

# SA-SIG

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

*Southern African Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group  
Newsletter*

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### 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 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 printing in the Newsletter should be sent to Colin Plen, Editor, at [colplen@iafrica.com](mailto:colplen@iafrica.com)

General enquiries about the Newsletter can be sent either to Colin or to Mike Getz at [MikeGetz005@comcast.net](mailto:MikeGetz005@comcast.net)

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

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Whilst preparing a Jewish Genealogy talk for a LIMUD session next weekend, I started thinking again about ‘why do we do genealogy?’ I reminded myself about a quote from Vera Weizmann, wife of Chaim, along the lines of: “... many Jews have no difficulty in remembering and commemorating the fall of the second Temple or Masada but have difficulty in remembering their great grandparents and where they originated from”. [I can’t trace the original of this, if anyone has it please send to me].

For me, genealogy has been a tool for understanding my personal and family background, the vast array of little bits of family history that come to light and make up the complexity of any of us and our origins. Genealogy has drawn me to study South African history both in a general and a local level. Some years ago I took a course on Russian Jewish history (much of which still defeats me!). Another of my minor forays has been into military history, after discovering that a great uncle was in the Pioneer Labour Corps., and was invalided out of the army after a mustard gas attack in WW1. Although he died of ‘injuries inflicted in the Great War’ his grave is not classed as a war grave, as he died after the cut-off point (1923?) in 1924.

#### Saul Issroff

London, [saul@issroff.com](mailto:saul@issroff.com)

*Editor's Note: Saul has recently been appointed to the re-energized JewishGen Board of Governors, whose major responsibility will be to focus on long-term planning for the organization. Full details can be seen in the June 1, 2009 press release at:*

[http://www.jewishgen.org/JewishGen/pr/Press\\_Release.2009.06.01.BoG.htm](http://www.jewishgen.org/JewishGen/pr/Press_Release.2009.06.01.BoG.htm)

## EDITORIAL

It is very exciting for me to be able to write my first Editorial. All sorts of things I must write about keep popping into my mind.

This month we have a lovely article about Mo Skikne's visit to the Pioneers' Memorial Museum in Port Elizabeth. I have a close relationship with Mo from the time when we worked together on the Jewish Genealogical Society Johannesburg. Mo was the Editor of our newsletter and he took over as Chairman of the Society when I left Johannesburg for Cape Town. I am very sad that the JGSJ has almost ceased functioning since most of the venues in the area have seriously increased their charges. *Beyachad*, who used to charge us a nominal R100, or nothing, at times, now demand R1000 for a meeting, which is a ridiculously high figure for a meeting where 30 people pay R15 for their tea.

Prior to my appointment on the SA-SIG as editor, I wrote and submitted to Saul and Bubbles an article on Cemetery Photography. I am publishing this article this month. I am involved in photographing the headstones of Jewish graves in Cape Town and this article gives some of the detail. Members of my family make comments like: At least the stones stand still. But on the other hand, I prefer my subjects to smile.

Gary Feitelberg has written some very interesting articles. The first one I am using is an announcement of the writing of an Encyclopaedia of Jewish Latvia. The last time information on the subject was collected was more than 100 years ago and since then of course Latvia has seen some of its greatest years and its total demise.

Ann Rabinowitz is a prolific writer and Internet studier of genealogy. I am convinced that she must be on a computer all day every day. In this short article I culled from her email, she talks about an entry in the 1901 British census with South African connections.

There has been talk for years, and there have been many attempts to start a Family History and/or Genealogical Society for Jews in Cape Town. No progress has been made in this regard but interestingly a larger group is in the process of being formed in the Western Cape area. We have included the memo from Elmien Wood discussing how a large combined group of interested parties

can come about. The week of the 22<sup>nd</sup> May to the 29<sup>th</sup> is Archives week and Elmien and her group are encouraging students of family trees to use the archives available in Cape Town. Sorry that you will only be told this in July!!

High on my Wish List in my life is to be able to attend a conference such as the Philly one. I have only attended one, in London, and it remains a special memory. I wish that in August I could somehow suddenly appear in Philadelphia and meet some of the people and hear many of the unique talks that come up at an International Genealogical Conference.

**Colin Plen**

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## A VISIT TO THE PIONEERS' MEMORIAL MUSEUM IN THE RALEIGH STREET SHUL, PORT ELIZABETH

*Maurice Skikne*



I had occasion to visit this delightful community history display in the old Raleigh Street *Shul*, now unused as a place of devotion, as all the residents had moved away or were in “*Yenem Veldt*” (the Other World). My eldest offspring, Janice Mendelowitz and family had moved to this delightful city in 2007, where her husband Geoff runs the Eastern Cape branch of his civil engineering consultancy.

My visit to them for a short vacation, afforded me this opportunity on a bright Sunday morning.

From an information pamphlet provided by the guides at the *shul*, one learned that the Port Elizabeth Orthodox Hebrew Congregation was founded in 1908 at a nearby house. Initial membership consisted of a main group of Eastern European Jews (from Lithuania and Poland, and a few from Belorussia and Latvia). In 1912, following its completion, the *shul* was consecrated by Chief Rabbi J. L. Landau of Johannesburg, and was deconsecrated in 1965. A plaque on the building attests to these facts. The building is now a remarkable museum depicting the history of the PE Jewish community almost from its inception. The first rabbi was Rabbi Wilentzick and the *chazzan* was Rev Sandler. Rabbi Wilentzick was succeeded by Rev Hilkowitz. The Rabbi, *Chazzan* and the *shamus*, Mr. Greenblatt, served the community until 1954, a few years before the *shul* was closed.

The Western Road *shul* preceded this one, being opened in 1887 and was closed up in 1958. This *shul* had an English style congregation and its last spiritual leader was one Rev Levy who won public fame in a case, concerning the Greyshtirt, Nazi type movement, in the mid 1930's (see below). A leading architect, Orlando Middleton, designed the Raleigh Street *Shul*, with the Kohler brothers the building contractors. The design is predominantly *Art Nouveau*, with turrets and keyhole windows influenced by the Byzantine style designs.

Following its close in 1954, the Port Elizabeth Orthodox Congregation and the Western Road Hebrew Congregation amalgamated to form the Glendinningvale Synagogue, which until now is the leading one in this very likeable city.

The museum retains all its furniture and fittings, which are absolutely magnificent to see. However, the star items are the magnificent collections of photographs and Judaic articles, and printed articles and letters on display. These are grouped into Wedding photos, and Beautiful *Ketubas*; Jewish Mayors and city councilors; famous PE Jewish dignitaries and people. There is a photographic display of Military personnel who served in both World Wars, as well as memorials to those who fell. In one of the upper galleries is a large collection of images of the Rabbis and *Chazzans* who have served the cities' congregations.

For my personal interest in Yiddish SA history, the upper rear of the Gallery has the most fascinating display, depicting the Greyshtirt case, in newspaper articles photographs, pamphlets, newspaper articles and even letters in support and opposition of this famous case. Briefly the story goes that the Jewish community purportedly issued a pamphlet in support of the already-proven fraudulent *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. A William Gruss (1880-1948) made Rev Levy aware of this pamphlet which was supposed to have been found in the Western Street Shul. Rev Levy, rightly outraged by this lie, decided to sue the Greyshtirt movement and its agents Louis Weichardt, von Moltke, etc. At the ensuing trial, these perpetrators were found to have acted fraudulently and falsely, and were found guilty. It was Weichardt who was given a three year sentence for his part in this dastardly fraud. The others were suitably fined, and the movement was put into disrepute. This was then a Landmark case as it was the first time world-wide that a case was won

against the Nazi movement. One of the anti-Semitic letters displayed that shocked me was the one written by Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, author of *Jock of the Bushveldt*, who apparently had a large following of Jewish people ardently supporting his writing. Needless to say, I cannot bring myself to read his writing anymore.

The Western Street shul's history is depicted in photographs. When it was demolished, in 1958, the concrete dome had to be dynamited. Norden and Norton (both of 1820 settler stock) built the Garden Street *Shul*, traveling from Grahamstown daily to do so. As a result of the fate of the Western Road *Shul* to be demolished, some concerned congregants of the shul, formed *The Synagogue and Youth Foundation*, and bought the building.

Having stood vacant for some years and following severe vandalism which incorporated the theft of a magnificent brass chandelier, restoration of the building, now declared a national monument, was begun. The declaration was done in 1986, with the aid of the Architectural Department of the University of Port Elizabeth (now Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University). Restoration of the building was accomplished slowly over the years and recently the original chandelier was replaced by a replica, the donation of a visitor. The *Aron Kodesh* (Ark) has an unusual façade, featuring the rising sun above the *torah* ark, with light rays streaming into the Universe. This is framed by elaborately carved wooden surrounds.

There are also two magnificent brass *Menoras* on stands on either side of the pulpit.

The Ladies Gallery also has elaborately carved wooden columns in pairs which support the porticos going up to the ceiling.

The exquisite Hebrew lettering over the entrance portal, are from those words of *Ja'akov* which read:

*"Surely this is the House of God, and these are the gates of Heaven!"*

Other quotes are:

*Who is a wise person?  
One who learns from all people.* (Talmud)

*Teach us to count our days then  
We shall acquire a heart of wisdom.* (Proverbs 90:12)

The museum is open on Sundays only, at present, or by special arrangement, and is run by a volunteer group consisting of Delia Grauer, Archie Sandler, and Tammy Berman.

*Note from Saul Issroff: My grandfather Yudel Issroff had seat no. 1 in the Raleigh Street Shul. He lived on a farm called Asch Hoek in the Gamtoos River Valley and would take the narrow gauge railway (now known as the Apple Express), from Hankey to Port Elizabeth for Shabbat services. He epitomised the Russian (Litvak) Jew who was uncomfortable with the Anglo-German establishment Jews and thus formed their own congregation. His seat in the synagogue is commemorated with a brass plaque.*

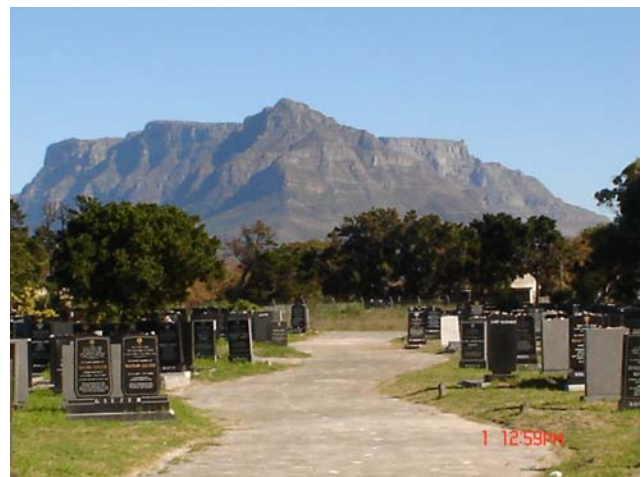
*The complete seating list of the Raleigh Street Synagogue can be found online at the SA Jewish Rootsweb web site:*

[http://chrysalis.its.uct.ac.za/CGI/CGI\\_ROOTWEB.EXE](http://chrysalis.its.uct.ac.za/CGI/CGI_ROOTWEB.EXE)

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## CEMETERY PHOTOGRAPHY

*Colin Plen*



Cape Town is lagging behind the rest of South Africa in photographing and listing tombstones in the various graveyards. However the Cemetery Maintenance Council is going full steam ahead now to make complete lists.

One practical reason for this is that they want to be able to approach the families of the deceased and get them to pay for upgrading and improving the burial sites. The other reason is that there are many

calls from all over the world for tombstone information.

I have taken on the project of photographing the gravestones and for those people who would like help and information on the graves, I just wanted to point out some difficulties and some facts.

Although Pinelands 1 is numbered up to over 24,000, this does not mean that there are 24,000 graves there. The lines are numbered in 200's; for example, one line starts at 8002 at the railway line, ends at the path with 8068, and continues up to the Main Road, from 8076 to 8176. That's 117 graves but the next line is numbered 8201, which makes people think that there are 200 graves in each line. Which means that Pinelands 1 has probably 11,000 graves.

Also, because water has been a huge problem in the rainy season, there is a gap of about 100 metres between 20,001 and 21,001 and that area was never excavated for graves due to the heavy water table there.

Then there is Pinelands 2. The designers of Pinelands 2 decided not to keep to the strict straight lines of Pinelands 1 and most other graveyards. The lines in Pinelands 2 meander and while it should look pretty, it actually looks untidy. Also if you are trying to find a particular grave you can start with Line W (for West) G and halfway up you suddenly find you are in WH row because the meandering actually takes you off the course you were plotting and puts you in a new row.

Also they decided not to have strictly demarcated grave sites, with 4 corners, but to grow grass right up to the stones. This means that you can find yourself walking across a line of graves, because it is a lawn.

So it is not easy to find a specific grave site in Pinelands 2.

The next best known cemetery in Cape Town is the Woltemade, or Maitland. The actual Maitlands cemetery is, I should think, one of the longest graveyards, being 4 kilometres along Voortrekker Road. That is the complete Maitlands Cemetery, not just the Jewish section by any means. There are squatters who have camped in Maitlands Cemetery and it is dangerous for anyone to visit without an armed guard. As it is, with Maitlands squatter camp being only a few metres from the edge of Pinelands

1, one has to make use of the guard to visit Pinelands 1. The guard, David, told me that just recently a visitor took out his ringing cell phone to answer it and two young men clobbered him with a brick, stole the phone, and left him bleeding badly.

On the far side of Voortrekker Road in Maitland is the 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue Cemetery. As I understand it, this cemetery was started and run by Westernised Jews who did not encourage Eastern Jews to be buried in 'their' high class cemetery.

It reminds me of a poem called Ozymandias where the remains of a statue lie broken in the desert, without any surrounding city walls, and the inscription on the statue reads: "*Look on my works you mighty and despair.*" And of course there are no works left.

In Pinelands 1 I have come across some interesting stones. There is a large attractive stone for Louis Washkansky, the first heart transplant patient, but for the second, and much more successful, Philip Blaiberg, there is no grave but just a memorial plaque on Mrs Blaiberg's grave.

I have even seen a grave for Paul Kruger. Not *that* one but one that died in 1945.

If you have a particular question or need a photograph of a grave in Pinelands, please write to me at [colplen@iafrica.com](mailto:colplen@iafrica.com).

*The photograph above shows Table Mountain as a scenic backdrop to Pinelands 2. A friend of mine commented: "I would die to be buried with a view like that".*

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## THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF JEWISH LATVIA

*Gary Feitelberg*

An ambitious enterprising, important, special, and worthwhile project is underway to document the Jews of Latvia. The mission is a marvelous effort of Riga's Shamir Religious Community to record our history and past and to pay special tribute to the community that once thrived prior to the *Shoah*. This effort has now sparked a renaissance of activity in recent times.

According to the conception and creation, this encyclopedia aims to cover the more than 400 years long residence of the Jewish people in Latvia, and to reflect on their contribution to the culture, medicine, music, science, technology, trade, and industry of this country. The book plans to be a new source of valuable information not only about the Jews in Latvia but also about their impact on the world's Jewry.

One should admit and note for the historical record that the last comprehensive Jewish encyclopedia in Russian depicting the life of Jews in Latvia was published more than a hundred years ago at the beginning of twentieth century. The information that was recorded in that volume is barely relevant at present. Currently there is not one encyclopedia in existence that specifically covers the history and achievements of Latvian Jewry and which also includes profiles of its outstanding members.

The *Jewish Encyclopedia of Latvia* is aimed to be a pantology about Jews of Latvia, a compendium of facts that have been accumulated to the present moment, and also a universal book of reference in this field. One can appreciate the unique character and exceptional importance by considering following facts:

- In this encyclopedia the progressive impact of Latvian Jewry on various aspects of social life in Latvia is brought to light for the first time in history.
- The fate of Jews in Soviet Latvia (during years 1917-1919, 1940-1941, and 1944-1991) is illuminated including all personalia concerned with Latvia till 1991. This year separates modern Latvia from its previous Soviet period that has already become history.
- The names of the Jewish victims of Stalin's regime are retraced and preserved for descendants.
- The *Shoah* subject matter in Latvia receives wide coverage, including the names of the Jews who were victims of Nazism.

Along with thematic articles (scope of activities, center of population, business organizations, public organizations etc.) there is a special emphasis on the importance of Jewish contribution – personalities as well as the entire nation – to every field of modern

civilization. In the context of information volume there will be several types of biographical articles.

The working process, organization, and formation of its structure, as well as the financing of the publication are planned according to the following principles:

1. Rabbi Menachem BarCohen is chairman of the *Shamir* society (in Latvia), and also initiates and administrates the publication of the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Latvia* project. The *Shamir* society is the base institution that supports the work of editorial staff.
2. The editorial staff determines the type and the character of the encyclopedia and consists of outstanding authorities in the field of Judaica in Latvia. The authors' core group includes professionals in areas such as history, literature, medicine, natural science, economics, culture, and religion.
3. At present, the work proceeds on the topics of centers of population, business, public, enlightenment and culture organizations, political parties etc.
4. The publication of the encyclopedia summarizes the period of Jewish presence in Latvia up to the end of the twentieth century.
5. Preparation of the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Latvia* is first commenced in Russian and after the Russian material has been completed, the translation into English will proceed.
6. Anyone who identifies himself or had been identified with the Jewish nation may be included in the encyclopedia (*Halakhic* rule is not applied). The number of personalias is not limited.
7. In the process of writing thematic as well as biographical articles, data from the Latvian State Archive is widely used (in particular from the Communist Party of Latvia's Central Committee Archive and the KGB Archive of the Soviet Republic of Latvia). As a result, information about tens of previously unknown personalia is gained.

General information about the *EJL* is available at the website [www.shamir.lv](http://www.shamir.lv). Jews of Latvian origin and all other interested parties can submit their



proposals for the encyclopedia by e-mail to [lee@shamir.lv](mailto:lee@shamir.lv).

Autobiographies, biographies, correspondence, documents, family tree charts, photographs, and other materials are welcome to be submitted for review.

This project is extremely important, and substantially contributes to a culture of the Jewish people. To download a brief biography and personality profile, go to:

[http://www.shamir.lv/stuf/LEE\\_anketa.doc](http://www.shamir.lv/stuf/LEE_anketa.doc)

and complete the questionnaire for consideration of inclusion. Please return the completed form by e-mail to [lee@shamir.lv](mailto:lee@shamir.lv).

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## INTERESTING RESEARCH

*Editor's Note: Whenever I receive an email from Ann Rabinowitz, I know that I am going to learn something! Here is an example:*

I happened upon an interesting entry in the 1901 British Census, for 1 Chatham Place, Ramsgate, Kent, England. The couple who lived at that address was Samuel and Katie Levene, ages 33 and 43 respectively, from London. He was a schoolmaster and accommodated eleven boarders and one visitor.

The visitor was Solomon Schechter, age 33, born in Focsani, Rumania, then a reader at Cambridge University, and the collector of the documents from the Cairo Geniza, Jewish educator, and President of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. He was the father of Ruth Schechter, who married Morris Alexander, well-known South African communal activist and attorney and herself an activist.

The eleven boarders, arranged chronologically, were:

Walter Saunders, 16, Port Elizabeth, SA  
Henry Rubenstein, 14, London, England  
Alfred Phillips, 14, Liverpool, England  
Max L. Marks, 13, Bradford, England (son of Charles Marks, oil merchant, and Malvine Marks, from Hungary)  
Lionel Wilson, 13, Kimberley, SA

Arthur Saunders, 13, Johannesburg, SA  
Abraham Clapp, 12, Widnes, England  
William Clapp, 11, Widnes, England  
Benjamin Rubenstein, 11, London (later husband of Conchita Supervia, Spanish opera star)  
Henry Marcuson, 11, Birmingham, England (from a well-known family in Birmingham and Dudley)  
Jack Phillips, 10, Liverpool, England

It is probable that all of the boarders were Jewish as there are several Anglicized surnames in the above list which have been used by Jewish families.

Ann Rabinowitz  
[annrab@bellsouth.net](mailto:annrab@bellsouth.net)

*Editor's Note: Just adding on to this: I have a brother, living in London. We had found the marriage certificate for our paternal grandfather and it gave his address and our grandmother's address in Manchester. Brian, my aforesaid brother, went to Manchester to sell a computer programme to the shul there and went to have a look at the house which is still standing 100 years later.*

*My Grandmother's father was shown on the certificate as a Fent Dealer. We thought it was an error and that it should have been a Tent Dealer, but after searching we found that "fent" is the remainder of a roll of cloth after the main bulk of material has been sold.*

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## WESTERN CAPE GENEALOGICAL SOCIETIES

*Editor's Note: This description is taken from a memo by Elmien Wood, Secretary of the GSSA, dated 10 May 2009.*

The cooperation between genealogical interest groups started when Johann Janse van Rensburg, then chairman of the Western Cape branch of the Genealogical Society of South Africa (GSSA), organised the first genealogical exhibition in 2003. Petro Coreejes-Roberts came up with the idea to approach the Castle as a venue for the celebration and twelve groups participated. (*Western Cape Newsletter*, 2003:4)



Since then it became a yearly occasion. In 2007 Mariana Olivier took over the position of organiser and since then the exhibitions have gone from strength to strength.

Parallel to these yearly exhibitions a proposal was put forward for the founding of a federation of genealogical societies. This motion came from Ockert and Sasa Malan of the Western Cape.

The implementation of this proposal only started in 2008. At the meeting of the National Executive Committee of the GSSA in May it was decided that contact between likeminded groups should be made at the regional levels. Isabel Groesbeek was put in charge of the GSSA branches and Elmien Wood, in consultation with the Western Cape branch, was to make contact with organizations in the Western Cape. (Minutes of the National Executive Committee of the GSSA held at Pete's Retreat, Centurion on 31 May 2008, point 15.)

It soon became clear that it would not be possible to form a federation in the near future without careful consideration. Guidelines regarding the aims and conditions have to be negotiated with all interest groups present.

Because of the good relationships established since 2003, closer contact could be made in a very pleasant way.

The groups included at present (together with the contact information) are:

- Cape Family History Society (CFHS)  
David Slingsby: [davidslingsby@telkomsa.net](mailto:davidslingsby@telkomsa.net)  
Lucille le Roux: [lucilleleroux@absamail.co.za](mailto:lucilleleroux@absamail.co.za)
- Cape Family Research Forum (CFRF)  
Mogamat Kamedien: [kammie@new.co.za](mailto:kammie@new.co.za)  
Ebrahim Rhode
- Jewish Family History Society of Cape Town (an informal group)  
Colin Plen: [evancol@iafrica.com](mailto:evancol@iafrica.com)
- Western Cape branch of the GSSA  
Andrew Kok: [jakok99@gmail.com](mailto:jakok99@gmail.com)  
Ria van den Heever: [riavdh@absamail.co.za](mailto:riavdh@absamail.co.za)  
Mariana Olivier: [omariana@lantic.net](mailto:omariana@lantic.net)

Examples of cooperation in 2008 include:

- Exchanging of annual programmes.

- Attendance of the *Course of Workshops on Family History for Beginners*, presented by the CFHS.
- Attendance of meetings of the societies.
- Distribution of information on projects and lectures of mutual concern.
- Ebrahim Rhode (CFRF) and Elmien Wood (GSSA) both presented a paper at the Slave Symposium held on 2 December 2008 at the University of Stellenbosch.

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## THE MEANINGS OF SURNAMES

*Colin Plen*

Surnames derive from 4 main sources: occupational, descriptive, habitation, and patronymic.

Examples of occupational names would be Shuster, Sandler, Kruger. That is, Shoemaker in Yiddish, Shoemaker in Hebrew, Bar owner in Yiddish or German.

Descriptive name examples are Gross, Lange, Kluge. That is, Fat, Tall, Clever.

Habitation names are Metz, Copenhager, Moscow or Libau.

Patronymic names are Cohen, Levy, Segal, or Davidowitz.

There are many sub divisions. In English or European surnames (but not really in Jewish surnames) you have topographical names describing the area where you lived: Woods, Forest, Marsh.

In Jewish surnames you have matronymic names such as Gittelson, where possibly the father of the child could not have his name used, such as in a rape.

Usually when people subdivide names they include under the "descriptive" category names which were 'good' names to have, as opposed to 'bad' names which you could get if you did not pay the giver of names a suitable bribe. A good name, although not descriptive is Rosen or Greenbaum (Green tree), Shein (beautiful). A 'bad' name example would be Krombein (crooked leg).

I chatted to a non-Jewish friend about surnames and it turns out that he has investigated Dutch surnames. The Dutch are by and large a much more humorous group of people than many of their neighbours, and when they were told that they had to take on surnames, sometime between the 11<sup>th</sup> Century and the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, they thought it was a joke and some invented surnames which they thought were funny. They kept these when they found that the authorities were serious. These include Schyttemaker and Hoenderdos.

In South Africa today we have a very interesting situation where a Minister of Education, black in appearance has the surname Witbooi. There are other strange names, mainly derived from the people previously known as Coloureds. They have Jewish names, Xhosa names, as well as Afrikaans and English names.

Why did Jews have surnames connected with metals? Gold and silver I can understand, but why not platinum? Was it too difficult to smelt in Europe or just not known?

Talking about metals, what about Kupfer as in Kupferburger and Kupferstein meaning copper and Galena meaning lead?

#### **An example: POTASH**

One of the great difficulties in trying to determine how a surname is derived is that everyone has a viewpoint. I thought I would try to find the meaning of a South African Jewish surname, Potash. Simple? The family with this name did not know. Then I began asking other people. I found the following interpretations:

- The little settlement of Potashi is located at the southern end of an area called “Abrene” that was annexed by the Soviets in June 1940. It is located by the Ritupe River. It is due north of Grebneva and of Ludza and NE of Karsava. Less than 100 people live in Potashi.
- I have been told that Potashi was a *shtetl*. However, I cannot find it in the *Shtetl* Finder Gazetteer.
- Potash is one of many surnames that relate to the occupation of its original holder. Potash was used in the manufacture of soap and glass. The forests of Russia were, and still are, a major source of Potash, and Jews were probably

involved in the extraction of the material; hence the surname.

According to *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire*, by Alexander Beider, the etymology of the surname Potash is from potash, an ingredient of soap. Perhaps the progenitor of the Potash family was involved in soap making. Beider states:

*POTASH (Riga, Dvinsk, Lutsk) with many variant spellings, including Potas, Potes, Patas, Batashev, Botyshev etc. and Potashnik .... from the village of Potashi (Rechista, Borisov, Gorodok)*

Potashnik has a separate entry (from Shavli, Ponevezh, Ozhmyany, Novogrudok, Minsk, Mogilev, and other places). Here Beider says it's from *potashnik*, Russian for potash maker, or a dealer in potash.

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I look forward to getting letters from you about my errors of assumption! I will translate names on request in a private e-mail.

Thank you to Ann and Gary and Saul and the many others who tried to assist me and assisted in confusing me.

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#### **New Facebook group: *Die Jode van Suid Afrika***

A new Facebook group has been created by Jeff Nathan for Jews with links to South Africa to discuss their roots and to share stories about their ancestors who originated from Eastern Europe. The group can be found by performing a Facebook search on the string “*Jode van Suid Afrika*”. The group's membership is open; any Facebook member can join.

## EDITOR'S MUSINGS

*Colin Plen*

In taking up a new post of going to live in a new town, there is always a certain amount of trepidation. In taking up the big strong shoes vacated by Bubbles, (no offence meant by the 'big', Bubbles!) there is trepidation on my part. Thank you for picking me!

At the beginning I want to tell you that my greatest interest in genealogy is the study of the meaning of surnames. In fact one of the things I want to institute is a Surnames column and I would appreciate your adding to it, and arguing with me when you know that you are right and my assumption is wrong. I will welcome any comments and all new surnames.

For instance I understood that Alexander is a surname named for the Greek conqueror who befriended Israel while conquering. How the name lasted through 2000 years I did not know. Then, while reading a history of the Holocaust, I found that there was in Poland a *shtetl* called Alexander (or something close enough to it). Instead of the surname having been carried by someone's family for all those years, it was a surname derived from the *shtetl* where he lived!

I have three children, all grown up and knowing everything so I am totally used to criticism. Please don't hesitate to tell me what you want, what you don't want, and how you want it.

### Does Anyone Remember Bnei Zion??

We ran a most interesting article a few months back about *Habonim*. In the old days I was *Bnei Zion*, and *Habonim* and *Betar* and any other name was anathema to us. *Bnei Zion* was strong in Germiston, Brakpan, and in parts of Johannesburg, and looking at the article, we learned the same things and had the same activities as *Habonim*. We even played soccer against *Betar*.

Something that made me think of it recently was that I saw a heading or a letterhead for *Habonim Dror* and it reminded me of why I fear politics.

Around 1963 *Bnei Zion* was invited to amalgamate with *Habonim* and we were wildly against it. "We will lose our identity" we said, and they told us that the new Movement would be called *Ichud Habonim*

*Bnei Zion*. So we fell into line and became part of the larger group.

And then voila, only a while later, *Habonim* approached *Dror*, and asked them to join and the new Movement became *Habonim Dror*. *Bnei Zion* was totally forgotten.

I do not know which Movement had their *machaneh* near to Port Elizabeth, but whichever it was, they called their toilets "plyms". Why? Because their toilets were constructed from the packing crates of motor cars, shipped to PE from the USA. The "Plym" was part of the name Plymouth, and the toilets had Plym stenciled on. Hence they were called The Plyms.

### I Love Success Stories

Herzlia School sends pupils to Israel annually on a 3 month *Ulpan*. A boy named Robert Mallach was in the group a few years ago and they went to visit a *Kibbutz* in the Galil. One of the *Kibbutzniks* who showed them around introduced himself, he said, "I am Leib Golan and my name at birth was Leonard Goldberg. I come from South Africa, from a town called Kimberley. I have been in Israel since the War of Independence ..."

Later the boy went up to him and introduced himself, "Hello Leib. I am Robert Mallach and my mother also came from Kimberley and her name was Yvonne Goldberg. Do you know of her?"

Of course Leib knew his cousin and remembered their early days in Kimberley.

At a dinner table one night in Cape Town, as I always do, I asked around what the origin of the various people's surnames were. I had met the one lady many years before and I asked her how her original surname, Beira, had come about. Her reply was most interesting.

"My father was one of the Ochsberg orphans and he was not sure of his surname so when the time came that he needed to register his surname he chose the nearest word, which was the town of Beira." This was the first I had ever heard of the Ochsberg orphans so I began asking questions about them. Then another woman in the group, added, "My father was also an Ochsberg orphan." Wow, two in one night!

A cousin of mine was married for long enough to produce an offspring, a girl. He and his wife then divorced in a nasty divorce so that he lost touch with his daughter. Twenty years later my son was in Durban in a large group of people and someone said, "Ask Plen. Plen always knows the answers." But before Gary, my son, could find out what the question was, the discussion went on around a girl at the far end of the table. He made enquiries and found that his second cousin, unknown to him until then, was the girl who knew the answers. They became close friends.

### **Random Thoughts**

In a previous SA SIG newsletter, we were told about Louis Zetler's project where he is making a database of Jewish names by researching births, deaths, marriages, and engagements, of people with apparently Jewish names.

When he was in Cape Town, the organization that will become the JGS Cape Town organization one day hosted him to hear his talk. Despite the fact that our computer did not talk to his software, we eventually heard a lot of what he had to say.

Louis has taken on a very long-term project, and we wish him well with it. The ambit of the plan is very long term and I don't think that the many people who will benefit from it eventually will understand how much work Louis is putting into it.

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Muizenberg was named after Sergeant Wynand Muijs, commandant of the post there. Many people think that the town was named for a mountain in the shape of a mouse.

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If you are an ex Durbanite planning to visit the town again, your maps will have to be changed. Berea Road is now called King Dinizulu Road, Manning Road is Lena Arendse, Moore Road is Chez Guevara, MacDonald is Alan Paton, and Point Road is Mahatma Gandhi. I suppose it is inevitable that the old names must make way for the new, but it will be difficult to learn them and to get used to them.

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With the massive increase in the abilities of computers, one of the things that I look forward to is that one day we will be able to download the contents of a person's brain so that all the invaluable memories of a person like Albert Einstein or Thomas Edison could be retained.

I used to be a philatelist, specializing in Southern African postmarks and my guru was a man known as Sam Kelly who ended up in Johannesburg after coming from Europe (he was Jewish) and living in the Congo, Northern Rhodesia, and Southern Rhodesia. He would look at an envelope from 1938 and identify that it had been sent from England by ship, delivered at Mombasa, traveled by the Camel train postal service then sent back by Mule train. If only his memory could have been downloaded!

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### **Letters to the Editor**

I want to thank the numerous people, if I haven't already done so directly, who so generously and graciously provided me with assistance and advice in my search for my newly discovered South African branch. I have much to do yet, but the help provided by this group has been invaluable. If I can repay any of you in kind, such as obtaining document copies from the National Archives in Washington, DC, please contact me privately.

Thank you.

*Judith Lipmanson*

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I would like to enter the following for your Family Search Page:

Searching:

Malech & Rose COHEN / KAHAN / KAGAN /  
KAHANOV

Established OK Bazaar chain of stores  
Born Raseniai or Kurshan, Kovno, Russian Lithuania  
Emigrated to Rouxville, Orange Free State

Travelled with brother (given name unknown) Malech  
and brothers's father was Abraham Isaac

*Sandi Root*

*Bulverde, Texas, USA*

*roadrunr2@usa.net*

## **SURNAMES APPEARING IN THIS NEWSLETTER**

***Vol. 9, Issue 4 – June 2009***

The numbers in brackets refer to the page numbers where the surname appears:

**Alexander (8), Aronstam (14), Baleson (2), BarCohen (7), Beider (10), Beira (11), Berman (5), Blaiberg (6), Blumberg (14), Cheifitz (14), Clapp (8), Cohen (2, 9, 12), Copenhagen (9), Coreejas-Roberts (8), Davidowitz (9), Einstein (12), Epstein (2), Feitelberg (3, 6), Fitzpatrick (5), Getz (2), Gittleson (9), Golan (11), Goldberg (2, 11), Grauer (5), Greenbaum (9), Greenblatt (4), Groesbeek (9), Gross (9), Gruss (4), Harris (2), Hart (2), Hilkwitz (4), Issroff (2, 5), Kagan (12), Kahan (12), Kahanov (12), Kamedien (9), Kelly (12), Kluge (9), Kohler (4), Kok (9), Krombein (9), Kruger (6, 9), Kupferburger (10), Kupferstein (10), Landau (4), Lange (9), le Roux (9), Levene (8), Levy (4, 9), Libau (9), Lipmanson (12), Malan (9), Mallach (11), Marcuson (8), Marks (8), Mendelowitz (4), Metz (9), Middleton (4), Moscow (9), Nathan (10), Norden (5), Norton (5), Ochsberg (11), Ockert (9), Ogus (2, 14), Olivier (8, 9), Phillips (8), Plen (2, 3, 5, 9, 11, 12), Potash (10), Rabinowitz (2, 3, 8), Rhode (9), Root (12), Rosen (9), Rubenstein (8), Sandler (4, 5, 9), Saunders (8), Schechter (8), Segal (9), Shein (9), Shuster (9), Skikne (3, 4), Slingsby (9), Supervia (8), van den Heever (9), van Rensberg (8), von Moltke (4), Washkansky (6), Weichardt (4), Weizmann (2), Wilentzick (4), Wilson (8), Witbooi (10), Wood (3, 8, 9), Zetler (12)**



A reminder of the IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy to be held in Philadelphia, August 2 – 7, 2009.

**Conference web site:** [www.philly2009.org](http://www.philly2009.org)

**Conference Program:** [www.philly2009.org/program.cfm](http://www.philly2009.org/program.cfm)

**Sessions of interest to South African researchers include:**

Tuesday, August 4, 8:00 pm

*FILM: Lest We Forget: South African Jews and Reconciliation*

Robyn Aronstam, a Jewish woman who grew up under apartheid, has documented her community's actions and morality during those dark times. This film takes us into contemporary South Africa and looks at a range of issues facing the Jewish community in 2007, including reconciliation and perspectives on Israel.

Wednesday, August 5, 2:00 pm

*A Personal Journey of Discovery: Reconnecting Past and Present*  
Henry G Blumberg

A fascinating step by step journey of discovery that started with a few faded photos and no one to answer questions. Using Power Point the presentation examines the methodical and exciting genealogical research that led to connecting the past with the present - the valuing of my heritage and established meaningful contact with extended family in Latvia, Israel, USA and Canada. My talk traces the migration of my family from 1796 in Grobina, Latvia, to New York and then South Africa and finally to Canada. Thus, genealogy is thus far more than just a numbers game.

Wednesday, August 5, 8:15 am

*The Great Trek - Finding Hidden Yidn in South Africa*  
Paul Cheifitz

Using my own family history as a basis I will explore South African Jewish genealogical resources including material discovered in a variety of repositories across the country and the world. Beginning with the immigrant experience the talk will follow the hunt for source material used to document the lives of my relatives, which have often led to the discovery of new family and extraordinary tales. Thereafter I will make myself available to answer questions on South African Jewish genealogical research.

Wednesday, August 5, 9:45 am

*Meeting of the Southern Africa Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group (SA-SIG)*  
Roy Ogus

Annual group meeting of the SA-SIG.

There will additionally be numerous sessions of interest to Litvak researchers.

More information is available on the conference website or by e-mailing the conference at:

[programs@philly2009.org](mailto:programs@philly2009.org)

### **MEMBERSHIP DUES for 2009 / 2010**

**Subscription fees for the SA-SIG Newsletter are due.**

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# SA-SIG Newsletter

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