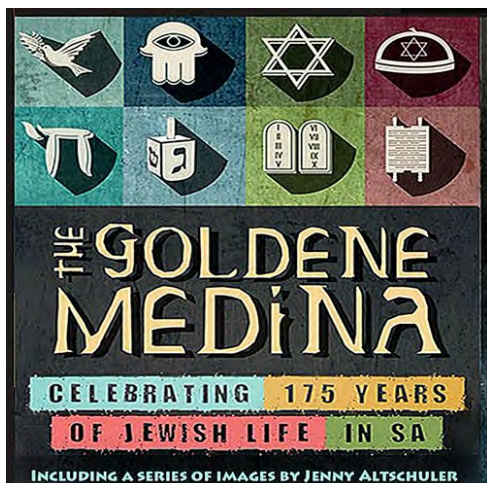


## NEW ITEMS OF INTEREST ON THE INTERNET

Roy Ogus

*The section describes new information, resources, articles, and interesting stories that are available on the Internet, and which may be of interest to Southern African genealogical researchers.*

### **The Goldene Medina exhibit celebrates the story of 175 years of Jewish history in South Africa**



While the first Jew is thought to have arrived in South Africa as far back as 1669, during the early years of Dutch rule at the Cape, it was only on the eve of Yom Kippur in 1841 that 17 Jewish citizens of Cape Town came together in a private home to form the country's first ever communal prayer service. This small gathering marked the formal birth of South African Jewry as an organized community.

In 2016, a number of events took place in South Africa to commemorate and celebrate the 175 years of Jewish life in the country. One of the main initiatives to mark the milestone was an exhibition, entitled *The Goldene Medina* [the Golden Land] – *Celebrating 175 years of Jewish Life in South Africa*, which was curated by and initially displayed at the South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town. The exhibition, which celebrates the history of Jewish culture in South Africa through the memories and stories of those living who are living now, reflects the religious, social, and political history of the Jews of South Africa from 1841 to 2016. Comprising a curated collection of anecdotes, images, artefacts and films, it creates a tapestry of the communal

experiences that, over the course of 175 years, has forged a new, shared identity – the South African Jew.

Following the Cape Town showing, the exhibit moved to Johannesburg, opening there in May 2017, and then enjoyed another successful run in Durban in August 2017. Following these successful showings, the exhibit moved overseas, and was shown in Israel between November 2017 and January 2018, followed by Sydney, Australia, during the period May 2018 through early June 2018.

More information and video descriptions of the exhibit in the various locations can be found at the following links:

- Cape Town

*Article:*

<https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Local/Peoples-Post/jewish-life-and-culture-on-display-jewish-life-and-culture-on-display-jewish-life-and-culture-on-display-20160919>

- Johannesburg

*Article:* <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/The-Goldene-Medina-492379>

*Video:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdFXWeaLPYk>

- Durban

*Article:*

<http://www.sajr.co.za/news-and-articles/2017/08/03/goldene-medina-exhibition-lands-in-durban>

- Israel

*Article:*

<http://www.telfed.org.il/GoldeneMedinaJan2018>

- Sydney

*Article:*

<http://www.jwire.com.au/the-goldene-medina-celebrating-175-years-of-jewish-life-in-south-africa/>

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## The virtual Holocaust survivor: how history has gained new dimensions

Pinchas Gutter survived a Nazi death camp – and now his story will live on through a hologram that can answer your questions. Gutter was seven years old when the Second World War broke out. He lived in the Warsaw ghetto for three and a half years, took part in its uprising, survived six Nazi concentration camps – including the Majdanek extermination camp – and lived through a death march across Germany to Theresienstadt in occupied Czechoslovakia. Pinchas feels that remembrance of his extraordinary story is crucial.

Pinchas' memories have been preserved using new technology in a project called *New Dimensions in Testimony* which has been developed in a collaboration between the University of Southern California's Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT), and the Shoah Foundation – an organization that is dedicated to making and archiving interviews with survivors and witnesses of genocide.

The prototype that has been developed involved filming extensive interviews with Gutter using an array of cameras and a specialized light stage. The team at ICT then used natural-language processing software to help create an interactive version of the video footage, with vocal cues triggering responses from the pool of recorded speech.

The recorded version of Gutter that is ultimately projected on the monitor is a prototype for a responsive hologram that will be wheeled into classrooms, lecture halls and museums. The idea is that the audience asks questions and pre-recorded memories from Gutter will respond – much as if you're talking to the real person. The virtual Gutter meets the questioner's gaze and tilts his head when the person speaks into the microphone.

A full description of this activity can be found in the following article:

<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/jun/18/holocaust-survivor-hologram-pinchas-gutter-new-dimensions-history>

A short video which illustrates the highlights of the project can be seen at:

<https://youtu.be/ZZXZz4JePMk>

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## South Africa's eleven official languages

According to the South African National Census of 2011, the following map shows the breakdown of South Africa's 11 official languages based on the "first language" indication in the census.



Of the 11 languages, Zulu is most spoken native tongue (22.7%), followed by Xhosa (16.0%), Afrikaans (13.5%), English (9.6%), Northern Sotho (9.1%), Tswana (8.0%), Southern Sotho (7.6%), Tsonga (4.5%), Swazi (2.5%), Venda (2.4%), and Southern Ndebele (2.1%).

More detail about this breakdown, as well as some trivia information about each of the languages, can be found in the following article:

<https://mapsontheweb.zoom-maps.com/post/143106698226/south-africas-11-official-languages-zulu-is-most>

For anyone curious, the present South African national anthem is actually a hybrid of two national songs ("Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika" and "Die Stem van Suid-Afrika") with the five most spoken languages in South Africa represented in the song as follows: first stanza (Xhosa and Zulu), second stanza (Southern Sotho), third stanza (Afrikaans), and fourth stanza (English).

A more in-depth article about South Africa's eleven official languages can be found at:

<https://southafrica-info.com/arts-culture/11-languages-south-africa/>

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## Images Explore Quiet Realities of South African Jewish Life

A Johannesburg photographer is mounting an exhibition exploring the diversity of the city's Jewish community. Photographer Marc Shoul has just released a series of rarely-seen perspectives from within the homes, schools, and synagogues of Johannesburg's Jewish community, revealing surprising images of the vibrant local community.

Shoul says the series, which he calls *Landsman* (a Yiddish word meaning "someone from your same town; a fellow Jew"), uncovers a culture that is rapidly urbanizing, but holding on to its traditions.

Marc explains, "Jewish life was, in the past, spread out over the country. There were far-flung communities of 'Boerejode' – Jews who integrated into the Afrikaner culture they found around them. But those have dwindled, and the concentration of Jews is now found in the main cities of South Africa."

You can read the full article, which includes a number of Shoul's images, at:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/2018/02/01/images-explore-quiet-realities-of-south-african-jewish-life\\_a\\_23349854/](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/2018/02/01/images-explore-quiet-realities-of-south-african-jewish-life_a_23349854/)

See also the article about *Boerejode* on page 36.

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## Update on Southern African *KehilaLinks* sites

The list of South African *KehilaLinks* pages which can be found on the JewishGen's *KehilaLinks* project web site continues to grow. (The *KehilaLinks* project provides a set of web pages which commemorate the places throughout the world where Jews have lived.)

The full list of South African *KehilaLinks* pages can be found at:

<http://kehalalinks.jewishgen.org/Asia.html>

The list now includes the following towns: Benoni, Bloemfontein, De Aar, Cape Town, Germiston, Graaff Reinet, Grahamstown, Kwekwe (Que Que) in Zimbabwe, Johannesburg, Kimberley, Mauritius in the Indian Ocean, Maputo (Lourenço Marques) in Mozambique, Muizenberg, Oudtshoorn, Paarl, Pietersburg, Port Elizabeth,

Potchefstroom, Pretoria, Springs, Stellenbosch, Uniondale, Uppington, Witbank.

Eli Rabinowitz, who has created and maintains most of these *KehilaLinks* sites, continues to update these pages, and invites you to send him your stories, memories, photos, family biographies, and articles on Jewish life in any of these places, or if you have materials for other towns not listed above. As examples of the kind of material he is looking for, Eli suggests you refer to the following links:

<http://kehalalinks.jewishgen.org/kimberley>

[http://kehalalinks.jewishgen.org/graaff\\_reinet/Wertheim.html](http://kehalalinks.jewishgen.org/graaff_reinet/Wertheim.html)

<http://kehalalinks.jewishgen.org/nasielsk/Kurtz.html>

You can find more information on Eli's complete set of *KehilaLink* pages at:

<http://elirab.me/kehila/>

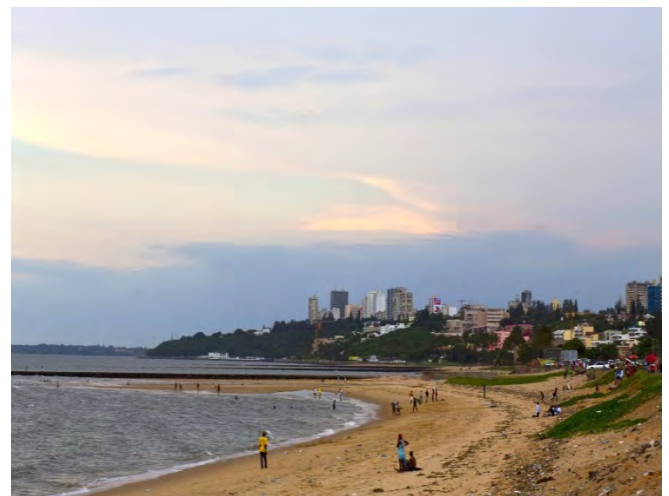
You can contact Eli at [eli@elirab.com](mailto:eli@elirab.com)

For reference, the *KehilaLinks* project home page can be found at:

<http://kehalalinks.jewishgen.org/>

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## In Mozambique, A (Very) Small Jewish Community Thrives



On the *Forward* web site, author Anne Joseph describes the tiny Jewish community that exists in

the city of Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, as follows:

Mozambique is a great place to be Jewish, says Sam Levy, one of the lay leaders of the small Jewish community in Maputo, the Southern African country's capital city. "There's no anti-Semitism here. The religious leadership actively cultivates tolerance and understanding."

Although the Jewish community's core membership numbers around 35, it is still a part of the Council of Religions, an association of Mozambique's different religious denominations. Just over half the country's population is Christian and around 28% is Muslim, but, Levy says, "We have a role, we're counted."

We're standing inside Maputo's synagogue — its cool, whitewashed walls offer welcome respite from the tropical rainfall and humidity outside. Situated in the center of the city, surrounded by a neatly manicured lawn, it is the only synagogue in Mozambique. Although there are guards who protect it, the security is no different from any other property in Maputo whose owners can afford it.

The full article can be viewed at:

<https://forward.com/culture/392973/in-mozambique-a-very-small-jewish-community-thrives/>

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### 15 People Who Recreated Photos of Their Grandparents



From an article on the *awkward.com* web site:

It's difficult to imagine our grandparents when they were young. That's probably because when we're born, our grandparents are already fairly advanced in years, so we always think of them as "old." We all **know**

that Grandma once was 20 years old, but it can be difficult to imagine without a picture.

Some folks aren't content to merely look at a picture, though; instead, they go ahead and recreate the picture itself. We've got a gallery of 15 people who recreated their grandparents' old photos, originally compiled by Bored Panda, and the love they have for their grandparents is apparent in all of them. Looking at these recreations, you can tell that not only is this a great way to honor your ancestors, it's a great way to feel a bit closer to them yourself. Who knows, maybe this photo gallery will inspire you to hit up some vintage clothing stores and make a recreation of your own!

You can view the full article at:

<http://awkward.com/15-people-who-recreated-photos-of-their-grandparents/>

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### Transvaal Photos from 1900



Go to the following Flickr photo album to view a collection of beautiful black-and-white photographs taken in the Transvaal around 1900:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/hilton-t/sets/72157628617704873>

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## History of the Greenside Hebrew Congregation

The Greenside Hebrew Congregation has recently celebrated the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its founding. A comprehensive history of the congregation was detailed in the brochure of the official opening of the Parkview Greenside and Districts Hebrew Congregation Communal Hall that took place on August 4, 1947. The contents of the brochure can be found at:

<http://www.greensideshul.co.za/oldsite/history.html>

Pictures of the present-day synagogue can be found on Eli Rabinowitz' blog, Tangential Travel, at:

<http://elirab.me/greenside-shul/>



## Chanukah 2017 and Pesach 2018 issues of *Jewish Affairs*



The Chanukah 2017 and Pesach 2018 issues of the newspaper *Jewish Affairs* have recently been published by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and are available on-line. The Chanukah issue features an Arts and Culture focus, while the Pesach edition includes a theme on Jewish South Africa.

These two issues, as well as other previous issues of *Jewish Affairs* can be found on the following page:

<http://www.sajbd.org/pages/jewish-affairs>

The Editor, David Saks, is now putting together the Rosh Hashanah 2018 issue and has issued the following appeal:

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the birth of the State of Israel. To mark this milestone, the Rosh Hashanah 2018 issue of *Jewish Affairs* will largely be devoted to Israel themes, with particular reference to how closely the story of South African Jewry

has been intertwined with that of the unfolding of the greater Zionist enterprise. The editorial board invites readers to contribute to what we hope will be one of the milestone issues of the journal, whether through submitting personal stories, photographs or original essays relating to modern-day Israel, its birth, subsequent development and contemporary challenges. This could include personal recollections of celebrating Israel's formal birth (and subsequent *Yom Ha'atzmaut* gatherings), involvement in the Zionist youth movements, fundraising, volunteering to serve in Israel during times of conflict or on kibbutzim, making aliyah and various other topics.

All those interested in participating should write to the Editor, Jewish Affairs, c/o SAJBD, PO Box 87557, Houghton, 2041, or communicate by e-mail: [david@sajbd.org](mailto:david@sajbd.org)

The SAJBD home page can be found here:

<http://www.jewishsa.co.za/>



## Finding Jewish communities in Africa – Addis Ababa

The first part of the project by the researcher and journalist, Steven Gruz, to get in touch with Jewish communities in Africa has just been published in the *South African Jewish Report*. Since Steven's day job takes him around the continent of Africa, he thought of using these stopovers to seek out Jews living around Africa and describe their stories. The first article in his series covers the Jewish community of Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, a place which doesn't immediately suggest the presence of Jews there or a Jewish community. However, there is one there, and Steven's description of the community can be found at:

<http://www.sajr.co.za/news-and-articles/2018/02/08/finding-jewish-communities-in-africa>



## Publication *UNION – Blaetter der Emigration* digitized and on the Internet.

David Lewin runs the small *Search and Unite* office out of London which attempts to help the



many who suspect that, despite the passage of so many years since World War II, someone may still exist somewhere “out there”. The *Search and Unite* web site can be found at:

<http://remember.org/unite/>

David recently reported that in parallel to the *Aufbau* publication about the German refugees who went to England and the USA, the *UNION – Blaetter der Emigration* publication was published in South Africa under the editorship of Dr. H. O. Simon between 1939 and 1948. The latter publication is a depiction of the life of those Jews who managed to escape Nazi Germany and who began life anew in the South African refuge.

While the *Aufbau* publication had been digitized some years ago, the *UNION* had been largely forgotten. A few copies on microfilm exist in libraries, and a paper version is available in South Africa, but nothing was available on the Internet. David felt that the *UNION* publication was at least as important as *Aufbau* and ought to be available freely to researchers.

He eventually managed to obtain a loan of the microfilm from the *Institut fuer Zeitungsforschung* in Dortmund, Germany, and had its images digitized. After a long struggle with Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software, David finally succeeded in the task to produce a searchable version of the digitized images of the *UNION* publication at the end of December 2017, which can be accessed from the following location:

[http://remember.org/unite/union/union\\_index.html](http://remember.org/unite/union/union_index.html)

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### **Eli Rabinowitz’s recent visit to Johannesburg**

On a recent visit to Johannesburg, Eli Rabinowitz’s friend Ishvara Dhyana showed him the once thriving Jewish world of Troyeville and Jeppestown – a sampling of his wonderful tours of old Johannesburg. Eli’s blog page shows many beautiful images of these old Johannesburg suburbs, both today, as well as how they looked in the days of old, and can be seen at:

You can read the blog entry at:

<http://elirab.me/troyeville-jeppestown/>

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### **How uncommon is your name?**

There are over 327 million people living in the United States of America. If everyone in the U.S. lined up single file, the line would stretch around the Earth almost 7 times. The U.S. Census Bureau statistics tell us that there are at least 151,671 different surnames and 5,163 different first names in common use in the United States. Of course, the frequency of these names varies considerably.

The site *howmanyofme.com* will tell you how many people in the U.S. share your first name and also how many share your last name. It will also tell you how many people have exactly the same first name AND last name as you.

A search for the name “Roy Ogus” yields the following results:

#### *Roy*

- There are 448,292 people in the U.S. with the first name “Roy.”
- This is statistically the 135<sup>th</sup> most popular first name.
- 99.64 percent of people with the first name Roy are male.

#### *Ogus*

- There are fewer than 121 people in the U.S. with the last name “Ogus.”

#### *Roy Ogus*

- There are 1 or fewer people in the U.S. named “Roy Ogus”.

(This confirms my own research which has shown that I am the only person in the USA or the world, for that matter, with my exact name!)

Have fun!

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## Watch the British Library Digitize one of the world's largest books



The 1660 Klencke Atlas is among the world's biggest books, measuring nearly six feet by seven and a half feet when open. So when the British Library recently digitized the towering tome, it required several people to maneuver it to a platform for its high-resolution photographs.

The maps in this centuries-old manuscript were designed to be displayed on the wall, so most other examples have deteriorated over time due to exposure and use. The public domain images of the atlas are part of the library's *Picturing Places* online resource, launched in early 2017, and concentrate on hundreds of landscape-related objects.

An article about this project, which includes a fascinating time-lapse video of the multi-day digitization, can be found at:

<https://hyperallergic.com/375669/watch-the-british-library-digitize-one-of-the-worlds-largest-books/>

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### Decoding the South African ID number

The current South African ID number is an important part of people's lives, and is used for accesses to banking facilities as well as to many other everyday services. The following article provides an understanding of the format of the number, and what each field represents.

<https://www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/decoding-your-south-african-id-number-0>

### South African ID number

A South African ID number is a 13-digit number which is defined by the following format:

YYMMDDSSSSCAZ

- The first 6 digits (YYMMDD) are based on the date of birth.
- The next 4 digits (SSSS) are used to define the person's gender. Females are assigned numbers in the range 0000-4999 and males from 5000-9999.
- The next digit (C) shows if you're an SA citizen status with 0 denoting that you were born a SA citizen and 1 denoting that you're a permanent resident.
- The last digit (Z) is a checksum digit – used to check that the number sequence is accurate using a set formula called the Luhn algorithm.

The C and A fields were previously used together to define citizenship and race. As race is no longer used, only the first part of the 2 digits (the C digit) is now officially used.

Note that the current format of the ID number was instantiated in the 1970s. Prior to that time, the South African ID numbers did not have any particular structure.

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### Three hunches, 15 years, one Father's Day

For years, Christian Bozarth thought that Carl the cabinetmaker was his dad. But it also could have been Mark the murdered bar owner, or perhaps Alopaki the Hawaiian lounge singer. Or someone else? His mom, Cindy, had been vague about his lineage, content to be a strong-willed, single-mom raising her son, playing catch and making mud pies with him and his half sisters and brothers who came later. Father's Day was a day other kids got to celebrate.

Despite a happy childhood, he would wonder where his dad was. He wanted to know whether they looked alike, whether they had the same nose, whether his dad wanted to know he had a son. Bozarth spent 15 years trying to answer those questions, at times obsessively searching, at other times losing hope. Ultimately, genetic testing opened the door to the answers he sought — and much more.

Though not about South African genealogy, you may enjoy reading about this fascinating story at:

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/A-cabinetmaker-a-dead-bar-owner-a-lounge-12999033.php>

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### **San Francisco woman is well into her second century**

Doris Sperber, who is probably the oldest person in the San Francisco Bay Area, turned 110 years old last January. Sperber, the oldest resident at the Jewish Home and Rehab Center in San Francisco, has a birth certificate that says her name is Dora and that she was born on Jan. 21, 1908. But her sons say that's not correct — that her name is Doris and that she was born on Jan. 28, 1908. Something got fouled up, way back when, and it's not likely to be fixed now.

Read about her story at the following link:

<https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/SF-woman-is-well-into-her-2nd-century-12512397.php>

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### **Some ordinary and extraordinary events from Johannesburg in 1904**

Author James Ball reports on the Heritage Portal web site that a while back he spent a few hours paging through the 1904 Minutes of the Johannesburg Town Council. (Johannesburg was still a relatively small town at that stage). He found it a remarkable experience travelling back in time and imagining what life was like for people from all walks of life when the town was still a “teenager.” In his article he provides a short selection of some ordinary and extraordinary events that occurred in the town during 1904. These included:

#### *A Smallpox Scare*

In mid-1904 a man named Mtumbela died of smallpox in Charlestown.

#### *Norwood Petition*

The year 1904 brought good news for the residents of Orange Grove and those wishing to travel to the suburb's famous Hotel: the Council had approved funding for the construction of a tramline.

#### *Death of President Kruger*

1904 was the year when Paul Kruger passed away.

#### *The Spread of Billiard Rooms*

In 1904, 31 Billiard Room licenses were granted in Johannesburg. The only building still standing from this list as far as the author could gather is the Cosmopolitan Hotel.

#### *Electrocution in Fordsburg*

Another noticeable event that happened during 1904 was the electrocution of a young man in Fordsburg. The acting Manager of the Light and Power Department reported that he was killed on a high tension line (10,000 volts) running from The Rand Central main line to the Braamfontein Railway Station.

#### *Early Litigation*

In 1904 there were a number of claims against the Council for damage caused by municipal vehicles.

#### *Fire at the Salisbury Mine*

In July of 1904, the General Manager of the Salisbury Mine conveyed his sincere thanks to the Fire Brigade for the excellent work done to extinguish a potentially devastating fire at the mine.

#### *Outbreak of Plague and the Opening of Klipspruit Camp*

One of the most significant events of 1904 was the outbreak of plague in Johannesburg (around present day Newtown).

You can read the full details of each of these events as well as view some interesting images related to each of them in the full article at:

<http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/some-ordinary-and-extraordinary-events-johannesburg-1904>

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### **A Visit to the SABC Sound Archives**

Last year, Eli Rabinowitz and Johannesburg researcher, Marc Latilla, visited the SABC facility in Johannesburg, and were given a tour by Florence Moshatana, the music archivist. Eli was particularly looking for any recordings of his

father, Harry Rabinowitz, a cantor and singer, and his sister Rachel Rabinowitz, a concert pianist. Both were both featured on the radio and concerts on the SABC over many years.

Eli reports on the items he found during his visit and in his Dad's scrapbook in his December 6, 2017 blog entry, found at:

<http://elirab.me/sabc/>

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### **Stunning Color Pics of Cape Town in The Fifties and Sixties**

The WTM Africa website has compiled a set of stunning pictures of the Cape Town area that were taken during the 1950s and 1960s. The author, Gabby Correia, notes: "If I had a time machine and could choose to go back to an era for a day, I would go back to the 50s or 60s. I love the fashion of those times, the cool cars, fresher air and less technology." He has compiled over 50 color pictures at the following location:

<http://www.capetownisawesome.com/2017/11/12/20-stunning-color-pics-cape-town-fifties-sixties/>

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### **Stories from South Africa**

The Jewish Book Council is an American organization whose sole purpose is the promotion of Jewish books. The organization recently compiled a list of 29 books which present stories of the Jewish experience in South Africa ranging from cartographers of the fifteenth century to colonial entrepreneurs to anti-Apartheid activists. (Some of these books have been reviewed in previous issues of the SA-SIG Newsletter.) The compilation can be found at:

<https://www.jewishbookcouncil.org/subject-reading-list/stories-from-south-africa>

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### **Why did A Chicken cross the road?**

Some humor: Mark Nicholls, the Webmaster of the JGS of Great Britain, reports in the October 2017 JGSGB Newsletter that he was leading the United Kingdom SIG meeting on 26 July, and was showing the attendees the way that the United Synagogue Marriage Authorisations worked. He

chose a test-case name of "Abraham Cohen" for getting several results to appear, and was discussing the subsequent list of records, when someone pointed out that one of the first entries was for an individual named "Abram Chikin" – it appeared that some sort of Soundex algorithm was operating.

Then it was also pointed out that "Abraham Chikin" had married "Jane Pluck". The meeting dissolved into laughter at this point. So did A. Chikin really marry J. Pluck? Well, a bit of in-meeting research showed that there was, according to the GRO Index, an Abram Chicken marrying Jane Pluck. All of this led Mark to the thought "Why did A Chicken cross the road? To marry Jane Pluck of course!" Groan!

Subsequently, the actual marriage certificate has been obtained and it proved the details were correct. Unfortunately, there were no occupations associated with poultry or with feathers on the certificate!

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### **Jewish Genealogy Society of Long Island (JGSLI) educational videos**



The Jewish Genealogy Society of Long Island (JGSLI), winner of the IAJGS 2015 Outstanding Publication Award for its work in instructional videos, has uploaded some new videos to its YouTube channel. The following new items may be of general interest to genealogical researchers:

- *Six Ways to Stay Current with Your Genealogical Research.*

We might be in the "Golden Age" of genealogical research. With the digitization and indexing of records, the speed of online sharing, the power of crowd-sourcing and the availability of DNA testing for genealogists, never before has so much been available to so many. But with this embarrassment of riches, how can you keep up to date on new databases

and material? This video will provide some help.

- *What Genealogists Should Know About DNA ... Without the Science Lesson!*

DNA and genealogy – this combination is all over: TV commercials, Facebook groups, print media, and DNA special interest groups. Using DNA for family research might be the biggest innovation in genealogy since someone discovered a descendant chart etched on a cave wall in southern Europe. So, what is it about DNA that has genealogists salivating? There are plenty of websites and tutorials on the basics of DNA. Attempted in this video is to present the points that a genealogist should know about using DNA to help with their research ...without the science lesson!

- *Seven Ways to Share Your Research with Others*

A question: If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a noise? Here's a better question: If you've spent years researching your family history but don't share it with your family, have you done all your research steps? The video provides seven ways that you can share with your family and friends the information you've been accumulating in interesting ways.

The above three videos, together with all the other items in the JGSLI library, can be found at:

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUV8xttIn93AwJX2\\_I0AIAg/videos](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUV8xttIn93AwJX2_I0AIAg/videos)

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## **New JewishGen videos targeted primarily for beginners**

JewishGen has added several new videos to its collection of educational videos designed to help newcomers become familiar with the JewishGen resources. The new videos include:

- Prepare for Your Search
- How to Navigate JewishGen
- Communicate with Other JewishGenners Using JGFF
- Communicate with JewishGenners on the discussion lists
- JewishGen Courseware

The complete list of educational videos, which include the following items, can be found at:

<http://www.JewishGen.org/education>.

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## **Newspaper Article Spoofs Current Addiction to DNA Testing**

The *Avotaynu* E-zine on Jewish Genealogy, *Nu? What's New*, refers us to the following article about the current fascination with DNA testing:

Do you have an addiction to DNA testing? Do you suffer from TAA – Terminal Ancestry Addiction? Have you noticed one of its symptoms; CO (Cousin Overdose)? There is a satirical article in the Huffington Post that allows you to diagnose – and treat if you want to – this disease which is spreading throughout the world.

The author notes, “I have even convinced some of my dearest friends and family into trying this DNA drug with me. I've shared the swab, passed the test tube, and begged them to just scrape for me. Just spit for me. Why? Because Ancestry loves company.”

He later continues. “I write this letter as I suffer from ancestry withdrawal while attempting to go cold turkey for just one day. I'm shaking like an ancestry.com tree leaf. I don't know if I can make it. I really don't know. They're calling me. Calling me. I need more of that double helix. Just one more ancestor hint. Please pray for me ...”

The article is signed “your 1st – 8th cousin.”  
It can be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/DNAAddic>

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### **Obituary for a deceased person with a curious name**

A recent obituary in the San Francisco Chronicle newspaper caught my eye: the deceased had a very unusual name! As the lengthy obituary unfolded, one slowly learned the reasons and the circumstances that result in the rather unusual name for this person. Let me quote from the obituary to show you what I mean.

#### **III**

September 21, 1944 – September 20, 2017

One of III’s favorite things to do was to explore the vastness of the western half of [the United States] in his half-a-million mile VW microbus, Mr. III. Every Fall for over a quarter of a century he made his way through a three or four thousand mile trip, exploring geography, following the tracks of Lewis and Clark or the Oregon Trail settlers, honoring the remnants of the First Nations that preceded ours, looking for good swimming holes, celebrating small-town America before WalMart eats it all up, or whatever else felt good in the moment. One day shy of his 73rd birthday, and a week before he and Mr. III were to embark on their annual pilgrimage, III took off alone on his next journey, passing peacefully in San Francisco after suffering a massive stroke the week before.

III, pronounced “three,” was born in Washington D.C. He grew up in Greenbelt, Maryland, a public cooperative community that his father helped to found in 1937. Upon graduation from High Point high school at age 17, and with his father’s permission in hand, III enlisted in the Navy. After his discharge, he started as the manager of data processing at a small bank and attended Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. Over the next ten years he continued his work in the rapidly expanding information and computer technology world and split time living in Virginia and San Francisco.

So far, no hint about the origin of this very strange name! A few more clues:

Unabashedly a self-proclaimed Luddite — no email, no cell phone — III was free to ask the fundamental questions that needed asking, test assumptions, question Divine Wisdom, explore alternatives, broaden the perspective and keep folks honest. Loathsome of titles, when pressed to describe his calling III would bemusedly suggest “Information Reconnaissance,” “System Provocateur,” and more recently “Senior Jiggler.”

III generously donated a considerable amount of his time and knowledge to Bay Area nonprofits, especially those that support the aspirations of folks with disabilities, including the Computer Technologies Program (CTP) in Berkeley where he met his soul mate to be, Ainsley Nies. No distance was too far or inconvenience too great to prevent III from “showing up” at a wide variety of events in the lives both family and friends. He was beloved “Uncle III” to many. III was also an avid reader particularly pre-history novels, speculating on life before electricity and bigness.

There are no social photos of III in the last fifty years, for he wanted to be seen only in the present and hewed to the Native American aversion to being photographed. Yet, everyone who had the privilege to meet him came away with an indelible impression and image that no photograph could ever capture. He was just like that. His heart was as big as his personality, and now it’s his legacy and legend that continue to grow.

Then, some more information is revealed about the names of his family members:

Among those who will join III later on his journey include his brother, Don Ritchie, his beloved nieces and nephews Karyn, Christine, Kevin and Ken, sisters in law Hilary Gauntt (Casey) and Leslie Tedrow (David Tregub), and his love and life partner, Ainsley Nies.

Finally, the mystery is revealed!

And now your reward for reading this far: III was named after his grandfather and his father. As the 3rd, the only part of his name that was truly his was “III.” He longed for a

name that was his own, legally just III (no law requires both a first and last name). After 26 years of a tenacious Everest-uphill battle with the California courts and innumerable government agencies to stake out this precious territory, he ultimately prevailed. III was just like that.

If you'd like to read the complete obituary, you can find it at:

<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/sfgate/obituary.aspx?n=iii&pid=187453317>

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Comments on article *The Role of Jewish Business in South Africa*

Thank you for your fantastic issue – over 50 pages! I really enjoyed reminiscing, and seeing names going back to my late Dad's business years!\* There were a few names not mentioned like the late Louis Israel Horwitz from Bloemfontein, who was the first ever judge appointed in the Orange Free State – or perhaps, South Africa, if I remember correctly.

Has anyone told you that Rabbi Shalom Coleman, who was the Rabbi in Bloemfontein for many

years, came to Sydney, Australia, and is now 99 and living in Perth? When I phoned him to wish him good wishes for Pesach, he even recognised my voice!

I also want to mention that *Golden Acres*, the Old Aged Home in Johannesburg, was built by my brother Gerald Jack Horwitz, who was a solicitor in his day. Jack is now buried on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, supposedly near my grandparents, who left Chveidan, Lithuania, just in time. Don't know why Gerald's son decided to bury him in Jerusalem, as he was such a well-known, well-loved man in Johannesburg, and if buried in Jo'burg, there would have been many, many stones showing all the visitors to his place of burial – but so be it!

Be well and keep up the good work!

Selma Jackson (*nee* Horwitz)  
Sydney, Australia (formerly Bloemfontein)  
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*\*Editor's Note: Selma was referring to the article titled, The Role of Jewish Business in South Africa by Philip Krawitz, in the SA-SIG Newsletter, April 2017*

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